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MISC 101(85) 3rd Meeting

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CABINET  
MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at  
10 Downing Street on  
MONDAY 21 JANUARY 1985 at 4.30 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Home Department

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham  
Minister without Portfolio

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP  
Attorney General

The Rt Hon Lord Gray of Contin  
Minister of State, Scottish Office

Lord Trefgarne  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
for the Armed Forces, Ministry of  
Defence

Mr John Butcher MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
Department of Trade and Industry

SECRETARIAT

Mr P L Gregson  
Brigadier J A J Budd  
Mr J F Stoker

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

SECRET AND PERSONAL

## INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that the number of new faces reported that day was the second highest of the strike. The figure stood at 1,828 and would rise further. Particularly large numbers, over 600 in each case, had returned in the North East and Yorkshire. On this basis, about 5,000 strikers might return in the course of the week. Two more pits were now working normally and one additional pit in Yorkshire had begun production.

870,000 tonnes of coal had been moved the previous week. The reduction compared with recent weeks was due in part to the one-day rail strike on 17 January and in part to the effects of the weather on open cast operations. He expected more than 900,000 tonnes to be moved that week.

Power station endurance continued at a high and increasing level. Workers at Didcot power station had now voted to use coal from all sources from which deliveries were being made. The Chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) had replied in a letter (which had yet to be published) to unfounded suggestions in an article in the Guardian that the Board were having difficulty in meeting some peak demands.

Both the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Opposition had called for a resumption of negotiations following a meeting of their liaison committee earlier in the day. General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was meeting officers of the National Coal Board (NCB) informally that afternoon at the NUM's request. The NUM had made plans for the meeting known in breach of an agreement on confidentiality and had said falsely that it was being held at the request of the NCB. The Board was holding to the line that no progress would be possible in negotiations without readiness on the part of the NUM to adopt a more realistic attitude towards uneconomic pits.

SECRET

He was preparing a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to a letter she had received on 18 January from the Leader of the Opposition.

SECRET

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT said that considerable disruption had been caused by the one-day strike in some British Rail (BR) regions on 17 January, though the two Midlands depots used as a pretext for the strike had in fact run 24 coal trains on the day. The Chairman of the BR Board, though alive to the possible damaging consequences of confrontation with the unions, was understandably anxious to reassert the authority of management over his workforce at a time when he was seeking increasingly to move coal by rail from previously strikebound pits in areas which had benefited from the return to work.

SECRET

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the public line for Ministers to take was that the deal available to miners was the most generous offer in post-war history and that Mr Scargill alone was preventing its acceptance. Recent trends in the strike were encouraging, but it remained most important to avoid industrial confrontation elsewhere - and particularly on the railways - of a kind likely to strengthen the resolve or authority of the strike leadership.

The Group -

SECRET

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion and invited the Ministers concerned to be guided accordingly.

Cabinet Office

22 January 1985