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M. S. THORNE

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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

22 October 1979

Mr M. S. Thorne

Thank you for your letter of 4 October regarding the report in "The Lancet" of 15 September 1979 of an increased incidence of leukaemia in western Lancashire. I have asked the Departments concerned to study the report with care.

It will be necessary to discover how the reported incidence in Lancashire compares with that for other regions and with national figures. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is being asked to provide the latest available figures.

Radiation levels in sea water and in fish and molluscs are monitored regularly and the results are published by the Ministry of Agriculture's Fisheries Radiobiological Laboratory. There has been an increase in radiation levels over the past two decades arising in part from atomic fallout, which reached a peak in the mid-1960s, and in part from discharges from nuclear sites.

The important question is whether there is a connection between radiation levels of the order of those encountered in the west Lancashire area and the incidence of leukaemia. The levels of radioactivity which have been recorded in sea water fish and molluscs do not provide a satisfactory explanation by themselves and I am sure that you will appreciate that there are several other possible reasons for the reported increase in the incidence of

/leukaemia.

leukaemia. We are seeking the advice of the National Radiological Protection Board and the Medical Research Council.

As soon as we have got together this further data and advice I will write to you again.

Yours sincerely
Raguel Dehler

S.G. Thorne, Esq., M.P.