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MISC 101(85) 4th Meeting

COPY NO 24

CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

—  
MINUTES of a Meeting held at  
10 Downing Street on  
MONDAY 28 JANUARY 1985 at 4.15 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 Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Peter Rees QC MP  
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP  
Attorney General

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

Mr David Trippier MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
Department of Trade and Industry

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Environment

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong  
Mr P L Gregson  
Brigadier J A J Budd  
Mr J F Stoker

## 1. INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that more than 3,300 strikers had returned to work during the previous week. More than 900,000 tonnes of coal had been moved, including the best rail movements of coal since June 1984. The number of new faces reported that day - 892 so far - was high, considering that talks were to resume on the following morning.

The National Coal Board (NCB) thought the following day's preliminary meeting likely to agree a basis for substantive talks with the whole of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) National Executive. The Board would require a written record of the meeting to be agreed. Although Mr Scargill was under considerable pressure from within the union, it remained doubtful whether he would compromise his personal stance on uneconomic pits. The drift back to work was expected to resume on a large scale if talks broke down.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL said that Nobis Finanz, the bank holding NUM funds in Luxembourg, was under pressure from the Luxembourg Government not to release the funds to the sequestrators; but this pressure did not, as previously thought, include a threat to the bank's licence.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that it was necessary to wait for the outcome of preliminary talks the next morning between the NCB and NUM. It would be most important in the interests of avoiding future conflict that the terms of any settlement which might eventually result should be clear.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.

## 2. LOCAL AUTHORITY ASSISTANCE TO THE NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS

The Group considered a Note by the Secretaries (MISC 101(85) 1) covering a Note by the Department of Energy on local authority assistance to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT said that the information attached to MISC 101(85) 1 had been obtained from a number of diverse sources, including the press. There was no evidence of direct financial assistance to the NUM by local authorities. Assistance, much of it in kind, had, however, been provided for purposes connected with the strike. Where assistance had been given, it had often aroused very great local controversy, but there were no clear legal grounds for action against councillors for acting improperly. The statutory powers on which authorities appeared to be relying - Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 83 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 - came within the scope of the inquiry he had set up into local authorities procedures and practices, and he proposed that they should be re-examined in the light of its conclusions.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a brief discussion, said that Departments should proceed as proposed by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Group -

Took note, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion, and invited the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Scotland and Wales to be guided accordingly.

Cabinet Office

29 January 1985