

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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CABINET OFFICE

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref. A04429

10th March, 1981

During the discussion of coal at the meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Economic Strategy on Thursday, 5th March, it was noted that, if the militant elements in the mining unions were frustrated in their attempts to secure industrial action now on the closure issue, they could well try once again to precipitate a confrontation with the Government on their next pay claim in the autumn of 1981. Your Secretary of State was asked to prepare, in consultation with other Ministers directly concerned, and circulate by Easter a memorandum on contingency plans to deal with any industrial action which might arise in the coal industry later in the year.

The other Ministers immediately concerned are, I think, the Home Secretary, as Chairman of CCU, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Secretary of State for Employment. I am therefore sending copies of this letter to Brian Cubbon, Douglas Wass, and Ken Barnes; and to Clive Whitmore.

For the time being, it seems to me that for security reasons it would be prudent to keep knowledge of this contingency planning limited to these Departments alone. At some later stage, it will be necessary for the full CCU machinery to be involved and particularly the Ministry of Defence, the Departments of Industry, the Environment and Trade as well as the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices. But this is a point which could, I think, be considered once your Secretary of State's memorandum is available. In the meantime, of course, it would be helpful for the Cabinet Office to receive papers so that we can keep an eye on the progress of planning. In this regard, your people might find it useful to have a word with Robert Wade-Gery, the Deputy Chairman of CCU here, before they begin work.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Sir Donald Maitland, GCMG, OBE

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