



10 DOWNING STREET

Pune Minutes ①

I agree with John's thesis that holding talks while communicating hopelessness will not work. On his options

(3) is the working of max open cast sites possible in the time scale of next few months?

(5) closing pits unilaterally may create an additional grievance that be agreed procedures are not being used - hitherto these have formed part of NCB's case

(6) NCB Industry has already been launched but has made no impact - it could be projected more.

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13 July 1984

PRIME MINISTER

COAL AND DOCK STRIKES

The Threat

The extreme Left is mounting a major extra Parliamentary challenge to the Government on a number of fronts. The coal strike has provided the main opportunity for exploitation; the dock strike is extending the industrial tactics; local government may become the breeding ground of more such activity.

The Left's aim is to pave the way for the ultimate defeat of the Government by destroying its policies and its credibility: it is out to undermine economic recovery by disrupting the Government's ability to control public spending and by interrupting the conduct of business; and in the ensuing climate of violence and non-compliance with the law, to mock the Government's claim to uphold law and order.

Like many revolutionary strategies to promote instability and tension, the present challenge is essentially a negative one. Its purpose is to oppose and to destroy. There are many responsible trade unionists and some more astute Labour politicians who can see that at the end of the extra-

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Parliamentary road could lie the destruction not of
capitalism but of the Labour Party.

There is only one thing worse than presiding over industrial
chaos, and that is giving in to the use of industrial muscle
for unreasonable ends.

Options for the Strikes

Either strike could be settled by giving in. Settling both
by giving in would be the end of effective government.

There is no alternative to seeing the miners' dispute as
central. If the dock strike can be settled within three
more working days by reaffirming the employers' support for
the NDLS, so well and good. Otherwise tougher action
should be considered.

As to the miners, it is dangerous to blow hot and cold, to
be out of the fray one week and then in it another.

Negotiators have clearly to mark out territory and plan a
defensible fallback position. It is not in the rules to
give something away today and then withdraw it tomorrow.

Any fudged formula over uneconomic pits which allows the
pace of pit closure to be slowed and the level of subsidy to
increase is defeat. It invites the question of why did we
bother to soldier on for so long? I can think of no good
answer.

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Peter Walker's strategy a few weeks ago was to hold talks, to arrive at an early breakdown if the NUM showed no signs of reason, and then to communicate a sense of helplessness and hopelessness to miners because there was no prospect of talks and reconciliation. Given the circumstances and the unreasonableness of Scargill, that seemed like the only strategy.

Yet 2 weeks later there are more talks and apparent movement in the NCB's position. This is a sign of prevarication. The central issues cannot be for negotiation. If I were a miner, I would be delighted by the events of the last 2 weeks.

It is always more difficult, and requires tougher action, to correct a situation that is being allowed to degenerate through the noblest of intentions, than to carry on doing the right thing in the first place. But it is not too late.

The NCB have the following options to reassert their position

1. The law can be used against secondary picketing, to make an attack on Yorkshire NUM funds.
2. If talks fail on Wednesday, all talks could be off.
3. The NCB could press for more open-cast sites.

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4. The redundancy option could be used.
5. The NCB could start closing pits.
6. The NCB could re-examine the idea of NCB industry to help in mining communities.

Conclusion

You cannot both follow a strategy of encouraging a war of attrition to get miners back to work, and a strategy of trying to find a fudged formula in talks which allow normal life to be resumed.

Given the current NUM negotiating stance - which clearly wishes to see the whole pit closure programme withdrawn and wishes to keep open the main sensitive pits - the negotiating option does not offer anything which the Government and the NCB could find acceptable, or which would enable the Government to come out of the strike with any credit.

It would therefore seem better to go back to the original strategy of the war of attrition, where the perceived way of the strike ending is for miners to go back to work. In the meantime, because ground has been lost, it is now advisable for the NCB to go more on the offensive in order to reassert their crumbling position. The recent series of

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advertisements have not been a success - they have not been
read widely, and the message has not been presented with any
flair. They still need to put it across more colourfully.



JOHN REDWOOD

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