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RECORD OF A MEETING HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON  
MONDAY 16 JULY TO DISCUSS THE COAL AND DOCK DISPUTES

Present: Prime Minister  
Home Secretary  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
Lord Privy Seal  
Secretary of State for Energy  
Secretary of State for Employment  
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Attorney General  
Chief Whip  
Mr. Alison  
Mr. Gregson

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On the dock strike, there was a discussion on whether the Government should continue to state that it had no plans to change or abolish the Dock Labour Scheme or whether it should be prepared to extend the undertaking for the life of the Parliament. On the one hand it was argued that to make this addition would display weakness by the Government and provoke further demands by the unions; it could make the strike more rather than less difficult to settle. Against this, it was argued that there was no prospect of abolishing the scheme directly, as opposed to buying out surplus dockers under it. The main difficulties arose not from the DLS itself but from the Aldington-Jones agreement which was not part of the statutory scheme but an industrial agreement between employers and unions. The longer the Government resisted giving the wider undertaking, the more it would look like a retreat when finally offered. While the wider undertaking might not be enough to satisfy the union leaders, it would be very helpful in weakening the support

/from rank and



from rank and file dockers whose enthusiasm for the strike was questionable. While holding the view that the wider undertaking was inevitable, it was possible to argue that this concession should not be given immediately but should be held back while the ACAS talks were still going on. It was agreed to reflect on these arguments overnight before settling on the line the Prime Minister should take at Questions.

The meeting then considered Mr. Gregson's agenda note of 16 July. It was agreed that the Government's priority should be to settle the dock strike as quickly as possible in order to allow the Government to concentrate on winning the miners strike. The Prime Minister said that British Shipowners had reported to her at their lunch that the extent of the strike was greater than they had ever witnessed before; there was now no-where where containers could be moved. Lay-offs would begin shortly.

Mr. Gregson then reported on the Ministry of Defence's assessment of the contribution which servicemen could make (Evans' letter to Turnbull of 16 July). It was agreed that this contribution would be limited and would apply only to priority categories of goods. Nevertheless, the assessment that 2,800 troops could move 1,000 tons of goods a day (approximately 50 lorries) was regarded as far too low. This appeared to under-estimate substantially the benefit to be secured from keeping Ro-Ro traffic moving.

It was noted that the use of troops did not itself require declaration of a State of Emergency but if the troops needed to requisition equipment it would be required. It was unlikely that Harbour Boards would volunteer to make equipment available. A state of emergency could be declared by The Queen in Council but under the EPA 1920 Parliament had to be informed immediately and, if not sitting, be recalled within five days. The existing Act limited the

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circumstances in which a state of emergency could be declared. While the reference to "the essentials of life" allowed action to safeguard a major shortfall in food supplies, it was doubtful whether this would cover the import of non-essential foodstuffs. Nor did it cover damage to the economy.

The choices were:

- (1) to use troops as far as possible without declaring a state of emergency;
- (2) to make as much use as possible of the present Act;
- (3) to introduce a new Act before the recess but not to activate a state of emergency immediately;
- (4) to recall Parliament during the recess to pass a new Act and to proclaim a state of emergency under it.

There were conflicting considerations relating to these different courses. It was not clear how far a declaration of a state of emergency would be interpreted as a sign of determination by the Government or a sign of weakness, nor to what extent to which it would increase dockers support for the miners strike. There was a danger that the introduction of a state of emergency, or still more the introduction of a new Act, could create excessive expectations about what the Government could do to alleviate the impact of a strike through the use of servicemen. It would be argued that the new Act represented a major extension of the Government's powers which should not be introduced without allowing time for proper scrutiny. It was agreed that the Attorney General should consider how far it was possible to act under

/ the existing



the existing EPA, taking account of the present food stocks. After consulting the Minister of Agriculture he should report to MISC 101 on Wednesday.

On information, it was agreed that no new Ministerial group should be set up but that Bernard Ingham should hold daily meetings with the Information Officers of the Departments concerned with the disputes.

On civil action in the ports, the advice from the Department of Employment was that industrial action in non-scheme ports was likely to be unlawful if the dispute was identified as being about the future of the DLS. Picketing of non-scheme ports by scheme port dockers would also be unlawful as it would not be near or at their place of work. If the dispute continued after a breakdown of ACAS's efforts at conciliation, it was likely that injunctions would be issued against the TGWU. The Government should not seek to discourage this and it would be helpful if they were issued by substantial enterprises rather than by individuals or small firms. If injunctions were sought in the docks dispute, there would be a case for activating injunctions against the NUM.

The Secretary of State for Employment reported on endurance in the coal strike. Deliveries were satisfactory but were relying heavily on lorries. It was not yet clear how far coal imports for industry would be interrupted as much of this traffic had gone through very small ports and wharfs. Only the steel industry had been bringing in coal through large ports.

On the conduct of the forthcoming talks, the Secretary of State for Energy said the NCB would be holding a meeting on Tuesday, following which it would be issuing a statement making clear that its position was reasonable and that there

/could be



could be no further concessions. It was expected therefore that the talks would break down. If so, the NCB would follow up with further publicity.

The meeting considered whether the fact that the miners strike had not been authorised by a ballot would bring it within the scope of the new Trade Union Act when it came into effect in October. The Act was expressed in terms of inducements to take strike action. It therefore depended on whether the NUM could be shown to be issuing new inducements. It could well defend itself by reference to existing resolutions.

The Secretary of State for Energy said work was going on to identify redundancy enquiries pit by pit. The NCB hoped to be in a position to send out letters soon. It was noted, however, that the process of closing pits should run in parallel with the process of seeking redundancies.

The Attorney General reported on developments in processing court cases. So far, approximately 20 per cent of the 2,800 cases had been dealt with in magistrates' courts. This was regarded as unsatisfactory but even more worrying was the slow progress in securing an outcome from indictable cases where, for the most part, not even committal proceedings had been secured. The two main courts concerned, Rotherham and Mansfield, were dragging their feet over the appointment of stipendiary magistrates - Mansfield had made no application and Rotherham only from September. It was agreed that the Lord Chancellor should be invited to the next meeting of MISC 101 to consider this question. The Home Secretary would speak to him in advance. The Chief Whip wondered whether it would be helpful to air this issue in an Adjournment Debate but, on balance, it was thought unhelpful.

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PRIME MINISTER

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

We face a difficulty over tonight's meeting. Currently invited are:

- 1 Secretary of State for Energy
- 2 Secretary of State for Transport
- 3 Secretary of State for Employment
- 4 Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
- 5 Home Secretary
- 6 Chief Whip
- 7 Mr Gregson.

You have suggested adding the Attorney General and the Lord Privy Seal and requests to attend have been made from:

- x Chancellor of the Exchequer
- x Secretary of State for Defence
- x John Redwood.
- x *Stewart*

AT

I think you have to decide on the nature of the meeting. Either it is small and limited to those most directly involved or it is extended to the rest. Apart perhaps from adding the Attorney General there does not appear to be a halfway house. Do you want to extend the meeting? If so, do you want to maintain the invitation to supper afterwards?

AT

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