

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MISC 101(84) 31st Meeting

COPY NO 19

CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held in the  
Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons  
on MONDAY 30 JULY 1984 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Home Department

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP  
Secretary of State for Trade  
and Industry

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MF  
Attorney General

SECRETARIAT

Mr P L Gregson  
Mr J F Stoker

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

## INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that it was now the peak of the holiday season in the coalfields. Pits fully working numbered 20, with a further 26 on holiday. The peak would be past when the Nottinghamshire pits returned to work in the following week.

Movements of coal during the previous week were good: stocks at the power station had reduced by only 220,000 tonnes.

The heaviest picketing that day was in Derbyshire, but numbers of pickets active were smaller than they had been earlier in the strike - about 3,500, compared with a peak of about 10-12,000.

Eight coal faces had now been lost during the strike and more were giving cause for concern. He would report on whether there was any chance that the lost coal faces might reopen in future.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND said that coal continued to be cut at Bilston Glen, but there had been no significant increase that morning in the number of men in. Reports that morning of a return to work at other Ayrshire pits appeared to be due to men providing safety cover being mistaken for returning strikers.

THE HOME SECRETARY said that a second stipendiary magistrate was being appointed at Rotherham and a further application was expected for a stipendiary at Mansfield.

Prosecutions were the responsibility of county prosecuting solicitors, who were the servants of the police. The police still maintained that offences were being prosecuted as quickly as possible. He would seek to persuade them to increase the rate of prosecutions and to give priority to the most serious cases.

Police in Nottinghamshire were treating a fire the previous day at a haulier's premises as arson. An arrest was imminent.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT said that the High Court that day had fined the South West area of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) £50,000 for breaches of an earlier order banning unlawful picketing of two haulage companies carrying coal and coke from the Port Talbot steelworks. The judge had said that a writ of sequestration would be issued on 1 August unless the fine was paid: the delay was intended to allow the union to retrieve assets thought to have been secreted. It appeared that the judge might have considered the commitment to prison of union officials had the plaintiffs sought it. Mr Scargill had issued a statement calling -

"on the British trade union movement.....to give total physical support to the NUM".

The Welsh miners' executive had issued a statement criticising the court, the plaintiffs and the Government, and including a statement that -

"the South Wales area of the NUM would carry out the TUC decision on anti-trade union laws. In doing so, we are carrying out national NUM policy of total non-co-operation with the courts in relation to the anti-trade union laws passed by the Thatcher Government".

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY said that the position in the steel industry was quiet at present during the holiday period. A possible difficulty might arise shortly, when registered dock workers now being trained to operate iron ore loading equipment at Immingham, in respect of which the breach of the National Dock Labour Scheme which had given rise to the recent dock strike had occurred, would be asked to load iron ore onto lorries. Loading at the port would normally be onto trains, which were now blacked because of the strike. If the workers refused, the British Steel Corporation (BSC) would be placed in a difficult position: cessation of movement of ore through Immingham would lead eventually to closure of the Scunthorpe works.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT confirmed that all movements of coal and iron ore to steelworks by rail continued to be blacked. Railwaymen sent home for refusing to drive coal and ore trains were now receiving from their unions only £10 per day, and not their full pay as previously.

In discussion, it was suggested that the South Wales NUM might conceivably pay the fine imposed by the High Court. Their statement was more equivocal on this point than might have been expected had a decision already been taken in favour of outright defiance. If the court action succeeded in reducing the ability of the South Wales NUM to carry on the strike, it would show that it might be possible for the civil law to be used more widely against individual striking areas of the NUM without the risk of sequestration of national funds in which men still working, as well as strikers, had a stake.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Home Secretary, consulting the Lord Chancellor and Attorney General, should continue to take all available steps to encourage prompter prosecution of offences committed in the course of the dispute. The next significant events for the course of the dispute were likely to be the actions of the South Wales area of the NUM following that day's judgement by the High Court; and the Delegate Conference called by the union for 10 August. She and other Ministers should be guided by advice from the Secretary of State for Energy in what they said publicly about the dispute over the next few days, and in particular in the debate in the House of Commons on the following day on the Government's economic, employment and industrial policies. They should counter suggestions for the appointment of a mediator by referring to the intransigence of Mr Scargill, as shown in his rejection of reasonable proposals by the National Coal Board (NCB) and in his introduction of additional demands whenever negotiations appeared to reach a hopeful stage on the issue of closures. They should refer to the need for a ballot to establish whether the strike leadership spoke for the majority of miners. They should, however, avoid saying anything which might adversely affect return from holiday of the Nottinghamshire coalfield the following week; or which might make it difficult for the NCB to withdraw the terms already rejected by the NUM if they decided that that would be the best course. The situation over the loading of iron ore at Immingham would need to be

**SECRET**

AND PERSONAL

watched carefully. BSC would clearly wish to avoid precipitating a renewal of industrial action in the docks. If the dockworkers were to refuse to load the iron ore on to the lorries, the best course might be for BSC to use the time provided by their existing stocks of ore at Scunthorpe to enable pressure to be brought to bear on the dockers by workers concerned about the future of the Scunthorpe plant. Ministers would resume discussion of the dispute at Cabinet on 2 August.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.

Cabinet Office

31 July 1984

AND PERSONAL

**SECRET**