

PRIME MINISTER'S BRIEFING - 5 OCTOBER 1984

MAJOR INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

National Coal Board, (NUM)

1. Talks between the NCB and the NUM broke down on 14 September. No further talks are planned. A meeting took place on 24 September between the NCB and the TUC but no agreement was reached.
2. Members of the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers were balloted on 24 September and gained an 82% mandate from its membrs to take strike action. This followed the NCB issuing instructions that NACODS members must cross picket lines to reach work. Previously they had only been asked to make "reasonable efforts" to get to work.
3. Talks between NACODS and the NCB ended without the threat of all-out strike by NACODS 17,000 members being lifted. A further meeting took place on 2 October and NACODS' proposals for improved consultation procedures with the NCB and wages for members whose pay had been stopped for not crossing picket lines were agreed. The Association's proposals for a revised system of agreeing pit closures are still being considered.
4. Representatives of NACODS met ACAS on 4 October and put forward a formula for ending the dispute. ACAS is meeting the British Association of Colliery Management today and the NUM on Saturday and hopes to meet the NCB at a later date.
5. The Transport and General Workers Union has promised the NUM full support for the miners strike.
6. An overtime ban has been operating since 31 October 1983 in protest at the NCB's closure programme and its pay offer of 5.2% on basic pay rates.

7. On 8 March the NUM National Executive Committee approved the local strikes which had been called from after work on 9 March in Yorkshire and Scottish Areas of the NUM, and approved in advance any strike action called in other areas. Decisions on whether to strike were left to individual areas, rather than to a national ballot. Ballots on strike action in various areas produced majorities against striking. A special delegates conference held on 19 April decided not to hold a national ballot at that stage. The conference also agreed that future national ballots would need a simple majority to authorise strike action, rather than the 55% majority which the rules had previously required.

8. On 18 July the High Court ruled that disciplinary rule changes agreed at the NUM annual conference on 11 and 12 July were 'void and of no effect'.

9. In the early days of the strike, after extensive unlawful picketing in various areas, the National Coal Board obtained an injunction against the Yorkshire Area of the NUM. This ordered the union to withdraw its instructions to members to engage in picketing at pits other than their own and required the union not to encourage or assist in unlawful picketing on Coal Board premises, including financing and encouraging flying pickets. On 19 March the NCB was granted an indefinite adjournment of its application for contempt of court proceedings against the Yorkshire NUM. The NCB can return to the High Court on giving two days' notice to the Yorkshire NUM.

10. Two private haulage contractors went to the High Court on 26 July to seek the enforcement of an earlier injunction against picketing of their lorries at Port Talbot. On Monday 30 July the Court gave the South Wales area of the NUM 48 hours to pay fines of £50,000 for contempt of court. The fine has been paid from the area's assets which have been sequestered.

11. Although technically too late, the NUM have been given leave to defend a High Court action, begun by two miners from the Yorkshire area. They want a strike ballot, branch elections, no picketing until the ballot and elections are held, and new disciplinary rules declared invalid. The High Court ruled on 28 September that the miners' strike was 'unofficial' and should not be described as 'official' by the NUM or 'its servants or agents'. Similar action taken by a group of Scottish miners failed to win an injunction but

they were given leave to return to the High Court at a later date if they so wished. The case of the 3 Staffordshire miners who are taking action against the Area NUM alleging wrongful dismissal from office will go to a full trial in October. In the meantime the Court ordered their re-instatement and declared the Area strike to be unofficial. A miner at Easington Colliery in Co Durham has been granted an injunction to stop the NUM taking action to prevent him from working.

12. Mr Arthur Scargill was served a High Court writ on 1 October in his personal capacity as President of the NUM, to appear in court on 4 October to answer committal proceedings brought by the 2 Yorkshire miners. This followed Mr Scargill's appearance on TV when he described the strike as 'official' and in accordance with the union rules. He threatened members with disciplinary action if they crossed picket lines. The writ seeks to commit him to prison or to impose fines or sequestration of the NUM's assets. Copies of the Derbyshire miners' orders were also served on Mr Scargill at the same times.

Mr Scargill or the NUM failed to appear in Court. They have been given 6 days to reconsider their defiance of the court ruling.

13. Three Derbyshire miners were granted an injunction in the High Court on 20 September which prevents the NUM taking disciplinary action against them. The NUM agreed to be bound by the injunction because of a mistake in the union's rule book.

DHSS Longbenton and Durham (CPSA 350 SCPS 50)

14. The strike began on 14 May over plans to change shift patterns at the computer centres which handle pensions, sickness pay, child benefits and national insurance contributions. The union claim that these changes would lead to considerable loss of earnings.

15. A series of meetings between officials from the unions and DHSS ended on 21 August without finding a solution to the dispute. CPSA members at the computer centres at Reading and Livingston have voted to strike from 10 October. Over 500 staff at the Newcastle computer centre are now out on strike. The payment of pensions by girocheque has been disrupted but it seems unlikely that unemployment benefit payments will be affected to the same extent.

Disputes settled since last Report.

16. Cammell Laird, Birkenhead (110, CSEU)

The sit-in on a gas rig ended on Wednesday. Bailiffs removed the 40 men who have now been jailed for contempt of court.

British Aerospace, Filton (2400, AUEW and others)

17. Workers in both the aircraft and dynamics division voted to accept management's pay and productivity offers plus an interest free loan of £120 to staff who were locked out during the dispute.

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT

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