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MISC 101(85) 8th Meeting

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CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
TUESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 1985 at 11.00 am

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 Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Employment

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 Barney Hayhoe MP
Minister of State, Treasury

The Rt Hon John Stanley MP
Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Ministry of Defence

The Rt Hon Lord Gray of Contin
Minister of State, Scottish Office

Mr Norman Lamont MP
Minister of State, Department
of Trade and Industry

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr P L Gregson
Brigadier J A J Budd
Mr J F Stoker

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that the 3,807 new faces reported the previous day were a record for any day during the strike. The figure for that morning was 1,259 so far, easily the best figure for any Tuesday during the strike. The proportion of National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members not on strike would reach 50 per cent that day or the next.

Coal movements by the National Coal Board (NCB) during the previous week had exceeded 1 million tonnes for the first time and were expected to be maintained at similar levels for the immediate future. The position on the railways was becoming less difficult and additional power stations were becoming accessible to rail deliveries. On current projections it was likely that power station coal stocks would begin to rise from the end of March. As endurance continued to strengthen, it might become sensible for the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) to reduce oilburn: the Board were making contractual dispositions designed to allow them to reduce the scale of their purchasing quickly if desired.

He had received a letter from the General Secretary of the NUM asking for confirmation that the modified pit review procedures agreed in principle by the NCB with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) would be available also to the Union. He proposed to reply referring the Union to the relevant passage in the document which had been proposed by the NCB as a basis for a settlement and reminding them that that document was the Board's final word on the issues at the heart of the dispute. There was no sign of any initiative by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) or others which might lead to a resumption of negotiations.

NACODS members were working normally apart from some isolated problems. He had been considering further the NCB's ideas on negotiations with the Association on changes to pit review procedures.

SECRET

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT said that, following further pressure on the rail unions by the British Rail (BR) Board, train crews and signalmen were accepting additional coal movements as more pits made progress towards normal working. BR would be meeting the rail unions that day and would continue to apply pressure for a removal of blacking. It was reported that three coal ships which had been blacked in ports in the North East would sail for power stations in the South East when the proportion of NUM members not on strike reached 50 per cent.

SECRET

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Government's line should be, first, that the document rejected by the NUM represented the final word of the NCB on the central issues in the dispute; and that the Board's position had the full support of the Government. Secondly, whether to end the strike must not be a question for individual miners: the sooner they did so, the better their interests and those of their families, their communities and the industry would be served. The Home and Social Affairs Committee on the following day was to discuss the outcome of a review of public order. It would be necessary in due course for work on the lessons of the coal dispute to cover both the role played by the common and criminal law and that played by the Government's own employment legislation.

The Group -

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion; and invited the Ministers concerned to be guided accordingly.
2. Invited the Secretary of State for Energy to circulate to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry a paper on the National Coal Board's ideas on proposed modifications to pit review procedures.

Cabinet Office

26 February 1985