



42

Ref. A084/3030

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet: Industrial Affairs: Coal

117 people present
57 out

It may be convenient to divide tomorrow's discussion into the following three parts:

progress reports;

timing of the benefit changes affecting strikers;

line to take.

5,000 made this week.

Progress reports

576
N.G. 88-14
Wander.

2. You will wish to invite oral reports from:

Wolverhampton
6,000.

(i) The Secretary of State for Energy on

14 - 62
43 - 1250

the number of pits and miners working (today's figure for those returning again appears to be more than double the figure for the same day last week);

1,000
575 B.G.
9 other pits.

coal movements;

NCB proposals for sustaining and improving the return to work (it was announced on 13 November that the deadline for a return to work which would qualify for holiday and bonus payments before Christmas had been extended by a week from 19 November).

301
=
Dunham 118
Bunham.

(ii) The Home Secretary on this week's high levels of violence in mining areas.



(iii) The Secretary of State for Employment on the likely attitudes of the TUC and Labour Party following the hostile reception of Mr Willis at the NUM rally in South Wales on 13 November, and Mr Kinnock's statement supporting Mr Willis.

(iv) The Lord Chancellor on the apparent lack of progress in bringing before the courts the more serious offences arising from picket line violence. (The Lord Chancellor has been asked to be prepared to speak on this matter.)

3. On the question of an indemnity for the sequestrators the Attorney General is, following the decision of MISC 101, pursuing the matter with the Chief Secretary, Treasury. It is unlikely to be raised tomorrow. One possible difficulty which might arise is the identification (should this prove necessary) of the particular Department incurring the contingent liability. For obvious political and presentational reasons the Department of Energy would be reluctant to take this on. The Lord Chancellor's Department would be a better choice. But there may be ways of getting round this difficulty. In any case we gather that the sequestrators are no longer being held up in their efforts.

Benefit changes affecting strikers

4. The Secretaries of State for Social Services and for Energy are likely to wish to discuss the timing of the recently agreed changes to benefits affecting strikers.

5. Mr Fowler is now ready to proceed with action to:

amend the supplementary benefit regulations so that payment of strikers' mortgage interest should be by a separate Giro cheque payable to the relevant building society;



block the loophole in the Housing Benefit Regulations concerning board and lodging payments to single strikers living with their parents;

(Both these items have been discussed by the Home and Social Affairs Committee and reported to you and other Cabinet colleagues in the Lord President's note of 30 October.)

Para A

uprate the "specified sum" from £15 to £16 - in accordance with the Social Security (No 2) Act 1980.

(Your agreement to this was conveyed in your Private Secretary's letter of 1 November to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Social Services.)

Para B

All the changes apply to all strikers, not just to the striking miners.

6. The Secretary of State for Energy is anxious to avoid any action that might be exploited by Mr Scargill and others to slow down the return to work and would prefer action on the three items to be delayed. ~~The Secretary of State for Social Services is concerned that any delay in respect of uprating the "specified sum" would mean that full implementation would not prove practicable in the current financial year. There would seem to be~~ ^{four} ~~three~~ courses of action open:

- (a) to delay implementing all three items;
- (b) to delay implementing uprating of the "specified sum" (if this is thought to be the most sensitive item);
- (c) to implement all three as already agreed, but taking particular care over the public presentation of the "uprating" item.

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- (d) uprate the "specified sum" on the argument that this is an automatic consequence of the general uprating, and delay the discretionary changes.

7. There are sound arguments on both sides. It would clearly be undesirable to give Mr Scargill some new issue to exploit just at the moment when he appears to be getting increasingly isolated and



when all public attention should be concentrated on the acceleration in the return to work. On the other hand the benefit changes should marginally increase the pressures to return to work. Moreover they may be easier to present now, along with other adjustments to benefits, than in isolation later.

Line to take

8. You will wish to conclude the discussion in the usual way by inviting proposals from the Secretary of State for Energy on the line to take, and in particular on:

the return to work;

violence;

benefit changes (if they are to be announced shortly).

Next meeting

9. The next meeting of MISC 101 has been arranged for 10.45 am on Tuesday 20 November.

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Approved by
ROBERT ARMSTRONG
and signed in his absence.

14 November 1984