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Mr Turnbull

NEWS OF THE WORLD ARTICLE

— P Walker

file

13/1/84

Last Tuesday evening the demand for electricity in Britain reached a higher level than at any time in our history.

Ten months after Arthur Scargill had organised a coal strike without the miners having the opportunity of a ballot this enormous electricity demand was met without difficulty.

The chairman of the <sup>Central</sup> Electricity Generating <sup>Board</sup> ~~Industry~~ has informed me that such are the supplies and stocks of coal that there will be no power cuts during 1985.

Mr Scargill's objectives of achieving industrial damage have failed and his militant and extreme attitude is losing support throughout the coalfields of Britain.

This has been the first week that there has been somebody working at every pit in Yorkshire. It has been the first week that in the crucial North Derbyshire field the majority of NUM members were at work and not on strike.

Alas, this tragic industrial action has been kept going by Mr Scargill, doing immense damage to miners, miner's families, mining communities and the mining industry. It was nearly 12 months ago that Mr Scargill explained to the miners that there were only eight weeks stocks of coal at the power stations, with the implication that if they joined him in the strike it would soon have to be ended. It was many months ago that the mass pickets were paid and organised to try and stop the miners who had voted to go to work from working. They failed. It was many months ago that Mr Scargill himself led the attack upon the Orgreave coke works to prevent the works from supplying the steel industry with the coke it required. He failed. It was throughout the late spring and early summer that the mobs were

mobilised to try and bring the steel industry to a standstill. They failed. Many of our steel works are now at record production.

The reason for the failures was not disloyalty by NUM members, or the failure of other unions to support Mr Scargill. The reason for the failure was that there never has been an industrial justification for this dispute. The country and the miners must be aware of the offer now available. An offer which if put to a ballot would, of course, be accepted by all sensible miners. It consists of:-

- a pay offer which keeps miners earnings substantially above average industrial earnings, and which exceeds what has already been accepted by groups like the power workers, gas workers and police;
- a guarantee that any miner who wishes to remain in the industry will be able to do so; there will be no compulsory redundancies arising from the closure of uneconomic pits;
- an investment programme for the industry which exceeds that of the coal industries of the rest of the European Community put together;
- generous early retirement provisions for those areas where pits are no longer economic;
- for the first time, an enterprise company financed by the National Coal Board has been established to give assistance on finance, advice and premises to new businesses coming to mining communities.

No wonder that with such an offer two of the three mining unions are not on strike and over 70,000 members of the NUM are hard at

work. No wonder 20,000 of Mr Scargill's strikers have gone back to work since the beginning of November.

On seven occasions the Coal Board have negotiated with Mr Scargill. On seven occasions Mr Scargill has refused to move from his demand that all pits, no matter how uneconomic, must be kept in production until the last tonne of coal has been extracted. This is a demand which no NUM leader has previously made, which no Labour government has proposed and which no coal industry in the world has ever practised. By making such an impossible demand Mr Scargill has succeeded in keeping the conflict going. It is however conflict that is primarily damaging to the members of his union, their families and their communities.

1984 was the lost year of opportunity. A year in which £700m worth of capital investment would have taken place in the coal industry; a year in which miners would have been well paid; a year in which not one single miner would have been made compulsory redundant; and a year in which new markets would have been obtained. 1984 was the most tragic year in Britain's coal mining industry. I hope and pray that sanity will now prevail, that our mines will return to normal working, that investment will take place, that new markets will be secured and that 1984, the year of disaster, will be followed by 1985, the year of revival.

PETER WALKER

11 January 1985

Mr Tyle  
Mrs Cani  
Mr Turnbull

Reference No. 7

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thro' C.C.O. ~~at~~ Friday 11 Jan.

Speaking at Rous Lench Village Hall in Worcestershire at 8.00pm this evening Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, said:

"I cannot believe that Britain's miners will continue much longer to tolerate the damage being done to their families, their communities and their industry by the totally unjustified industrial action organised by Mr Scargill. The mind boggles at the extraordinary statements he perpetually makes, statements totally divorced from reality.

"After his National Executive meeting this week he came out saying that there were more men on strike than at the beginning of the strike and that the return to work had been a flop. Yet every journalist and every miner knows that there has been a massive return to work in the last few months. 20,000 members of Mr Scargill's union have returned to work since the beginning of November. At the beginning of November there were 81 pits with nobody at work. Now 151 of Britain's pits have men working and only 23 are totally on strike. For the first time last week every pit in Yorkshire had somebody at work, and another one of Yorkshire's major pits started producing coal.

"It was Mr Scargill who, but a week or so ago, stated that any of those 70,000 miners that were at work who rejoined the strike would be forgiven but, if after Christmas they continued to work, they would be stained for all time. We now know the manner in which that threat has been received. Not only did the 70,000 working miners remain at work and produce more coal than ever before, but now several thousand more of their colleagues have joined them.

"Even more extraordinary, Mr Scargill claimed after his executive meeting that it was the Coal Board that had turned down the proposal from ACAS. The Chairman of ACAS has made it abundantly clear there was only one ACAS proposal - a compromise proposal to bring a solution, a proposal accepted by the Coal Board and rejected by Mr Scargill.

"This week we saw the biggest ever demand for electricity in the history of our country happily and easily met by our power stations. The movement of coal, the production of coal is at high levels allowing the Chairman of the CEEGB to inform the country that with such stocks and such coal production there will be no power cuts in 1985. The steel plants throughout the country are hitting record production levels.

"Having failed to close the working collieries, having failed to close Britain's steel works and having failed to close Britain's docks and transport system it appears that Mr Scargill is now engaged in trying to break up his union. I hope he will not be allowed to break up a union which has a fine tradition. I hope that soon this union will return to being a united union able to ballot when it feels industrial action is necessary; a union free of violence and intimidation; a union willing to sit down with the Coal Board and operate a plan for the coal industry which will bring it expanding markets instead of decaying pit faces.

"Mr Scargill has repeated yet again that he is unwilling to move an inch from his impossible demands. I hope soon that saner counsel will prevail so that 1985 can be the year of recovery for this industry after its year of disaster in 1984."