



BRIEFING FOR PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS: 21 JUNE 1984

COAL INDUSTRY DISPUTE

Additional Background

There are 43 pits working normally this morning; 7 turning some coal; 5 with some men working and 118 idle. In addition, 2 pits that would normally be in the first and second categories are on holiday.

Bilston Glen (in Mr Eadie's constituency) produced 150 tonnes of coal yesterday morning, the first coal produced in Scotland since the start of the dispute. 33 men worked there yesterday; today 22 men crossed the 250 strong picket line, but as the NUM have withdrawn safety cover the power has been switched off and work underground is not possible. 16 men are occupying offices at Killoch colliery but are not interfering with safety cover.

The occupation of Betteshanger colliery (Kent) ended yesterday without the NCB having to enforce the injunction granted the day before. The two men who had worked there earlier in the week have apparently undertaken not to do so for the rest of the dispute.

Pickets are this morning keeping out contractors at the Selby site; yesterday 500 pickets were there but contractors eventually got in under police escort. Today there are only around 100 pickets.

In North Derbyshire there are 1000 pickets at Shirebrook but 69 men are working, the highest number so far. The pit continues to turn some coal. There are 4 men sitting on the headgear at Whitwell colliery following an abortive attempt to occupy the pit on Tuesday night; it is understood the men intend to remain until Friday. The sit in has little effect, the only men working at Whitwell are 2 men on the nightshift.

Attendances in Lancashire and Staffordshire continue to improve.

The NUM and transport unions are to meet later today to discuss tightening the control of coal movements around the country.

This afternoon the annual conference of the ISTC is to debate whether the union ought to enter into discussions with the NUM on the level of coal supplies to steelworks.



## COAL INDUSTRY

### General line to take

The issue in this strike is clear. It is about whether coal develops into an efficient profitable industry, or declines into a high subsidy low demand industry. As the Chairman of the National Coal Board has said in his letter to miners today, if this strike continues "Nobody will win. Everybody will lose - and lose disastrously". There are between 20 and 30 pits which are in danger of never reopening if there is a lengthy strike. I support Mr MacGregor's call to miners to return to work to start repairing the damage and building a good future.

### Will you now intervene/appoint a Court of Inquiry or a go-between?

The only way to a prosperous future for the coal industry lies in co-operation between management and workforce. It is they - not any arbitrator or go-between - who have to work together in the future and it is they who must find a solution which will provide for a prosperous and profitable future. The National Coal Board have made it clear they are willing to sit down as a matter of urgency with all the unions to discuss a revision of Plan for Coal. Two of the 3 unions are willing to do so; a quarter of the membership of the NUM are prepared to do so. I call on the leadership of the NUM to accept that invitation.

### Civil Action

The Government's position on this matter is quite clear and has not changed. As I said on 4 June and again in the House last week the Government will not stand in the way of any nationalised board which seeks a legal remedy. But regardless of whether civil remedies are sought, society has a right and the duty to protect itself from mob rule.

### Effect on Steel

I know that the RHG Deputy Leader of the Opposition wishes the Steel trade unions to reduce production at the behest of the NUM. Not content with losing customers for coal, the Labour Party and the NUM now want to lose customers for steel. Steel workers know the effect on jobs of losing customers and British Steel itself



uses 6.92 million tonnes (4.16 million tonnes from the NCB and 2.76 million tonnes imported) of coal each year. The NUM action shows the strike up in its true colours: it is an attack on jobs.

Pits at risk

I can confirm that as Mr MacGregor points out in his letter to miners today, many pits are in danger as a result of this strike. Faces at Rossington, Bold and Tilmanstone have already been lost.

21 June 1984