

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

NCB/NACODS MEETING

There was a meeting between the negotiating teams from the NCB and the NACODS Executive at Doncaster today. Cowans was added to the NCB team. The following is a report from a member of the NCB team to the Department of Energy.

The talks were amicable and constructive. Pay and guidelines on crossing picket lines are agreed and out of the way. Today's discussion concentrated on machinery for review of pit closures and some form of arbitration arrangement in cases of disagreement, in which NACODS are described as "evangelical".

At first, NACODS proposed a mandatory arrangement. Cowans said that it was questionable whether the Board's statutes allowed it to surrender its responsibility in this way. Discussion then turned to an advisory process; and there was a frank exchange on the difficulties which would arise on the first occasion when the NCB wanted to reject the view of an "advisory" tribunal that a pit should be kept open against the NCB's wishes.

Cowans pointed out to NACODS that any settlement would have to embrace the NUM and BACM. The NACODS Executive said that they did not want to have direct discussions with the NUM, and the purpose of the NACODS approach to ACAS tomorrow is to ask ACAS to mediate between NACODS and the other unions in order to formulate what is a reasonable

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

demand on the unions side.

Cowans said that he would report to the NCB on Friday what NACODS had said. At this stage he was fact-finding, not negotiating. The Board might be forced by its statutes to reject proposals which removed or diluted its management responsibilities; but it would look constructively at NACODS' suggestions.

NACODS' parting shot was to ask whether they could bring their full Executive to the NCB on Friday to hear the Board's conclusions. Cowans agreed to this.

The impression of the NCB team was that NACODS were genuinely anxious not to play the strike card. But a feeling of obligation to ~~work~~<sup>obtain</sup> something significant ~~for~~ for their members was superimposed on a desire to find a way of settling the dispute. The NCB have taken the point that they will have to handle with great care the meeting with NACODS on Friday at which they give their reactions to the NACODS' approach.

Peter Walker is in Peterborough this evening, returning to London at about 11 p.m. He will be talking to Cowans tomorrow. Mr. MacGregor is going to France tomorrow morning, and is due to return on Thursday evening. At present Mr. Walker has a meeting scheduled with Mr. MacGregor for 9 a.m. on Friday, but will probably try to bring this forward.

Meantime, tonight the NCB Press Office have been instructed to deny stories that there is a new peace plan, and will simply say that the NCB listened to NACODS today, and will be reporting what was said to the NCB on Friday.

2 October, 1984.

CONFIDENTIAL

FERB