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MR NORGROVE

31 October 1985

EMLEY MOOR COLLIERY

Symbolically, it is important that the miners' initiative should succeed, if not at Emley Moor at another small site in the vicinity. We need to get a tide running in the direction of a UK coal industry based on a diversity of private sector participants, including the small-scale.

It is reassuring that Ian MacGregor and Energy Ministers recognise the need both for sympathetic encouragement and painstaking effort to bridge the gap between the miners' aspirations and established NCB thinking. That gap is probably wide. The ethos of the NCB is alien to small-scale private mining. The Board operates within a cumbersome and costly framework of mining practices and standards which have not kept pace with advancing technology. Moreover, those who have worked in private licensed mines, point out that the NCB's assumptions about manning levels, particularly away from the coal faces, are unnecessarily inflated.

I suggest that the Prime Minister's response to the Department of Energy should:

- Express pleasure that through David Hunt's intervention, this small, but symbolically important, initiative is still alive.

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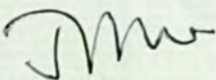
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- 2 -

- Agree that it is essential to deal with the matter thoroughly and sympathetically, and suggest that we need to be sure that this small-scale, low-overhead venture is not rejected by an NCB frame of mind unused and inappropriate to such operations. (The NCB must not confuse its role as licensing authority with the inclination to 'nanny' on this inappropriate basis).

With wider reference to the NCB's mining standards and procedures, it would be timely to urge the Department of Energy, and more particularly the Department of Employment, to get some real urgency into the measures needed to break NACODS' outdated, inefficient and damaging stranglehold on operational safety cover in deep mines. We understand that the NCB have only just registered the need to act on this. Now that the terms of the new Colliery Review Procedure have been agreed, this should become a high priority.

Presentationally, moves in this direction will have to be set in the context of the need to bring out-of-date practices into line with today's technology, coupled with the need to increase flexibility and productivity.



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