

Prime Minister (2)

To note.

MR SCHOLARcc Mr Mount
Mr Ingham
Mr Wolfson

PA

Mus 22/10

Ready on
mt.THE MINERS

You asked me to update the assessment in my note of 14 October, which the Prime Minister saw.

The Ballot

The only new factors which might influence the outcome of the ballot are the publication of the New Earnings Survey, showing that miners are at their highest level in relation to average earnings since the survey began in 1970; and the success of Scargill's rallies in creating an impression of widespread support among miners for the NUM claim. There are still reverberations from the pay/closures link on the ballot paper, but it is difficult to judge which way that will affect the outcome. Mr Lawson has declined to forecast the outcome to Cabinet; I understand that the NCB Area Directors are hopeful, but that Siddall himself is more cautious and expects a close outcome. It still seems to me unlikely that Scargill will get his 55% majority.

PR

The NCB's campaign continues to look good, Siddall has been particularly explicit on a No vote meaning a long strike. Scargill has on the whole had a bad press. The Government has succeeded in keeping out of it. But Bernard is bound to be continually asked by the Lobby for a reaction, and has agreed with me that he should point out the increasing desperation of some of Scargill's claims - such as the need for a 45% increase to get back to 1975 purchasing power (which ignores the effect of the productivity scheme). The Department

of Energy have started their preparatory work on the PR implications of an adverse vote, and we are being consulted.

Endurance

The build-up of stocks continues at a satisfactory pace, only slightly affected by the overtime ban. MISC 57 has confirmed the endurance position - 20 weeks for coal, 16 weeks for ancillaries - and has identified the secondary issues which need to be put to Ministers. Mr Lawson will be circulating the report next week (we have discussed the handling of it and you will be advising the Prime Minister separately). The main issue at present is what advice to give Electricity Boards about the use of legal remedies if miners picket power stations and prevent replenishment of ancillaries.

Handling

If the ballot goes wrong we shall also need permanent Ministerial machinery to handle MISC 57's work. No doubt the Cabinet Office will be advising on that, but I am sure the Prime Minister ought to continue to chair it, unwelcome though that may be from a diary point of view.

J.

22 October 1982