

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH TUC MONITORING GROUP: 19
FEBRUARY 1985

Peter Walker's statement to the media:

"The Prime Minister, accompanied by the Lord President and the Secretaries of State for Energy and Employment, met representatives of the TUC, led by their General Secretary, Mr Norman Willis, for one hour today.

"The TUC reported on their efforts to promote a settlement of the coal dispute.

"The Prime Minister expressed appreciation for the TUC's efforts, and she said a settlement was long overdue.

"The Prime Minister said the views of the TUC would be conveyed to the NCB by the Secretary of State for Energy. The Government wanted an early resolution of the strike but any agreement must deal clearly and unambiguously with the central point of the dispute."

Q: So was any progress made at all?

A: I think it was important talks and certainly we listened as we said we would to the views the TUC were expressing, but both sides of course were in a position that they weren't involved in negotiations. The TUC were not negotiating for the NUM and the Government were not negotiating for the NCB. There was an exchange of views and as I say I will be conveying the various points that the TUC put to the Government to the NCB.

Q: Do you think an agreement is any closer Mr Walker?

A: Well as you know I have personally always hoped that there would never be a strike and I certainly thought there would be a settlement in May, June, July and so forth, because what is on offer to the NUM is the most generous

offer since nationalisation, probably a more generous offer than any offer that has been made to any other union in the country, and I think its a great tragedy that the damage to the industry goes on. And so one always hopes that very quickly this will come to an end but one can never be certain.

Q: Mr Walker are you impressed by the concessions made by the NUM?

A: All I can is that when you are talking about concessions all that the Government is offering is a very good future for that industry.

Q: But you've consistently criticised them for not making any concessions and now they've made some.

A: All I can is that the tragedy of this dispute right from the beginning alas has been that there was never a ballot and as we know the members of the NUM that balloted voted more than two to one against having any form of strike action, there was an ACAS compromise, obviously I regret all of that. But all I can say is if one reaches a quick settlement on sensible and clear terms, nobody will be more pleased than the Government.

Q: Do you accept Mr Willis's argument that the gap is actually very narrow now Mr Walker?

A: I think one has to consider exactly that there are some major issues still at stake and its not an easy problem, but I think in fact the reality is that here is a situation in which what is being offered to the miners of this country is a good future and certainly not a bad one and I hope very quickly they will take advantage of that.

Q: Mr Walker we've heard all this before, is there anything new as a result of today's meeting? [Indistinct]

A: Well of course its been said before because its remained the truth of the dispute and the realities are those which

everyone can examine and I do hope that very quickly the needless damage to the industry will come to an end.

Q: Has today's meeting brought that any closer?

A: Well we'll have to see what happens as a result following today's meeting. As I say I will be reporting the views of the TUC to the Coal Board and I know that they will carefully consider them.

Q: In a nutshell Mr Walker, the word uneconomic has to be in any settlement document?

A: Well throughout history pits that have been uneconomic have been closed by agreement with all parties and that's always been the situation and never before have we had a demand from any union leader of the NUM that every pit no matter how uneconomic should be kept in being. And so of course in the interests of the industry using the enormous investments that have been put into that industry in a sensible way one must have a clear cut situation that after going through all the appropriate procedures the Board has the right to manage.

Q: Is the meeting over?

A: Yes.

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH TUC MONITORING TEAM, 19 FEBRUARY 1985NORMAN WILLIS'S STATEMENT TO THE PRESS IN DOWNING STREET

NW: We had a very serious and very considered discussion with the Prime Minister about the urgent need for a settlement of the dispute. The Prime Minister welcomed the TUC's genuine endeavours to assist in promoting a settlement. She listened very carefully indeed to the points we put to her and has undertaken that the Energy Secretary will be conveying these views to the National Coal Board. In that situation the TUC is standing ready to continue its efforts to facilitate a settlement and will be remaining in touch with the Government as well as the National Union of Mineworkers and NACODS and on that basis we are looking ahead.