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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 February 1981

As you know, the Prime Minister held a meeting with your Secretary of State and senior officials this morning to discuss his draft statement on the coal industry. This letter is simply to record for the benefit of those Ministers who attended the meeting on 16 February, the basis of the decision to bring forward the tripartite meeting from next Monday to tomorrow.

It was reported to the meeting that, your Secretary of State being unavailable, Mr. Gormley had spoken on the telephone to the Secretary of State for Employment in the following terms. He had said that, after speaking to several Labour MPs, he would now prefer the tripartite meeting to be held tomorrow. He (Gormley) had come to the conclusion that, unless the meeting was held tomorrow, there was no chance of persuading the NUM National Executive from voting for a strike ballot. He also said that the union side would regard a meeting tomorrow as only a preliminary one in which they would state their case. It was also reported that Sir Derek Ezra was of the view that, if Mr. Gormley wanted an earlier meeting, the Government should agree to one.

In a brief discussion, it was argued that the decision to set up a meeting for next Monday was right as long as Mr. Gormley was content with that arrangement. But the situation had now completely changed. Even though it was debatable whether he could deliver the union side so as to avoid a strike, it was highly desirable to keep him as much as possible as an ally. Since the NCB were also in favour of an early meeting, it was accordingly decided to arrange it for tomorrow.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Terry Mathews (Chief Secretary's Office), David Heyhoe (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), Richard Dykes (Department of Employment) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

I. P. LANKESTER

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