

14.9.84

MINeworkERS' DISPUTE

Talks Break Down

~~SECRET~~

The NCB regret that, despite further lengthy discussions, they have been unable to reach agreement with the NUM to bring the dispute to a conclusion.

The Board made proposals to clarify their construction of Clause 3(c) of the Board's discussion document of July 18th in an attempt to obtain the acceptance of the Clause by the NUM.

In a draft Joint Agreed Note which the Board tabled, they gave a specific assurance that Clause 3(c) did not imply a new policy and programme with regard to uneconomic capacity. It explained that it was the Board's intention on resumption of normal working that the previous practices adopted in the industry with regard to consultation and colliery closures should be maintained.

This assurance, together with the undertakings previously given by the Board in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Discussion Document, were, in the Board's view, a basis for a reasonable settlement and an immediate resumption of work.

The NUM turned down the Board's proposals and reiterated their policy that closures could only take place on the grounds of exhaustion or for safety reasons.

The NUM tabled amendments to the Board's note on Clause 3(c) which simply reiterated the stand which they have taken throughout the dispute.

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In a further attempt to reach a settlement, the Board then tabled a wholly revised Clause 3(c) which eliminated the use of the word "beneficially" but proposed that pits should be deemed exhausted where, following examination by their respective mining engineers, further investment of human and financial resources could not be justified.

This attempt was also rejected by the NUM. They proposed an alternative which was unacceptable to the NCB.

After further lengthy discussions the Board tabled another alternative Clause 3(c) late on Wednesday night.

The NUM responded with another version.

At that stage paragraph 1 of the alternative Clause 3(c) was agreed and the outstanding difference was the use of the word "satisfactory" or "acceptable" in relation to continuing operations at collieries under review.

In the early hours of Thursday it was agreed to adjourn.

In resumption of the talks today (Friday) the NUM said they now reneged on their previous agreement with paragraph 1. The Board said: "That paragraph must still stand". The parties had reached agreement on that paragraph and that it had remained as written through several sessions and redrafts.

Further discussion then took place on the second paragraph and the Board proposed another form of words to try to reach agreement, but without success.

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The parties agreed mutually that no further progress could be made and the talks were adjourned without fixing a date for their resumption

The Board believe that the inability of the NUM to negotiate a settlement despite all the efforts made by the Board is the continuing cause of the dispute.

The dispute is quite unnecessary, bearing in mind the assurance given repeatedly during the discussions by the Board with regard to colliery closures, and the following assurances given to all employed in the industry:-

1. A stable industry with a minimum of 100m tonnes with the prospect of expansion as the market opportunities arise;
2. No compulsory redundancies;
3. Every man who wants to stay in the industry will be offered another job plus substantial transfer payments and resettlement allowances if he is affected by a closure;
4. Improved terms under the Redundant Mineworkers' Payments Scheme;
5. 5.2% wage offer on grade rates from 1st November, 1983;
6. Continued high investment - between £700m. and £800M. was planned in 1984/85.

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The NCB will do all they can to inform their employees of the conditions on which the industry can return to work.

The Board believe that it is now time for the mineworkers to make their views known. They have been denied the opportunity for far too long. All the pits are open for work.

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AMENDED CLAUSE 3(C)

It is agreed that since the advent of Plan for Coal there have been colliery closures which do not fall within the definitions of exhaustion or safety, and in accordance with the principles of the Plan it is acknowledged that this procedure will continue to apply.

In the case of a colliery where a report of an examination by the respective NCB and NUM qualified mining engineers establishes there are no further reserves which can be developed to provide the Board, in line with their responsibilities, with a basis for continuing operations there will be agreement between the Board and the Union that such a colliery will be deemed exhausted.

NCB/14.9.84