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CABINET

DISLOCATION OF COAL SUPPLIES THROUGH TRANSPORT DIFFICULTIESMemorandum by the Minister of Fuel and Power

The recent cold weather and heavy gales, by dislocating transport, have led to a most serious situation in regard to the supply of coal. Briefly, the position is as follows:-

- (a) This morning, on the North East Coast, 57 ships loaded with coal for the South were held up in ports owing to gales. Other ships which have discharged their cargoes of coal in London and the South were held up this morning by the weather on their way back to the loading ports on the North East Coast.
- (b) In South Wales the handling of coal has been seriously held up by the freezing-up of appliances in the docks at Cardiff and Barry.
- (c) The transport of coal by railway is seriously interrupted by heavy snow. In the Midlands and in Northumberland and Durham collieries have been blocked by snow and work interrupted. Yesterday, for example, in Durham, the large Cossett and Holmside pits were isolated and in Northumberland the Throckley pit was closed. Snowfalls have blocked the Woodhead Tunnel linking Sheffield and the North Western Region. In parts of the country it has proved impossible for many miners to get to their work. Absenteeism on this account is as high as 50 per cent. at some pits.
- (d) The railways have placed most stringent embargoes on the conveyance of all traffic other than coal but in spite of this, very little coal is being moved by railway.

2. Immediately the situation was reported to me I took action in every direction open to me to alleviate the situation which I consider is now on the mend:-

- (a) Twenty of the 57 ships held up this morning on the North East Coast have sailed south this afternoon and I hope that the sailing of the remainder will shortly be possible.

- (b) Ships on their way to the North East Coast are again on the move.
- (c) The railways report that when they have asked for military assistance for clearing stoppages at vital points they have received it.
- (d) The Woodhead Tunnel, the blocking of which might have been serious, is being cleared by Polish soldiers.
- (e) Steps have been taken to obtain full information regarding the location of collieries blocked by snow or where miners are unable, on account of the snow, to get to work. When these have been located it is my intention to seek assistance from the Service Departments with a view to providing access to the collieries concerned.

3. The Central Electricity Board reported to me this afternoon that if, owing to weather conditions, coal was not moving from the producing areas, it must be expected that by the week end power stations in London and in South Eastern and North Western England and the Midlands would have to close down if no special action was taken. The action which they suggested was:-

- (1) that all supplies of electricity should be cut off from industrial consumers in the four areas indicated above, subject to an exception being made in favour of vital services, such as water, sewage, food processing (bakeries, milk sterilisation) etc.
- (2) that, in the same areas, supplies of electricity should be cut off from domestic consumers from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and that similar cuts should be applied to theatres and cinemas.

4. I recognise that the present position is difficult, but I consider it would be wrong to apply the drastic measures suggested by the Central Electricity Board until we see whether the action now being taken is sufficient to render those measures unnecessary. I myself hope that it may be possible to avoid taking such measures but I think that we should keep the question under daily review.

E. S.

Ministry of Fuel and Power,  
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5TH FEBRUARY, 1947.