

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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MISC 101(84) 50th Meeting

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CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 10 DECEMBER 1984 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

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

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Peter Rees QC MP
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham
Minister without Portfolio

Mr Giles Shaw MP
Minister of State, Home Office

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

SECRETARIAT

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

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

SECRET AND PERSONAL

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

The SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that some 600 miners had given up the strike the previous week. That day 208 had returned to work; a significant number were in the South Yorkshire area where it was expected that coal would be produced at Manton Colliery for the first time since the strike began, either that afternoon or the following morning. 948,000 tonnes of coal had been moved by the National Coal Board (NCB) during the previous week and coal stocks at power stations remained above 15 million tonnes.

A number of High Court cases were due to be heard during the current week, which could result in the Yorkshire and North Derbyshire National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) area funds being committed to the care of trustees and individual members of the NUM National Executive Committee being made personally liable for certain financial penalties imposed by the Court. It seemed likely that pay discussions between the NCB and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) which had restarted that day, would be prolonged as it was unlikely that NACODS would readily accept the 5.2 per cent already accepted by the British Association of Colliery Managers Union (BACM). NACODS members were still refusing to cross NUM picket lines in Yorkshire in sufficient numbers to permit the resumption of coal production at a second pit, but efforts would continue at a local level to improve the position. The NCB's strategy both on the pay negotiations and on getting NACODS members back to work was to play it long and avoid provoking a confrontation.

There was at present no sign of any new initiative from the Trades Union Congress (TUC) but the recent request from the Scottish TUC, accompanied by representatives of Scottish churches, local authorities and other organisations, to see the Prime Minister would need careful handling.

He understood there was a reasonable chance of saving those parts of Rossington Colliery currently threatened by an underground fire, but the task was made much more difficult by an NUM refusal to remove pickets to facilitate NACODS members joining the fire fighting.

The MINISTER OF STATE, HOME OFFICE said that intimidation continued but incidents were more scattered than in recent weeks. The number of cases awaiting trial in Magistrates' Courts had decreased by 300 between 9 and 30 November and there were plans to deploy three more Stipendiary Magistrates at Rotherham, Chesterfield and St Helens early in the new year to expedite hearings.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL said that news of the indemnity given to the sequestrators appointed by the High Court had attracted considerable attention when the revised supplementary estimate had been presented to Parliament. It was not yet clear when further proceedings might be taken in respect of the Transport and General Workers Union's failure to pay the fine imposed by the High Court in relation to the Union's breach of the 1984 industrial relations legislation during the recent Austin/Rover strike.

During a brief discussion the following were the main points made.

a. It would be important to use every means of communication (individual letters, press advertisements and direct approaches by local colliery management) to ensure the largest possible return to work after the Christmas and New Year holiday period. There would be a need to counter efforts likely to be made by the NUM to persuade their members to rejoin the strike by offering, for example, an amnesty to those who had returned to work during the weeks leading up to Christmas. Although the initial response in the first week of January might not be large because of difficulties of communication during the holiday period, and the usual problem of securing good attendances immediately after the New Year break, the NCB was right to time its efforts so as to take effect from 2 January onwards. These efforts would need to be sustained from then until the end of the tax year. The tax benefits to be gained by those returning to work earlier rather than later would be highlighted.

b. It seemed that a recent claim for a substantive pay increase for NUM members to cover a two year period, contained in a letter signed by the NUM General Secretary, did not have the approval of most members of the

NUM National Executive and Mr Heathfield had been reported as denying that it was in fact a pay claim.

c. The NCB had undertaken to produce a paper giving their ideas about the composition and terms of reference of the advisory body which would, in future, form part of the pit closures review machinery in accordance with the recent agreement between the NCB and NACODS.

The PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the NCB should be urged to produce the paper setting out its ideas on the new advisory body not later than early January. It was agreed that the request for a meeting with her by the Scottish TUC could not be accepted but she would seek advice from the Secretary of State for Energy, in consultation with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Employment, on how best to reply.

The Group -

Invited the Secretary of State for Energy:

- i. to urge the NCB to make available its paper about the colliery review advisory body not later than early January;
- ii. to propose, in consultation with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Employment, the terms in which she might reply to the letter sent to her by the Scottish TUC.

Cabinet Office
11 December 1984