

SECRET

21

PRIME MINISTER

Meeting with Mr. MacGregor

The meeting with Mr. MacGregor arose because he wanted to talk to you about the Channel crossing (as he did in 1981). He is coming at 1500 hours and will have 15 minutes to talk on this subject before Mr. Walker and Mr. Gregson arrive at 1515 and the meeting turns to coal. Mr. Gregson has provided a brief.

Also in the folder is a minute by RTA suggesting the composition of a Ministerial group to handle a coal strike.

Larger (i) do you prefer the smaller or the larger group?

Yes (ii) are you content with the suggested composition?

As a piece of contingency planning, I have set up a meeting of the larger group for Friday morning - you will be unavailable on Monday and Tuesday and so if there are decisions to be made it might be better to hold such a meeting on Friday rather than wait until Wednesday of next week. It can be cancelled or certain Ministers stood down if necessary.

AT

13 March 1984

SECRET



SECRET

20

P.01244

PRIME MINISTER

Coal

When you and the Secretary of State for Energy see Mr MacGregor tomorrow your main concerns will probably be:

- i. to seek his assessment of the current situation and how it is likely to develop;
- ii. to find out what further steps the National Coal Board has it in mind to take to influence rank and file miners against strike action;
- iii. to ask him how he thinks the Government can best contribute to a successful outcome.

The remainder of this brief provides some background on the issues affecting endurance and picketing.

Endurance

2. The current assessment of endurance of a national miners' strike is as follows:

- a. power stations: 6 months, assuming build up to maximum oil burn over 4 weeks;
- b. coal burning industry: 14-18 weeks for cement; 6 weeks for most large customers;
- c. domestic users: merchants' stocks estimated at about 6 weeks.

SECRET



SECRET

3. The most important decision affecting endurance which Ministers may have to take during the next week or so concerns oil burn. Work done by MISC 57 has confirmed the view of the CEGB that it will not be possible to build up to maximum oil burn (350,000 tonnes a week compared to 60,000 tonnes now) in less than 4 weeks without running into logistical difficulties and precipitating major disturbance in the oil market. The Chairman of the CEGB was asked last week to ensure a high state of preparedness. The CEGB has been talking to the oil companies to work out contingency arrangements for extra supplies. They will however be reluctant to enter into firm commitments until they are reasonably certain that they will have to increase oil burn, and they will not wish to start extra oil burn (net additional cost of maximum oil burn is £20 million a week) until a national strike seems inevitable. The CEGB may therefore require some steer from the Government before it enters into firm commitments with the oil companies.

Picketing

4. It is clearly desirable that those miners who wish to work and are prepared to cross picket lines should be enabled to do so so far as is practicable. The Home Office and the Scottish Office are arranging meetings this week between Chief Police Officers in the areas likely to be affected and the Departments of Energy and Employment to assist in working out effective arrangements, and preparations are being made to activate the plans for mutual aid between police forces as and when necessary.

5. At some stage the question will be raised as to whether the Employment Acts can be usefully invoked. The Government's public stance will, as always, be that it is for the parties affected to consider whether they should seek redress under the civil law. At present the best hope of preventing a

SECRET



SECRET

prolonged national strike lies in the internal opposition within the NUM and action under the Employment Acts might play into the hands of the militants. At a later stage the balance of advantage may change. There is in any case the possibility of action by some businessman in the private sector and the Government would have no way of preventing that even if it wished to do so.

Meetings with Ministers

6. Sir Robert Armstrong has minuted you about the possible composition of a new Ministerial Group in the MISC series. Whether or not any specific decisions are required on matters such as oil burn before the weekend, you may nevertheless think it would be useful to have a first meeting of the Group to take stock of the situation, say on Friday morning, if this can be arranged without too much difficulty.

P L GREGSON

13 March 1984

SECRET