

subject a master

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Record of meeting held at 10 Downing Street on 4 September, 1984, at 1700 hours

Present:

Prime Minister
Secretary of State for Energy
Mr. MacGregor
Mr. Gregson
Mr. Butler

Mr. MacGregor gave an account of the events behind the NUM's claim that the NCB had cancelled talks to resolve the coal dispute. Mr. Maxwell had approached him over the weekend to ask him whether he was prepared to meet the NUM. Mr. MacGregor said that the NCB was always ready to meet the NUM if there was anything useful to discuss, and that the normal procedure would be for Mr. Heathfield to contact Mr. Smith. In fact it was Mr. Maxwell who next approached Mr. Smith. This led to discussions between Mr. Smith and Mr. Heathfield at which they provisionally agreed on talks on Wednesday subject to the approval of other members of their delegations. When Mr. Smith spoke to Mr. MacGregor it was agreed that Wednesday was too early, partly because the TUC Conference would still be going on, and partly because more time was needed to prepare. Mr. Smith went back to Mr. Heathfield to seek an alternative time and to discuss the agenda. These discussions were inconclusive as the NUM appeared unwilling to depart from their previous position or to make new suggestions. It was mutually agreed that there would be little point in talks unless the issue of pit closures could be discussed, but it was left that Mr. Heathfield would speak to other members of his Executive and then make contact again. No contact was made, and the

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first the NCB heard was Mr. Scargill's statement in the morning that the NCB had cancelled the talks. The NCB responded by putting out a statement at lunchtime denying that it had cancelled the talks. On his return from Essen, Mr. MacGregor said he was prepared to meet the NUM on Sunday.

There followed a discussion on the terms on which the NUM should be invited to talks. Mr. MacGregor said it was important to avoid a formulation which suggested the talks were about ways of solving the problem of uneconomic pits. This could give the message that the NCB was prepared to make further concessions from its position at the conclusion of the previous talks. Such a message would have the effect of slowing down the drift back to work. Indeed, Mr. MacGregor thought that the possibility of talks may already have affected attendances.

It was agreed that the NCB could make no further concessions on the principle of closing uneconomic pits. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State for Energy said public opinion would react adversely if the invitation suggested that the NCB were not prepared to move, but would be prepared to attend talks if the NUM were prepared to move. The aim should be to draw the NUM into talks which, if they broke down, would reveal that the NUM were still intransigent in their demands which even many unions recognised as unreasonable

It was agreed that the NCB should issue a letter as soon as possible inviting the NUM to talks on Sunday at a particular location (or any other time and place agreeable to them). The aim would be to hold constructive discussions about the points on which previous discussions had foundered, and to find a resolution in accordance with the report on Plan for Coal (which had recognised the need to close uneconomic capacity). In order to make clear that

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the NCB was not interested solely in pit closures, the letter should state that talks would also cover ways in which a prosperous coal industry could be developed.

The Prime Minister said recent events had shown the limitation of mediation by people like Mr. Maxwell who sought not to clear obstacles but to represent to the different parties that there were no obstacles. In future it might be better if such discussions were conducted on paper.

The meeting closed at 1810 p.m.

AT

5 September, 1984.

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