

c/c

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MISC 101(84) 45th Meeting

COPY NO 19

CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
TUESDAY 23 OCTOBER 1984 at 10.30 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Lord Young
Minister without Portfolio

The Rt Hon John Stanley MP
Minister of State for the Armed
Forces, Ministry of Defence

Mr Norman Lamont MP
Minister of State, Department of
Trade and Industry

Mr Michael Ancram MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State, Scottish Office

Mr Michael Spicer MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State, Department of Transport

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr P L Gregson
Brigadier J A J Budd
Mr J F Stoker

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that pits working normally numbered 45, those turning some coal numbered 10, those with some men present numbered 23 and those on strike numbered 96. Record attendances were reported that day in Scotland, North Derbyshire and the Western Area. The National Coal Board (NCB) hoped that one pit in South Yorkshire, where 26 men were now present, would shortly begin to turn coal.

Total movements of NCB coal the previous week had been 911,000 tonnes. 670,000 tonnes had gone to power stations. The expansion of movements, principally by road, to their present levels had been a great achievement. It remained to be seen whether threats by the Transport and General Workers Union to disrupt supplies from open cast sources would have any significant effect.

Talks were taking place that morning between the NCB and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) at the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). The talks followed an approach to the NCB by NACODS, whose suggestion it was that ACAS should be involved. The direction that the discussions might take and the likely outcome were impossible to predict. If the strike threatened by NACODS from 25 October took place, it should be possible to move 350-450,000 tonnes of coal a week to the power stations from formerly working pits and from opencast sources even if production were to cease. It would be necessary to provide a further 150,000 tonnes a week from other sources. Consideration was being given to the sources which should be used and how the movements should be handled.

In discussion the following were the main points made -

- a. The handling in the media of the appointment of Mr Eaton as adviser to the Chairman of the NCB had led to exaggerated impressions of his role in relation to negotiations and to undesirable speculation about the future role of Mr MacGregor. No doubt the Board would continue to take opportunities to clarify Mr Eaton's role in relation to that of Mr MacGregor.

b. No Chief Executive or Board members had yet been appointed to the NCB's new Enterprise Agency.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the temperature in the dispute was likely to be further increased if, as seemed likely, the assets of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) were sequestered in the High Court on the expiry the following day of the deadline for payment of the fine imposed on the Union for contempt. Meanwhile, considerable uncertainty surrounded the talks at ACAS that morning between the NCB and NACODS. It was to be hoped that the outcome would be that the strike threatened by NACODS from 25 October would be called off on a basis acceptable to the NCB and consistent with its statutory and other responsibilities. While the outcome of the talks remained unclear, NACODS should be left in no doubt that a strike would, on current form, be likely to continue for a considerable time. It was important to avoid any implication that NUM members who had worked throughout the dispute would be let down if NACODS struck, but, equally any reassurances given should not be of a kind likely to reduce pressure from working miners on NACODS to continue to work. Above all, it was important to leave no doubt in anyone's mind that, in the event of an effective strike by NACODS, the NCB and Central Electricity Generating Board could and would continue, with the support of the Government, to move coal to power stations in quantities sufficient to keep them in operation and the economy working.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.

Cabinet Office

23 October 1984