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MISC 101(85) 6th Meeting

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CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY 1985 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw
Lord President of the Council

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 Lord Young of Graffham
Minister without Portfolio

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

Mr Alan Stewart MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State, Scottish Office

Mr David Trippier 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

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The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that 1,100 new faces were reported so far that day. This was good considering the weather conditions, which were very severe in places. One additional pit - at Coventry - had resumed normal working and it was likely that another would do so in the course of the week.

930,000 tonnes of coal had been delivered by the National Coal Board (NCB) during the previous week. More coal trains had run than in any week since June 1984. Movements, including movements by sea, were continuing satisfactorily in the circumstances.

Contacts had been made by the NCB with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) through the agency of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in an attempt to agree an acceptable agenda for talks, but without success. Mr Scargill continued to blame the lack of talks on the imposition of preconditions by the NCB though his real purpose was to resume talks while ensuring that the main issue in the strike was not addressed.

The Executive of the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) were due to meet on the following day. They appeared concerned that members might be victimised in the event that the NUM called for a return to work without a settlement. The NCB were optimistic that the Association would not call a strike ballot, though the possibility remained that they might do so.

He had now received from the NCB their ideas on arrangements for the new independent advisory body.

In a case brought by working miners, the High Court had found that the mass picketing at five pits in South Wales had been unlawful. A similar case brought by miners from Yorkshire was due to begin on the following day.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT said that the day of action called by some regions of the TUC that day in support of striking miners had been a failure. Rail services in the South East, though there had been disruptions due to the weather, had been very little affected by industrial action.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the numbers returning to work that day had been good, considering the severe weather. It was necessary to wait for the outcome of the NACODS Executive meeting and other current developments while continuing to support the attempts of the NCB to negotiate a clear and acceptable conclusion to the dispute.

The Group -

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.
2. Invited the Secretary of State for Energy to circulate a memorandum to the Group commenting on the National Coal Board's ideas about the new independent advisory body.

Cabinet Office

12 February 1985