

MR REIDY

Mr Turnbull

from SW

cc PS/Puss (Commons)
PS/Puss (Lords)
Mr Manley
Mr Priddle
Mr Brown
Mr Gillis

Mr MacGregor's Press Conference - April 13th

1. Attached is copy of today's Press Statement by Mr MacGregor.
2. At a Press Conference this morning he made the following points:

Miners: More miners are steadily drifting back to work. 45,000 now working every day which is an improvement of over 10% on last week and compares with 32,000 two weeks ago. Miners are now working at more than 50 pits - which are 40% of the Board's productive capacity. 1100 more men working in Western Area alone in last few days.

Injunction: He was not pressing for an injunction against picketing today. He intended waiting to see how miners acted next week before taking any decision on that. He had not consulted with the Government concerning injunction issue during last 24 hours and had no plans to do so during the next week.

Damage: He confirmed that miners who wanted to work were facing abuse and physical intimidation but the Board would do everything possible to enable men to exercise their right to work. Some miners' homes had been damaged.

Closures: He agreed that a long drawn dispute could cause further contraction of the industry because of geological problems and because of markets/customer confidence being affected. But it was not his view that the Board would use a long strike to accelerate pit closures.

Mr Cowan made the point that a long strike would do "irreparable damage" to some good pits which would prevent them being worked on.

Government: The strike meant fairly substantial increased loss figures which would affect the Board's profit and loss account althoughs cash flow was improved. The future of the British economy was at stake. He refused to be drawn on Government involvement if the strike went on for long. The Board was trying to manage the industry, he said.

NUM talks: The NUM had refused to take part in meeting so far and would not be attending next Tuesday's meeting of the National Policy Advisory Committee.

Abroad: French and German coal industries were declining and were rapidly being run down as their Governments could no longer afford their subsidies.

Power Stations: Coal was moving. He refused to say how much. Coal stocks at power stations were very high and would last a very long time as they could use other

energy sources

NCB

Press Release

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"THE PITS ARE OPEN FOR WORK"

Statement by Coal Board Chairman

Mr Ian MacGregor, Chairman of the National Coal Board, said today (Friday):

"A majority of the National Executive Committee, representing about half the mineworkers of this country, went to yesterday's meeting in Sheffield mandated to vote for a national ballot. They were prevented from achieving it.

"As a result the industry has to endure another period of uncertainty coupled with disruption, hardship and internal division.

"The loss of wages will continue at the rate of £19m. a week on top of the £150m. already lost through the overtime ban and five weeks of strikes in some coalfields.

"Men who resent being denied the chance of a vote to go to work can express their views in another way.

"Each day this week has seen more miners going back to work and more coal being produced. The Board respect the determination of those men confident in the future of their industry who, having voted in local ballots to carry on working, have insisted on doing so despite abuse, physical intimidation and, in some cases, damage to their cars and homes. We shall do all we can to make sure they are able to go on exercising their right to go to work.

"Thanks to them the attempt to achieve a national strike without the ballot required by Union rules has been defeated. They are keeping democracy alive in their Union.

"The Board believe that, now they have been denied the chance of an early ballot, there are more men in other places who will want to return to work. We want to make it clear that all the pits will be open for work on Monday and will remain open.

"We want the maximum number of our employees to have the chance to earn money as the holiday season approaches.

"The Board want to repeat that the industry has already gone halfway towards eliminating the excess of output over market demand. Not a single man was made compulsorily redundant last year.

"Anyone who believes the industry can go on indefinitely producing coal at costs no customer can afford to pay is asking the taxpayer to pay a heavy burden year after year.

"The Board's proposal is to take out of the industry about 4 million tonnes of output, or about 4 per cent. The industry would then for the first time in many years, be in a stable market condition with output and sales reasonably in step with each other. From this stability expansion to 100m, tonnes and more, provided we put our selves in a position to seize the marketing opportunities as they arise.

"The Board are confident that, given there is effective co-operation, there are enough men in the industry ready to take voluntary redundancy on the terms now offered to make it possible for them to be able once again to continue to avoid compulsory redundancy - and also permit an increase in recruitment, particularly of younger men.

"All this can be achieved if the industry tackles its problems with care,

"If this realistic approach is rejected in favour of a strike the damage to the industry will be severe and in places irreparable. Pits deteriorate if they are out of production for a long time.

"In our industry a long stoppage will cause damage to the pits. Business could be lost if our long-suffering customers grow tired of waiting for us to come to our senses.

"Those who are in favour of a strike must realise that they will be out for a very long time. The electricity industry has other fuels available to it and at the present reduced rate of consumption has enough coal in stock to last well into the Autumn. Our own stocks still stand at well over 21m. tonnes.

"I am not threatening anybody - just stating the facts. Facts that should be considered carefully by anyone advocating a strike.

"Mr Scargill said last night that the strike is hurting the National Coal Board. He is right. It is hurting our credibility as a supplier. And that means throwing away the chance of secure jobs for his members."

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