

File

Prime Minister

This is the draft which Mr. Walker gave to Mr. McGregor. Mr. McGregor had previously decided not to send a letter after all but is now reconsidering his decision, with his date

MS

DRAFT LETTER FOR COAL BOARD REGIONAL MANAGERS TO SEND TO MEMBERS OF NACODS

FEB 18.10.

I thought it was my duty to write to you in order that you are aware of all the facts connected with the current dispute.

I know that you share my desire that this damaging strike should come to an end so that our industry can take advantage of the considerable opportunities that are available.

We are now the only coal industry in Europe with a massive investment programme and one which the Board is willing to continue.

There is a good opportunity if we can produce coal efficiently and well to expand our markets both at home and abroad.

A few weeks ago the majority of members of your union voted in favour of strike action. You will know that it was on three issues - the Board's cutback in capacity, the Board's attitude in the implementation of conciliation procedure and of the rejection of the Board's guidelines of 15 August.

I am pleased to say that in negotiations the problems on the guidelines of 15 August have been totally solved, and what is more any NACODS member who was adversely affected by 15 August guidelines has been compensated.

On the more general issue your leaders decided that with a negotiating strength on the decision to strike their duty was to persuade the National Coal Board to agree to talks under the auspices of ACAS so that ACAS, in their traditional role of trying to find solutions to industrial disputes, could have an influence on such talks and bring an end to this strike.

The Coal Board agreed to accept this NACODS proposal.

At the ACAS talks the NUM tabled their views and the Board tabled theirs. ACAS studied both and came forward with a compromise suggestion. That compromise read as follows:

"Any colliery not covered by geological exhaustion or safety dangers may be brought forward by either party for discussion and investigation in line with the principles of the 'Plan for Coal' under the colliery review procedure.

"The colliery review procedure will be amended to include as a final stage an independent review body whose function would be to consider a reference from any one of the parties on any closure matter about which there is disagreement.

"Full weight will be given by the parties to the advice of this independent review body."

Although this was a very different wording from what the Coal Board themselves had proposed the Coal Board decided in the interests of the industry and to bring an end to this dispute they would accept the ACAS compromise. The National Union of Mineworkers decided to reject it.

It would appear that on the part of some there was a misapprehension as to the meaning of the ACAS compromise and that it would not apply to those pits that had already been considered for closure.

I am pleased to inform you that this is not so, and both the Coal Board and the Government have made it clear that any future closure of any colliery will be subject to the procedures proposed in the ACAS compromise.

I do hope therefore you will recognise that since the ballot of NACODS all the main objectives have been achieved in that the specific problems of guidelines and the adverse effect on NACODS pay have been sorted out, and that the Coal Board have agreed not just to talk to ACAS but to the compromise proposal which came from ACAS out of these talks.

We are anxious that no further damage is done to our industry. If the strike continues it will continue for many months ahead. Coal stocks are high at power stations but in those months serious damage will be done to coal faces, markets will be lost and the standing of our industry will decline. I would remind you of the totality of the package which is on offer to the industry as a whole. On wages NACODS of course accepted the wage increase of last November. The NUM have not but that wage offer can now be seen as an offer which is greater than that already accepted by the workers in the power, gas, railway and water industries. There are five other ingredients of the package on offer which I feel you should know:

1. An undertaking that any miner who wishes to continue working in the coal industry will be able to do so. There will be no compulsory redundancies.
2. For miners in any pit which is going to close, an opportunity to go for voluntary early retirement on terms more generous than in any coal industry in the world, and any other industry in this country.
3. A continuation of a capital investment programme in new machinery, new collieries and new coal faces, which will enable the industry to produce cheap coal and therefore to expand its markets. A sharp contrast to France where the mining industry is to be cut by half.

4. The creation of a new enterprise company which will provide finance, advice and accommodation for new businesses and new enterprises in any mining community adversely affected by closures. During the eleven year period in which Labour governments closed 330 pits (many more pits than exist at present) there was no such generous programme for the communities, and there was no such provisions for early retirement.

5. To amend the colliery review procedure previously agreed between the National Coal Board and the mining unions so that an independent review body can, if asked to do so, give its views on a closure. This would be coupled with an undertaking that full weight will be given by the NCB to any advice received from the independent review body.

I therefore express the hope that this package will now be seen to be fair and reasonable, and that no further damage will be done to our industry by industrial action.