

Colliery Closure Procedures

There were misunderstandings in the House of Commons debate on Tuesday about the colliery closure procedure. To make the position clear the National Coal Board today (Wednesday) issued the following statement:

Arrangements were agreed with all the industry's unions at the beginning of 1973 for the introduction of a colliery review procedure. Certain changes were made in 1976, again with the agreement of all the unions, to meet the requirements of the Employment Protection Act of 1975, under which employers had to give longer notice to employees.

Under the procedure, every three months each NCB Area Director holds a general colliery review meeting with representatives of Area unions at which the results of all the Area's collieries are considered and ways of improving those results are discussed. At these meetings the Director also identifies collieries where special action is required.

About three weeks later the Director reconvenes the meeting which is also attended by union representatives from collieries to be specially considered. If the Director's view is that a pit should close he announces his decision at that stage.

If at this reconvened meeting the local unions agree to closure, the date can be settled. When the unions do not agree to closure, they are given the opportunity to make a technical inspection of the colliery.

The Director's view that he can see no justification for keeping the colliery open is communicated to the National Board who, if they agree, will so inform the unions nationally who then have a month in which to decide whether to ask for a national appeal meeting.

Representatives of the National Board hear the appeal and report the points made at that meeting to the full Board who take the final decision.

This procedure has, in the opinion of the NCB, worked well. In the last ten years 79 closures have been dealt with. Of these, the majority - 58 - were agreed locally. The remaining 19 were referred to national appeal meetings. Of these, ten were closed and nine continued in operation but subsequently closed by local agreement. In the case of two other pits it was informally agreed that their reserves should be worked from neighbouring collieries.

The NCB have proposed no change in these jointly-agreed procedures. In the case of Cortonwood Colliery in their South Yorkshire Area, the Director expressed the view that he could see no justification for continuing production beyond a certain date. He proposed there should be another meeting locally. This offer was accepted by two of the three unions. The National Union of Mineworkers, however, have not been prepared to take the case through the agreed procedures.

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