Coal

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ASLEF ACTION - COAL DELIVERIES TO POWER STATIONS

(Note by the Secretary of State for Energy)

ASLEF mid-week stoppages have curtailed coal delivery by rail from the NCB to power stations in England, Wales and Scotland by some ¾ mt a week. If ASLEF continued their present action and no steps were to be taken to offset the decline in power station coal stocks, the endurance of the electricity supply system would be reduced from over 5 weeks at present to about 3 weeks by the end of March.

2. Before that point is reached we would need to make arrangements to restrict electricity demand, introducing a lower level of restriction initially as a necessary preliminary to moving to more stringent control. Effectively we would then be relying on nuclear and oil fired electricity and the limited coal we could move by road.

3. However, we agreed earlier this week to introduce measures to offset the erosion of coal stocks, notably greatly increased oil burn. Already, deliveries by road are building up from the normal level of 100,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes a week.

4. I have instructed the CEGB to increase their road and water borne supplies of coal to the maximum extent and will purchase additional electricity from Scotland where stocks and endurance are more favourable. As set out in the Annex, these measures should enable us to hold endurance at five weeks from now on or even improve on that if the weather remains mild and there is no hindrance to the arrangements, for example by the NUM.

5. I have been advised by the NCB that, in spite of isolated instances of NUM members refusing to load additional coal and the ASLEF appeal for support, it should be possible to continue road deliveries at their present level, or perhaps increase them, provided that this is done discreetly.

6. An all out strike by ASLEF. There are three possible scenarios:-

(a) NUR moving coal. I am advised that we cannot rely on the NUR to move coal by rail, if ASLEF move to an all out strike. NUR drivers (1600 against ASLEF's 23,000) are unlikely to be in the right place, familiar with the required routes or willing to substitute for striking ASLEF drivers (NUR members have been advised not to cross picket lines during the current actions; less than 10% of the NUR drivers have reported for duty). I do not believe it is realistic to think we could rely on the NUR to move the required coal. (This would be even more the case if British Rail introduce a lock out).

(b) NUM co-operation. In relying on road and water for the delivery of coal, the attitude of the NUM will be important. On present advice, it seems likely that the NUM members would be prepared to continue to deliver some 250,000 to 300,000 tonnes a week, ie at about the present rate. There is a risk, however, that they might refuse to handle more than the normal level of road borne supplies ie some 100,000 tonnes. Physically, as much as 500,000 tonnes could be moved by road but it seems unlikely that NUM tolerance could be pushed that far.

(c) The use of Servicemen. MISC 57 assessed the potential for servicemen moving coal from pithead to power stations at about $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ mt a week. MISC 57 also emphasised the possible adverse political and industrial relations repurcussions. The NUM would almost certainly black road deliveries by servicemen in the event of an all out ASLEF stoppage and would probably extend their action to picketing service lorries or servicemen who

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attempted to load coal. The consequences for law and order would be serious.

Conclusion The measure already in hand should enable us to hold the position unless ASLEF's action escalates to an all out strike. In the event of an all out strike, I see no prospect of avoiding electricity restrictions (we would then be losing some 1mt a week from stock). We would need to impose some restrictions approximately four weeks after a stoppage and then to tighten these progressively; by, say, the sixth week we should need to cut demand by an unprecedented 40% or 50%.

NL

10 February 1982

ANNEX

EFFECT OF MEASURES TO HALT EROSION OF POWER STATION STOCKS (GB)

(mtce)

NO EXCEPTIONAL ACTION	ENDURANCE	ADD ø EXTRA OIL BURN	ADD x EXTRA ROAD DELS	ADD EXTRA SCOTS ELECTRICITY	STOCKS	ENDURANCE
W/ending 7 Feb 13½						
14 Feb 12¾	over 5 weeks	?	¼	?		
21 Feb 12	5 weeks	0.4	0.3	0.1	12	5 weeks
28 Feb 11¼	under 5 weeks	0.4	0.3	0.1	12.1	5 weeks
7 March 10½	over 4 weeks	0.5	0.3	0.1	12.2	over 5 weeks
14 March 9¾	under 4 weeks	0.5	0.3	0.1	12.2	over 5 weeks
21 Mar 9	3½ weeks	0.5	0.3	0.1	12.4	over 5 weeks
28 Mar 8¼	3 weeks	0.5	0.3	0.1	12.5	over 5 weeks
4 April 7½	under 2 weeks	0.5	0.3	0.1	12.6	over 5 weeks

ø Oil burn less than estimated earlier. Rail dependent oil deliveries have been adversely affected by Aslef; both oil depots and power stations have been affected.

x It would be possible to add 0.2 mt a week if rail deliveries stop and NUM prepared to handle.