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TUC GENERAL COUNCIL'S PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AFTER MEETING WITH THE
PRIME MINISTER ON TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER AT 10 DOWNING STREET

Fish TUC: in which we advanced to her the policies which we believe the Government should be following to deal with the very serious unemployment situation which we now have in this country. We pinpointed in detail the various economic measures which we believe are essential if we are to survive as a major industrial nation. I think you have got a copy of the paper which has been the basis of the argument which we have put forward this afternoon and we have then been involved in a discussion with the Government Ministers about the various points ^{that are} raised in our policy. We highlighted a number of things that we think are essential to the present situation. We talked about the high level of interest rates, talked about the exchange rate, the effect that has on our imports and exports, we talked about the need in our view for selective import control, we talked about North Sea oil, we talked about a variety of subjects and the Ministers present talked to us about their policies basically we expressed our very serious concern about the present situation and said that two million unemployed is totally unacceptable to us and expressed our concern, and we have expressed our dismay and anger about what is happening. We have called on the Government as the one body that can take more effective steps to get us out of our present difficulties and take action along the lines that we have indicated. I call on my two colleagues, you may like to say something and David as Chairman of the Economic Committee, you may like to outline the economic measures we believe the Government should take..... than Len will be dealing as General Secretary with the various comments and discussions there have been about the way in which our policy should be pursued and the reaction of the Government to what we said to them.

Bas TUC: What I said on behalf of the General Council to the Prime Minister is in the paper before you. But what I'd like to do in case you'd like to ask questions about that later on is just to give a brief impression of the somewhat prolonged discussion which followed that. I must say that there is an "Alice in Wonderland" air about what the Prime Minister was saying to us - what I say three times is true - If the way they make cars in Halewood is not what I think it ought to be and I say it three times then that is one of the causes of our economic difficulties. One of the major causes compared with If I talk about wages and /productivity

productivity for a long time then that isn't true. If I talk about the occasional failure to place trainees ^{from} a skillcentre in industry then that is a fundamental part of our policy. What we have got to get across quite simply is that industry is now in a situation where the squeeze has occurred and there is a major step-down whereby major firms are being threatened with closure and that is on top of the 2 million unemployed we already have and the major causes of that and you don't have to rely on us ^{for} that - you can look at what the CBI says motions on the Agenda of the Conference this year are on interest rates and ... and, I have got to say, on neither of those two things were we offered anything.

Nor TUC: far beyond there being two nations in this country we seem to live in two worlds. We tried to impress on the Government the world in which we're living is the world in which there are now well over two million people unemployed, a world in which investment is being cut, a world in which companies are closing down. The world in which they live is a world in which they go round and round in monetary circles and fail to make contact with the working reality that we ourselves are having. I posed to the Prime Minister and her colleagues again and again at what level of unemployment does the concern which they profess about unemployment show itself in action to alleviate unemployment. I asked that several times, I never received any answer to that question at all. I put it to them that they were offering no alleviation, no hope to the, and I suggested, three million people who could well be unemployed in a finite space of time and that I suppose was the message we have been offered no alleviation to the situation, we have been offered no hope to take back to the people who are unemployed, the 4 million youngsters, 16% in Ebbw Vale, the 17% in Corby, the 25% in parts of Northern Ireland and I don't have much to take back to them in prospects of though I believe

Press: Did you expect anything from today at all?

TUC: We didn't expect anything specific today. We didn't expect the Prime Minister to suddenly say that she was going to change course on her particular policies. What we did expect was an acceptance that there was room for change and that they were prepared to make change but the Prime Minister tended to defend what the Government were doing by saying

/that there

that there were very few alternatives. She didn't seem to be prepared to give a great deal of thought to the alternatives that we were putting forward.

Press: Can you say something about your relationship with the Government after today's meeting? Has it changed?

TUC: I don't think our relationship with the Government has changed at all as a result of today's meeting. I think it's as it was. I think the Government were not listening to what the TUC were saying in the last eighteen months as our economic situation has deteriorated and I think it would be true to say that the condition is the same after today's meeting. There was no indication that the Prime Minister was prepared to give what we would have thought was serious thought to the proposals we put forward. It's more a case of the Prime Minister defending the policies that the Government are following. There are ^{no} alternatives whereas we were suggesting that there are very many alternatives that could be pursued.

Press: What do the TUC leaders intend to do about this? I mean the Government's not doing anything about this, what do the TUC leaders propose to do?

TUC: We shall continue our campaign to take the message to the nation and to receive the message from our members in the nation and to seek to convey that message to the Government in whatever way we can. The campaign will go on and the centre-piece will be unemployment because more and more that is becoming the central fear of more and more people.

Press: What reply did the Prime Minister give to your question that the continuing deteriorating situation might lead to increasing industrial social unrest, if you did in fact make that point to her?

TUC: We did make that point to the Prime Minister and she gave no particular response to that other than that she was equally concerned with the level of unemployment but that the measures being taken by the Government known policies were the best answer to the situation that we're in.

/ TUC:

TUC: I think we could take that further because we said to the Prime Minister that she could be apprehensive about the social effects of growing unemployment but she expressed no apprehension at all.

Press: Did you feel that the decision by the engineers yesterday to accept a single figure pay settlement undermined your thoughts today in any way?

TUC: It didn't affect our thoughts today. What the Prime Minister had to say on wages we have both heard many times before. Secondly, it is clearly not one of the major causes of unemployment and again I repeat that it is the employers themselves who say this, after all most of the unemployment is appearing in low wage industry. It didn't affect our discussions today at all.

Press: Will you be coming back again

TUC: What we did say to the Prime Minister was that we would follow up some of the points made in discussion this afternoon where they were putting forward particular examples of what they said were inefficiencies in industry needing to be corrected and where they referred to wage demands and made references to the public sector and in the way in which money had been spent in the public sector in the current year. We said on some of those points we would want to have more detailed comment made from our side and discuss them with individual Ministers. That was where we left it in that setting but the general tenor of what was said to us was, I think we could put the word, disappointing.

Press: not attempting to look for consensus?

TUC: No, what I said in that part was that they made consensus a dirty word. I do recall that before the Election the Prime Minister said she didn't understand what consensus means but she knew what compromise meant. She clearly demonstrated today that she does not understand what it means. Nor was there any response to the second part of that statement in which I said that the Government clearly were not entitled to cooperation in a situation where they were offering us not cooperation but confrontation.

Press: ?

/ TUC:

TUC: No, I think we have got to represent our members' views to the Government, I think it's essential that they should know what our attitudes are and it's essential that the public should know what our attitudes are. It is the policies of this Government which are causing unemployment.

Press: Can I get it clear that you say that Mrs. Thatcher doesn't deserve consultation but confrontation.

TUC: What we were saying is that if there was adequate and proper consultation that's the only way in which a country can satisfactorily be run where there is in fact cooperation between a Government, whichever Government, in whichever country and the Trade Union Movement that's as representative as ours is. And that has not been there and has no apparent wish on the part of the Government from today's meeting to see that there.

Press: And that the logical extension of non-consultation is confrontation.

TUC: We're not seeking confrontation with the Government at all. We're only asking the Government to pursue the policies in which we believe and if they choose not to pursue them that's a matter for them and that can lead them into confrontation with different groups of society, not particularly the Trade Unions.

Press: You say the Government is not entitled to cooperation. What form would non-cooperation take?

TUC: Well we've had non-cooperation with the Government for the last eighteen months, ever since they took office, that's their fault. This is only the second meeting we've had with the Prime Minister since the Government was elected and that goes back to May 1979. There can't be much less consultation with Ministers at that level than I should have thought in the recent history of the TUC.

Press: Will there be a third meeting, a follow-up ^{to}/to-day?

/TUC:

TUC: There is no planned meeting at all. We asked for this meeting specifically to protest at the fact that the unemployment figures, the official figures have passed the two million mark so we asked for this meeting. It was on that that we came here today and we've been expressing the views of the Trade Union Movement.

TUC: Can I just say this, I think it would be reasonable to expect from the Government with two million unemployed, with the Trade Union Movement angry, with industry concerned on both sides about its future, when we put forward proposals which will at least begin to offset the deterioration of British industry, if the Government had said, well all right let us go away and think about this and see what we can do, but there was no offer even to do that.

Press: Was there any discussion before your meeting with the Prime Minister or any warning during the meeting that trade unionists themselves might take action to defend their industries?

TUC: Well that's already happened in some cases hasn't it. It happened in the steel industry. I mean we've already seen examples of this, where workers or groups of workers have attempted to defend their industries, in cases of total closure by work-ins, in certain cases where there have been substantial redundancies by resisting redundancies. And this is the real origin of the steel industry dispute within the last twelve months. We didn't threaten the Prime Minister with anything, we didn't go there to threaten. We went there to advocate the policies which we believe are the solution to our unemployment problem. We're not there to threaten the Prime Minister or tell her that people would do this or do that or do the other. ^{We called on her} to bring about changes in the economic policy which would assist in solving our problems and not make them worse.

Press: Did you say that one of the consequences of rising unemployment would be that trade unionists might take things into their own hands and that the TUC might not be able to control the situation any longer ... could you elaborate on this?

TUC: We said that it would create social unrest, that was the phrase that we used and that was the way in which we spelt it out to the Prime Minister. We didn't go into any further detail than that.

..... society. Well the phrase which was first used was this in that frustration and despair amongst the unemployed may soon turn to anger expressed in a direct and forthright way unless the Government are seen to be tackling the problem of unemployment. And that means ... unless there are solutions found and the Government is seen to be doing things then that sort of attitude will ?.

TUC: Anyone got any burning questions?