

PRIME MINISTER'S BRIEFING - 12 OCTOBER 1984

MAJOR INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

National Coal Board, (NUM)

1. In a series of meetings with the various parties in the dispute ACAS met the British Association Colliery Management on 5 October and the NUM on 6 October. Talks began yesterday at ACAS headquarters with the NCB and NUM. National Association of Colliery Overmen Deputies and Shotfirers also attended the meeting which is continuing today.
2. Members of the NACODS 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. The Transport and General Workers Union has promised the NUM full support for the miners strike.
5. 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.
6. 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.

7. 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'.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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 nor the NUM appeared in Court. They were given 6 days to reconsider their defiance of the court ruling at the end of which, on 10 October, Mr Scargill was fined £1000 by the High Court for contempt of court and given 28 days to pay. The NUM was fined £200,000 and given 14 days to pay. If the union does not pay the fine, the court will consider moves to seize £7m assets. Mr Scargill issued a statement reaffirming the NUM stance that the strike was official and that miners should not cross picket lines.

12. 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.

13. A group of miners is planning to begin High Court proceedings next week claiming damages from the NUM for loss of earnings.

14. On 10 October a special conference of the NALGO failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority to stop donations to NUM until the establishment of a secret ballot.

DHSS Longbenton and Durham (CPSA 350 SCPS 50)

15. 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.

16. 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 unemployment benefit computer centres at Reading and Livingston voted to strike from 10 October but the National Executive decided against calling these members out on strike, when it met on 11 October. It was decided by a 16-8 majority vote to intensify the dispute by selective strike action at local offices responsible for paying unemployment benefit. Over 500 staff at the Newcastle computer centre are now out on strike. However talks are expected today between the DHSS and the unions to try and resolve the dispute.

Vauxhall, Luton (400 AUEW) (300 TGWU), Ellesmere Port, (2250 AUEW) (2000 TGWU)
Dunstable, (TGWU, AUEW 2400)

17. Workers voted on 9 October to start an indefinite strike over a pay offer of 7.5% increase which shop stewards claim inadequately reflects the changes in working practices being asked of the 15,000 workforce. Strike action was taken on 10 October by Luton and Ellesmere Port plants, and although a majority of workers at Dunstable voted against strike action, production has been halted because 100 key workers responded to the strike call. Talks between management and union officials began late on 11 October.

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT

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