

MR BUTLER

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COAL DISPUTE

1. NACODS

NACODS are giving 9 days' notice of their strike. There is no technical need for this. It suggests either gross mismanagement by the union or a rift between militants wanting a strike and moderates wanting space for further negotiation.

The delay of 9 days extends the period between the vote and strike action to more than the maximum of 4 weeks allowed by the 1984 Trade Union Act.

Information from the Department of Energy and from outside suggests that: (1) the unions have succeeded in persuading NACODS members that MacGregor is not to be trusted; (2) the NCB have not got across the message that NACODS have been given all they asked for; (3) the feeling on the ground is that the NACODS members will support the strike call throughout the country.

Conclusion

The NCB should hold open the opportunity for NACODS to have further talks, even if we think there is little chance of them climbing up this lifeline. In conjunction with this, the Government and the NCB must get the message across that NACODS have been given what they wanted.

The Prime Minister might contact Ian MacGregor about this and persuade him to repeat the message ad nauseam.

Tactically, it would be best to try to win the propaganda battle over the first part of next week, and to offer NACODS further talks on Friday.

Although the NACODS delay will give the NCB a cast-iron case for use of the 1984 Trade Union Act, the Board should not take the opportunity since it will be seen as a technical ploy to overthrow a democratic union vote. It would be better to use the legislation against the Yorkshire NUM once all the pits have stopped.

2. USE OF BACMS

BACMS have previously indicated their unwillingness to undertake NACODS work. Once they perceive that pits could be closed and pay lost, we could get a different response.

There is also the problem that, under current legislation, only properly qualified people can operate as pit deputies. They need to have a certificate of competence not more than 5 years old.

We fear that even if the legal problem is overcome, it may be less than half the BACMS people who could do the job. (This compares with around 15,000 NACODS members altogether, of whom about 6,000 have been at work.)

Conclusion

If there is a chance of BACMS members being prepared to do NACODS work, then we could quickly pass a one-line amendment to the Mines and Quarries Act to facilitate this. Couldn't this be done by extending the provision that already allows competent personnel to be appointed as temporary deputies in mines employing less than 30 people (1956 Commencement Order, Part 4, Section 27)?

If BACMS and NACODS employees remain intransigent, then we should up the stakes. We should start closing pits that are genuinely uneconomic, preferably in places like Yorkshire. And we should make sure that miners convicted of violence against colleagues or NCB property are seen to be sacked.

3. POWER STATION SUPPLY

Oil is supplied mainly by pipeline or sea. Neither the TGWU members nor refinery workers are showing any enthusiasm to frustrate oil movements to power stations. Calls by shop stewards at mass meetings have gone unheeded.

Some oil is moving by road to supplement coal at coal-fired stations - the so called "oil overburn". One potential danger point is the the new round of road tanker drivers' pay negotiations in November. However, there are no indications so far that this will give rise to militant action.

We are urgently following up:

- the scope for rapidly switching coal stations to gas.
- the scope for increasing oil burn in coal stations.

John Wybrew, drawing on Shell technical opinion, believes that both can be done quickly enough. It is reported that an experimental switch to gas at the Hams Hall coal station was surprisingly successful. BGC's comfortable gas supply position could make this a valuable option, always provided gas supplies can be rapidly tied into coal-fired stations. And some oil can be mixed with coal without major modification of power-station plant.



Policy Unit