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PRIME MINISTER

Miners

1. I feel I must put in a note before events go much further on the miners' threat of a national strike against a closure programme. I would like to make the following points against the background of some quiet canvassing of opinion.

- i. There is a tendency in Government to underplay the seriousness of the threat and to believe we can play it long. This may be naive. The NUM has set a 7-day deadline before moving to a strike ballot which Yorkshire, the largest coalfield, has to all intents and purposes already conducted. It will be kept to it, unless there is a very persuasive move, not simply by pride and industrial machismo; it will be kept to it, in view of the NUM executive's unanimity against a closure programme, by those who have other (political) fish to fry than pits and jobs.
- ii. Against this, my contacts in the NCB are more relaxed; they say that the closure programme, as it is now officially emerging in the coalfields, is much less horrendous than it has hitherto been portrayed. Moreover, they believe that, if the Government can provide more money for redundancies and for investment in conversion from oil to coal, ? they can get their way once they start making their case.
- iii. On the basis of the plans so far revealed, there is nonetheless a view outside Government, in spite of the general distaste for Scargill and

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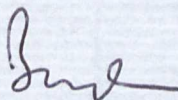




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viii. There are many in our society now who are not Parliamentary democrats who will egg on the miners in the hope of bringing down the Government; equally, there are other trade unionists who, not gifted with insight into the implications, would not be averse to the Government getting a bloody nose.

2. I am frankly concerned at the apparently relaxed approach of the Government to the threat. Publicly, I am sure we should not get involved at this stage and should avoid any sign of panic, undue concern or weakness. But behind the scenes we need a much more extensive and rigorous examination of the situation than is implied by an E Committee discussion of coal industry redundancy terms. The Government will inevitably become involved when the tri-partite machinery is put in motion by the Department of Energy which has today been asked to set up a meeting by the NCB and the NUM and the other coal unions. But can it realistically hope to delay that meeting until after E on February 24, given the NUM's 7-day deadline? There will be those in the NUM who will seek to apply the tightest interpretation of this timetable.



B. INGHAM

13 February, 1981

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