



BRIEFING FOR PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS: 28 JUNE 1984

COAL INDUSTRY DISPUTE

Additional Background

There are 40(4) pits working normally this morning; 6(2) turning some coal; 5(1) with some men, and 117 idle. Figures in brackets refer to pits on holiday that would otherwise be expected to be in these categories.

Bilston Glen produced coal yesterday but will not do so today. 33 men are working in addition to the safety cover team, but they are securing coal faces in readiness for the pit's 3 week annual holiday which begins next week. 80 pickets from Durham, including women, attempted to take over the pit this morning but were either arrested or removed by police.

In North Derbyshire the attendance is fairly stable: 217 men at Bolsover and 84 at Shirebrook - both pits are producing some coal. Warsop has 22 men, Markham 8 and Renishaw Park 6. There are around 800 pickets at the 5 pits, the majority at Shirebrook.

Elsewhere picketing is fairly light, the one exception being 180 at Parkside (Lancashire) where there have been 5 arrests.

The pits not on holiday in Staffordshire once again have record attendances (Lea Hall, Littleton), as does Point of Ayr in N Wales.

The High Court on Tuesday declared in favour of 3 Lancashire miners from Agecroft colliery, and found that the strike in Lancashire could not be made official without a ballot and that the union could not take disciplinary action against men who continued to work.

The NCB has dismissed miners from Betteshanger, Tilmanstone and Whitwell collieries who were involved in occupations of the pits; 43 men in all have been dismissed.

No iron ore trains moved into Llanwern steel works yesterday and it is not expected that any will get in today although 5 are scheduled. The NUM have claimed that ASLEF have agreed not to move ore into Ravenscraig from noon today.

COAL

Current Situation

44 pits are working normally and 14 partially. An increasing number of miners are returning to work in several areas. Coal stocks remain sufficient for several months.

General Line to Take

The issues in this strike are clear.

It is about whether the future of coal lies in subsidies or in sales.

It is about whether the future of the coal industry lies in the productivity of its own workers or taxation paid by others.

The Opposition knew that when they were in Government; that is why Plan for Coal envisaged the closure of uneconomic pits. The economic reality remains the same; only the Opposition has changed to suit their political convenience.

Will you now intervene/appoint a Court of Inquiry or a go-between?

The only way to a prosperous future for the coal industry lies in co-operation between management and workforce. It is they - not any arbitrator or go-between - who have to work together in the future and it is they who must find a solution which will provide for a prosperous and profitable future. The National Coal Board have made it clear they are willing to sit down as a matter of urgency with all the unions to discuss a revision of Plan for

/Coal

Coal. Two of the three unions are willing to do so; a quarter of the membership of the NUM are prepared to do so. I call on the leadership of the NUM to accept that invitation.

Civil Action

The Government's position on this matter is quite clear and has not changed. As I said on 4 June and again in the House last week the Government will not stand in the way of any nationalised board which seeks a legal remedy. But regardless of whether civil remedies are sought, society has a right and the duty to protect itself from mob rule.

Effect on Steel

Steel workers know all about the effect of strikes on customers and the effect on jobs of losing customers. British Steel itself uses over 4 million tonnes of NCB coal in a year. Why is the Opposition supporting the leadership of the NUM in their attack on steelworkers' jobs?

Cost of the Dispute: a Billion Pound Strike?

The figures which have been quoted in the press are entirely speculative. In any event, the once and for all public expenditure cost of the current dispute is small by comparison with the continuing cost of failing to tackle the coal industry's underlying problems. Huge subsidies from the taxpayer, which last year totalled £130 per miner, per week, would be required year after year.

/Pits at Risk

Pits at Risk

I can confirm that as Mr. MacGregor has pointed out in his letter to miners, many pits are in danger as a result of this strike.

Faces at Rossington, Bold and Tilmanstone have already been lost.