

# Case by case examination by NCB

## COAL DISPUTE

The National Coal Board would sack miners on its merits, Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, said in the Commons during question time.

If there were cases where this had not been done, the NCB was willing to re-examine them carefully and if any mistakes were made, the power of industrial tribunals was considerable, he said.

Some of those calling for an amnesty for sacked miners who had committed grievous crimes of violence also argued that no forgiveness should be given to those who worked during the dispute.

In Scotland apart from Poonaite where miners were not at work - 900 people had been convicted during the dispute and 181 had been dismissed, not the whole number, which was the impression given by certain people.

He also said that substantial amounts of money which would have been used for capital investment in the industry would now have to be used to repair the damage done during the dispute.

Mr Walker said that morning there were full attendances at virtually all collieries.

He hoped that the industry will get back to normal working quickly (he added) and take advantage of the opportunities available to it.

Mr Harvey Procter (Billerica, C): That statement meets with the pleasure of the House as a whole. Can he confirm that there will be no general amnesty but that the NCB will look at individual cases on their individual merits?

Mr Walker: Yes, I can confirm that.

Mr Robert Parry (Liverpool Riverside, Lab): Is not the NCB adopting double standards? During the strike it reinstated sacked miners so as to present the best figures. Is not the present stance vindictive and hypocritical?

Mr Walker: No. There are plenty of cases of people convicted during the strike who have gone back to work during the last week and are continuing at work.

Mr Richard Douglas (Dunfermline West, Lab): Will Mr Walker examine what happened this morning at Cornie Colliery when the management in a vindictive, locked 'men out' (Conservative laughter). This is no laughing matter.

Would Mr Walker get Mr MacGregor and Mr Wheeler to come to his office immediately to explain why Scotland should be excluded from the type of working he is using today? Will he do that immediately or otherwise sack them both?

Mr Walker: I am informed, I hope rightly, that at Cornie the miners marched to the colliery, held a meeting, and then returned home. There are some 25 NUM members at the pit and the same number of Nacods.

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley, Lab): Why were people sacked last week when they were working for two months beforehand? These are

the men Mr Walker and the Prime Minister were praising.

Why have men in Yorkshire been sacked who have been found not guilty in courts of law of any offence? Why have men been dismissed when their cases do not come to court for months?

What type of settlement are we going to end up with that is going to take the industry forward? Is it not the case that this vindictiveness and victimization is going to help destroy the coal industry?

Mr Walker: I totally disagree with Mr Barron's assessment. There are hundreds of men working who have been convicted during the strike of offences. His portrayal of the scene is totally inadequate.

Mr William Hamilton (Central Fife, Lab): I would draw his attention to a report in *The Guardian* this morning about older miners who have been convicted of relatively minor offences and received small fines but have nevertheless been dismissed and stand to lose £30,000 or more in redundancy pay.

If this is the case, how can any MP or the Government defend such injustices?

Will Mr Walker instruct the NCB at all levels to give firm assurance that where there are such men possibly being deprived of their rights in this matter, he will give a directive that that shall not happen?

Mr Walker knows my views very well on this strike, if he and the Government and the NCB continue with this victimization and terrorization there will be no end to the trouble in the coal mines.

Mr Walker: I recognize and appreciate Mr Hamilton's views. There is no policy of the NCB that men because they are elderly and subject to compensation should be dismissed. There is no reason why the NCB should hold such a view because all the redundancy and early retirement payments are paid out of separate funds. The NCB has no financial interest in it whatsoever.

If you take all of Scotland, obviously I cannot give the figures for Poonaite because they are not at work but apart from this 900 people have been convicted during the dispute and 181 have been dismissed, and not 900 which is sometimes the impression given by certain people. Some 181 were dismissed and the NCB considered, having carefully examined each case, that they are justified.

Mr David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells, C): This whole tragedy could have been avoided if the NUM had struck to its rule book and held a national ballot.

Mr Walker: His view has been totally confirmed this week by a certain publication known to be close to Mr Scargill's supporters called the *Socialist Worker*.

It said in a leading article: "In the aftermath of the strike, one of the criticisms bandied to be levelled at the miners is that the strike was lost because there was no ballot. But this had been a central fact - if there had been a ballot there would not have been a strike." (Conservative laughter)

Mr David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands, C): Will the Government do everything it can to bring about reconciliation in the coal

industry, in keeping with true Conservative principles?

Mr Walker: I have no doubt the majority of miners want to get back to normal working.

Government and the NCB will do everything to encourage that.

Mr Michael Foot (Bassano Gwent, Lab): Did he see the disgraceful interview with Mr MacGregor yesterday in *The Sunday Telegraph*? Mr MacGregor is just as unfit to run an amnesty as he ever was to run the coal industry. In that interview, he said the minister has nothing to do with any of the decisions. Is he telling the truth?

Would it not be better to get him back to America as soon as possible? (Labour cheer)

Mr Walker: I saw nothing in *The Sunday Telegraph* article on the question of saying no amnesty should be given for serious crimes which differs from the views of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Neil

contaminated grievous crimes of violence and argue that no forgiveness or protection should be given to those who legally went to work during this dispute.

Mr Roy Mason (Barnsley Central, Lab): How does he react to Mr MacGregor saying at the weekend that people are discovering the price of intimidation and instruction and "By God we are going to make it stick"? These are the words of an angry and foolish old man and cannot be a prerequisite to reconciliation.

Will Mr Walker take the lead in encouraging negotiations between both sides and not allow the overtime ban to be a bar to negotiations?

Mr Walker: As many miners are finding the appalling damage done by this dispute, which was totally unjustified on any basis. They have already paid a heavy price and are continuing to do so.

Regarding the overtime ban, I am surprised Mr Mason does not recognize that the best opportunity of this industry recovering from the disaster of the last year is to get back to normal working.

Mr Trevor Skeet (North Bedfordshire, C): How many coal faces have collapsed and what money is he prepared to spend on them?

Mr Walker: 30 working faces have been destroyed during this dispute. Apart from that, a great deal of machinery has been damaged and a great deal of repair work will have to be done before any form of normal working can be achieved.

Instead of the £800 million the industry would have had last year in capital investment and a similar amount this coming year, we now have the problem that substantial capital investment will have to go into restoring the damage done.

Mr Timothy Yeo (Suffolk South, C): Will he ensure the cost of the dispute is borne by the country as a whole and not just by the customers of the coal industry?

Mr Walker: The cost of the dispute, in all its forms, will be a complicated calculation which will have effects over several years.

Mr Peter Hardy (Wentworth, Lab): A number of my constituents have been sacked by the NCB although their cases have not yet been decided by the court and they have had no opportunity to explain or

defend themselves. This is an embarrassing factor at a time when we should see the healing of wounds.

Mr Walker: I can assure him the objective of the coal board is to look at every individual case on its merits. If there are cases when this has not been done, they are willing to re-examine them. If they make any mistakes on this, the power of the industrial tribunals is considerable.

Those who talk about continuing the dispute by anarchy and guerrilla warfare are more concerned in disguising their own failures as leaders of the industry than helping those in the industry who have suffered enough misery already.

Mr Walker: I agree. The nature of Britain's coal reserves and our miners' skills are such that, with high productivity, this industry has a good and secure future and it is important to seek to maximise and encourage improved productivity.

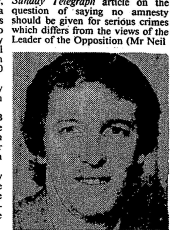
Mr Stanley Orme, chief Opposition spokesman on energy: The position of the coal board is untenable in this situation. What has happened in England alone the health service will be spending an extra £19 million next year. The great bulk of that extra spending will be paid for from taxation and national insurance. But, at the Government's detailed spending plans made clear, the Government believes that there should be some increase in the contribution from direct charges.

Mr George Footkes (Canrick, C): A negotiated settlement would have meant those positions could have been resolved without the bitterness which has now been engendered in the industry.

Mr Walker: Yes, that is why I regret the Opposition did not do far more in encouraging acceptance of the Acais compromise and also far more in moving Mr Scargill from the totally intransigent position he took.

Mr George Footkes (Canrick, C): Unsubstantiated position he took.

Mr Walker: I doubt whether he was heard to be very vocal when the pound exchange rate was £2.40, seeing that under his calculation that meant that all pits should close.



Barron Vindictiveness and victimization.

rebuild the industry, which has been shattered by Scargill's strike.

Mr Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes, C): Since Arthur Scargill has reportedly said in Britain he would be the first to confirm or deny that statistics as it seems to be not only a vital plank of NUM policy but also a test of Mr Scargill's veracity?

Mr Hunt: The statement is incorrect and one further example of the festering falsehoods of the President of the NUM to perpetuate the pointless political strike.

Mr Stanley Orme, chief Opposition spokesman on energy: To get rid of socialist activity in the pits it is

# Fowler looking for extra income from prescription charges

## HEALTH SERVICE

An increase of prescription charges to £2 per item and of charges for dental treatment will increase total income from charges to the NHS by £40 million a year, Mr Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, said in a statement in the Commons.

Mr Michael Meacher, Labour spokesman on health and social security, said that many people would in future pay more for their prescriptions than the cost to the health service and that that would apply to 170 million prescriptions a year.

In his statement, Mr Fowler said that in the next financial year, the health service finances to spend an extra £800 million, bringing total spending up to some £17,500 million.

That is an increase of the size of over 20 per cent in real terms since this Government came to power. In England alone the health service will be spending an extra £870 million next year. The great bulk of that extra spending will be paid for from taxation and national insurance.

The net effect of the changes the Government believes that there should be some increase in the contribution from direct charges.

Mr Fowler said that the Government had had an agreement this would have never have arisen. In 1972 and 1974 a negotiated settlement would have meant those positions could have been resolved without the bitterness which has now been engendered in the industry.

Mr Walker: Yes, that is why I regret the Opposition did not do far more in encouraging acceptance of the Acais compromise and also far more in moving Mr Scargill from the totally intransigent position he took.

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ments - crowns, inlays, bridges and dentures - will increase by 6 to 10 per cent. The maximum charge for any single course of treatment will increase by just 4.5 per cent. We have decided to change the structure of charges for routine treatment such as fillings and extractions and to relate the charge more closely to the cost of treatment.

In future patients will pay the full cost of routine treatment up to a maximum of £17 rather than £14.50 as at present - but they will also pay two-fifths of any cost above that level.

In the hospital service we intend to increase the charges for private patients and overseas visitors so that the charges meet the full cost of the services provided including all overheads, some of which have not been fully allowed for in the past. This will mean an average increase of just over 14 per cent although there will be variations for different types of charge and hospital. These changes will now make a total contribution of more than £60 million a year to health authorities' budgets.

These changes will come into effect at the beginning of April.

The result will be that the health service remains predominantly funded by general taxation - which accounts for some 86 per cent of expenditure. A further 11 per cent is derived from national insurance contributions. After the changes I have announced today charges will account for only some 3.2 per cent of total health service spending.

The net effect of the changes the Government is making to all health charges this April will be to increase total income from charges by some £40 million next year. This will be a contribution towards the extra £870 million to health service spending we are planning for next year. If we want to see more resources going to the health service, charges must make a contribution to that growth. provided exemptions policy protects those who cannot afford to pay.

have not shown excessive cost increases and some have become cheaper per unit to the NHS since the mid-1970s. Many people will be paying more for their prescriptions than they cost the NHS.

The maximum dental charges, which is what more than 90 per cent of people have to pay for treatment, have reached a level where the principle of a general dental service readily available to all in need is in danger of collapsing.

These huge increases in prescription and other charges (said) the Government to withdraw them.

Mr Fowler: If he wants more resources, they have to be found and not from tax, national insurance or charges. Tax and national insurance are providing 97 per cent of the cost. It is hypocritical to call for more spending on health and to condemn every means of raising that money.

Mr Roger Sims (Birmingham, Edgbaston, C): The poorest and most needy are protected all the way along the line. Even those that are neither poor nor needy are still going only to pay £2 for a prescription which is worth £4.50. That is a bargain in anybody's money.

Mr Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds West, L): Why has Mr Fowler chosen this time to introduce a substantial increase in prescription charges when he aims to save £75 million next Monday by his limited list of drugs proposals?

Pharmacists have been asking clients to say which one item is most important because they simply cannot afford to pay for all the items doctors are prescribing.

Mr Fowler: I am constantly being pressed to spend and provide more resources. We are providing £800 million more for the health service next year. The issue comes down to how is that money going to be raised. Charges must make a contribution.

Mr Roger Sims (Birmingham, Edgbaston, C): Many people will feel that a charge of £2 for a prescription imposed on those who can well afford to pay it is not an unacceptable figure when compared with the cost of a packet of cigarettes, or a pint of beer or a cinema seat.

The list of chronic conditions which enjoy exemption is relatively limited. There are some who feel it might be widened.

Mr Fowler: I will certainly look at that point again.

Mr Roy Galley (Halifax, C): Will he clarify the position of prescription season ticket holders?

Mr Fowler: I hope we will be able to help with that.

Mrs Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley, Lab) said it was not true that expectant mothers did not pay any charge. If she went on you become pregnant when you have started your treatment you pay for it unless you can arrange to become pregnant before you start that treatment.

Mr Fowler: I will look at that

# No plans to sell off mining industry

There were no plans for privatization of the coal industry, Mr David Hunt Under-Secretary of State for Energy, said during question time.

What matters for this industry now (he said) is a period of consolidation to recover from the damage of the dispute.

He called on the Opposition to start to condemn irresponsible talk of guerrilla action in the pits which could only destroy the industry.

This strike has inflicted very substantial damage (he said) and let no one in this House underestimate the extent of that damage. For the President of the NUM to talk of the fight to continue it, it must be the view from all sides of the House that the only fight that now matters is to

rebuild the industry, which has been shattered by Scargill's strike.

Mr Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes, C): Since Arthur Scargill has reportedly said in Britain he would be the first to confirm or deny that statistics as it seems to be not only a vital plank of NUM policy but also a test of Mr Scargill's veracity?

Mr Hunt: The statement is incorrect and one further example of the festering falsehoods of the President of the NUM to perpetuate the pointless political strike.

Mr Stanley Orme, chief Opposition spokesman on energy: To get rid of socialist activity in the pits it is

necessary to get a negotiated agreement. I had a meeting this Monday morning with Nacods and NUM officials. Nacods gave me a copy of a letter which they wrote on March 6 to Mr Spanton asking review procedure and for all parties to attend. Will he agree that that should go ahead?

Mr Hunt: The Government has always wanted to see a negotiated settlement. It was a great tragedy for the future of the industry that sadly he did not support the initiative of the TUC in presenting the document they obtained from the coal board as the best possible offer. That offer is still open to the NUM

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*The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, Mar 12, 1985; pg. 4; Issue 62084. (1960 words)

**Category:** Politics and Parliament

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**Gale Document Number:**CS67342444