

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY - 21 FEBRUARY 1985

Mr Norman Willis, on behalf of the TUC, held a series of discussions with the Chairman of the National Coal Board. As a result of these discussions proposals were prepared by the Board which expressed the basis upon which an agreement could be reached on the main issues of the dispute. These proposals took account of the views Mr Willis had expressed to the Board.

Over the weekend the TUC showed this paper to the NUM executive, who asked for amendments to be made.

The Coal Board confirmed to the TUC that this was their final paper. The TUC then requested a meeting with the Prime Minister.

The TUC confirmed to the Prime Minister that the proposals under discussion would, if agreed to, constitute the final agreement on all of the matters which they dealt with, and that they were not a document which would be an agenda or form the basis of any further negotiations on these issues.

The TUC explained to the Prime Minister that they had a number of difficulties with the document, and my rt hon Friend undertook that I would convey their views to the National Coal Board.

This was done and subsequently the seven TUC leaders asked to have further talks with me before they met the National Coal Board. During these talks I clarified the Government's desire to see that the new NACODS procedures were brought into operation as speedily as possible, and that it was the Coal Board's intention that they would be in place by the time they were needed. I explained that neither the Board nor the Government could accept a position where if the NUM refused to agree to the detail of the independent body, no review procedure would exist. For this might have the effect of the NUM being able to frustrate any reasonable plans for closure. The

document was therefore amended to express the desire of all parties to see that the new procedures were in operation by 1st June, which would be well in time for any disputed closure to be referred to the independent body.

The document was further re-ordered to meet the NUM's anxiety that its sequence as originally drafted could have implied that disputed closures would take place prior to going through the proper procedures. A re-ordering of the document made it perfectly clear that a disputed closure will only take place at the end of the agreed procedures.

I share the TUC's disappointment that the NUM executive has rejected the proposals which had been made. The NUM executive have now rejected proposals in seven rounds of talks, the compromise proposal put forward by ACAS and the proposals prepared following discussions between the TUC and the National Coal Board.

I deplore that the generous and reasonable offers now available to miners continue to be rejected by the NUM executive. Those coalfields which originally balloted voted overwhelmingly against strike action. I can only urge those miners still on strike, though deprived of a ballot, to return swiftly to normal working, so that the damage being done to their industry, their families and their communities can come to an end.

SS/energy Statement.
21.2.85

AND ANSWER: TO BE CHECKED AGAINST
DELIVERY

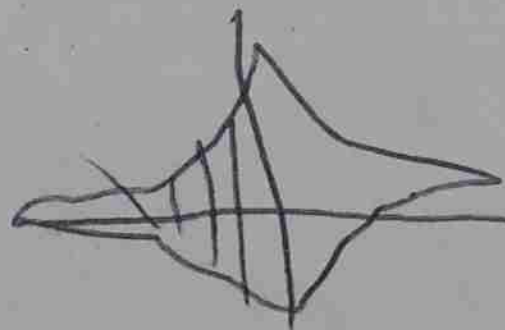
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