



SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY
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File

Prime Minister (2)

*A further exchange. We
 await Mr Orme's answers to*

The Rt Hon Stan Orme MP
 House of Commons
 LONDON
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2 November 1984

the questions on page 2.

[Handwritten signature]

Thank you for your letter of 1 November.

I know you would like this dispute settled, and know that the Labour Party is deeply embarrassed at being closely associated with the methods and objectives of Mr Scargill. But I must repeat I think that he succeeds in taking you and your party for a ride on very frequent occasions.

As an honourable man you now know that he took you for a ride when you suggested he was in agreement with two ACAS papers. You discovered later that these were the papers which described his views.

You must now know that he has taken you for a ride over his latest claims concerning the NCB paper on the North East. The extract he refers to examines objectively what will happen to the existing pits in the North East between now and the end of the century if there were to be no further major investment. It is not a 'hit-list', but an engineers' assessment of the current position. The paper illustrates that on existing programmes there would be a progressive fall in production in the North East during the 1990s.

The Coal Board have made it clear to me that demand for coal in the North East is such that they will seek to maintain production at around its present levels. Therefore this report, sensibly commissioned, helps to illustrate the scale of new activity and investment required.

Let me answer each of your questions. You mention a specific colliery - Herrington. The agreement the National Coal Board have willingly reached with NACODS makes it clear that no colliery will be closed unless it has gone through the colliery review procedure which has been used under Labour and Conservative Governments for years. In addition, there will be a new ingredient - if either side wishes, an independent review body will give its observations on any proposed closure before a decision is made.

*Dms
 2/11*



Second, you asked whether other projections exist. I hope that the Board are looking at every area in the same positive way that they have looked at the North East, so that they can calculate in engineering terms the run down over the decades ahead and therefore the necessary scale of new investment and new exploration.

As to your third question, naturally engineers in the North East were involved in the assessments made about that area. They are the engineers who know it best, and they therefore provided the information required for drafting such a document.

All your questions have now been answered. I hope you now share my view that Mr Scargill has behaved outrageously and misleadingly by describing this document as a 'hit-list', and thereby endeavouring to raise the fears of miners in the North East. Perhaps you will now join me by explaining that this document enables the Board to assess the extent of the new investment which will be required.

As you have asked me some specific questions, let me give you one or two:

(i) Yesterday the national executive of the NUM was split from top to bottom. Arthur Scargill did not want a ballot, and succeeded by 11 votes to 9 in stopping the question of a ballot coming up. Are you in favour of the 9 or the 11? Months ago, when Scargill changed the NUM's rules on balloting, Neil Kinnock expressed the view that this would enable a ballot to take place. Do you support Mr Scargill in rejecting a ballot? Does your leader still want a ballot and do you want a ballot? Do let us know - yes or no.

(ii) Do you or do you not support the NACODS agreement? Do you think NACODS were irresponsible, after patiently negotiating, to reach such an agreement? Do you think this agreement has weaknesses? Do you share Arthur Scargill's view that it is a meaningless agreement and should be rejected?

(iii) Do you consider it was wrong for a third of the miners belonging to the NUM to abide by their union's normal traditions and have a ballot before taking strike action? Do you criticise them for voting so overwhelmingly against the strike?

On these three questions please let us have three answers - publicly declared. Then the country can judge whether you and the Labour Party are in favour of the two unions - NACODS and BACM - who have conducted their procedures in the best traditions of the trade union movement and the third of the NUM's members who balloted and acted in accordance with the view of the majority, or whether you and the Labour Party are in favour of Arthur Scargill. If this is the latter I must say that you will be in pretty unpleasant company both at home and abroad.


PETER WALKER