



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 February 1984

My dear Mr. MacGregor,

I was horrified to learn of the disgraceful incident which occurred during your visit to Ellington Colliery. You will have seen that the Home Secretary has deplored what happened in most forceful terms. I was appalled at the failure of those concerned to offer any kind of apology.

I hope you were not too badly shaken and have now fully recovered. Please convey my sympathy to Mrs. MacGregor who, I know, will have found this most upsetting.

You are under no illusions that your task as Chairman of the Coal Board is a tough one, but I am sure that you will not be intimidated from taking the decisions which are in the best interests of the coal industry and of the country.

Every good wish,

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Thatcher

I. MacGregor, Esq.

LPO

BRIEFING FOR PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS 23 FEBRUARY 1984

INCIDENT IN WHICH MR MACGREGOR WAS KNOCKED TO THE GROUND

Line to Take

As my rt hon and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said what occurred at Ellington was a disgraceful incident which every right-minded person must deeply deplore. I understand that in a public statement the Northumbria Police have said that they are investigating evidence of the possible commission of criminal offences in relation to the incident. It would, therefore, not be appropriate for me to comment further on the details of the events.

NOTES FOR SUPPLEMENTARIES

What about the discrepancy between the account of the incident in Mr Hurd's letter to Dr Owen, and the Home Secretary's subsequent statement?

Mr rt hon Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office gave a preliminary assessment of the facts, on the basis of information then available to the police. He made it quite clear that the account might well be amplified or modified. The Home Secretary was fully aware of the preliminary assessment, and would have given it himself had he been in London. His own statement of condemnation benefited from further information which became available later last night. [IF PRESSED - including in particular the film of events at Ellington, which were shown on the national news.]

What about the further report from the police for which the Home Secretary has called?

The Chief Constable of Northumbria will provide a full, written report, which my rt hon and learned Friend will study closely. As I have said, the police have issued a statement that they are investigating the possible commission of criminal offences.

Was this not illegal picketing? [As suggested to the Home Secretary's Office by Mr Maclellan]

Whether they call themselves demonstrators or pickets, people have no immunity from the criminal law. The control of any particular event, and the enforcement of the criminal law, are matters for the police.

Ought not the organisers to apologise?

I quite agree that an apology is the least that could be offered. I understand that a local miners' leader [Mr Gobbin] has been reported as regretting the incident, but that the President of the Northumberland miners [Mr Murphy] has emphasised that he does not regret it.

BACKGROUND NOTE

In the House on 22 February, Dr David Owen raised the incident earlier that day in which Mr MacGregor was knocked to the ground when leaving Ellington Colliery. Mr Hurd wrote to Dr Owen, giving the initial information provided by the Northumbria Police. A copy of the letter is attached at A.

2. Subsequently, as TV coverage of the incident and other further information became available, the Home Secretary issued a statement condemning the incident. A copy is at B.

3. The Northumbria Police have today issued a press statement saying they are making inquiries to determine whether any criminal offences were committed. A copy is at C.

4. On a radio broadcast this morning, a local miners' leader was reported to regret the incident, but the President of the Northumberland miners was reported as not regretting it.

5. Mr MacLennan MP has suggested by telephone to the Home Secretary's Office that the demonstrators were engaged in "unlawful picketing". He may have in mind some comparison with the dispute at Warrington, where the NGA were fined by the High Court for breaching injunctions requiring them to refrain from organising secondary picketing. The Department of Employment advise that the courts would be most unlikely to entertain any civil action in respect of the Ellington events as picketing: in commonsense terms, what took place was a demonstration. The essential point is that, whatever people call themselves - pickets, demonstrators, protestors - they have no immunity from the criminal law.

6. The police have confirmed that eggs as well as bread were thrown and that there was much shouting and verbal abuse. The grabbing at Mr MacGregor is at the heart of their investigations, but it would not be appropriate for the Prime Minister to confirm this while the criminal investigation is under way.



A
HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

22 February 1984

Dear David,

I understand that you raised in the House this afternoon the incident which took place at Ellington Colliery today involving Mr Ian MacGregor. The Home Secretary has asked for a report on the incident. In his absence from the office I am writing to say that our understanding is that the sequence of events was as follows.

Mr MacGregor was making a planned visit to Ellington Colliery, of which the Northumbria Police had had notice. When he arrived at 9.20 a.m. there was a crowd of up to 250 miners outside the main gate. Mr MacGregor was taken to the colliery offices by a side entrance. His car returned to the front gate where at some stage its tyres were deflated (rather than slashed).

Mr MacGregor held discussions with the colliery manager. When the miners became aware that Mr MacGregor was in the colliery offices, they gathered outside and called for him to address them. He declined to do so but indicated that he would be prepared to meet representatives of the miners. This offer was refused. Mr MacGregor agreed to cancel a trip underground to inspect the pit after consultations with the police and colliery management.

At 12.15 p.m. it was decided that Mr MacGregor should leave Ellington as a large shift of miners was due at 1.30 p.m.: it was considered that the shift change might inflame the situation. The 50 police officers on duty lined a walkway from the colliery offices to another car which had been provided for Mr MacGregor. He was escorted down the walkway by two police officers and a number of Coal Board officials. As they walked, various objects, mainly food, were thrown but did not hit Mr MacGregor. Before the party arrived at the car the miners on one side of the walkway surged forward, knocking down the police officers lining the path, Mr MacGregor, and a number of Coal Board officials. A low wooden fence on the opposite of the path from the surge was knocked down by the falling bodies. Some press reports have stated that, as he fell, Mr MacGregor was knocked unconscious. The police officers at the scene do not think Mr MacGregor lost consciousness. The police do not regard the surge as a deliberate attempt to harm Mr MacGregor, but as a spontaneous movement by a large number of persons trying to get close to him. Once the miners realised what had happened, they drew back without being asked. Mr MacGregor was lifted up by two police officers and two reporters who began carrying him to the car. The police say that he asked to be taken to the car, was put on his feet, and walked to the car himself.

Mr MacGregor left Ellington colliery at 12.30 p.m. and travelled to his next engagement, lunch at the National Coal Board's regional headquarters at Team Valley. The police have checked with the headquarters and Mr MacGregor was apparently calm. There was no question of him requiring medical attention.

No arrests were made. It was not possible to identify who had let the tyres down on Mr MacGregor's car; police considered that the nature of the surge forward made it impossible to single out particular people as being deliberately responsible.

All this is of course subject to amplification, or
widened modification, as further information comes to
hand. But I thought you would wish to have at once
the facts as they are
being to the Northumbria Police.

The Rt Hon Dr David Owen, M.P.

(DOUGLAS HURD) available this

2/Owen David

E R.

HOME SECRETARY'S STATEMENT

B

The television pictures of the scenes in which Mr McGregor was involved have now been seen by the whole country. It is quite clear from them that what occurred at Ellington was a disgraceful incident which every right-minded person must deeply deplore. As Douglas Hurd has indicated we have so far had only a preliminary assessment from the police of the incident. I am now seeking a fuller report from the Chief Constable and will wish to consider it closely. Meanwhile, if those involved in organising the demonstration have an ounce of decency they will want to repudiate what occurred and give an unqualified apology to Mr McGregor.



File

Coal

Andrew
I reported to
H.C. PM

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

Prime Minister

There are reports that Mr MacGregor was knocked unconscious while visiting Ellington Colliery, Northumberland. It appears that during his visit this morning he was moving from one building to another and was walking alongside a fence, on the other side of which was a crowd of picketing miners. Under the weight of numbers, the fence collapsed. This caught Mr MacGregor on the leg and he fell. Though his fall was partly broken, he was on the ground for 1 or 2 minutes, though not, it seems, unconscious. He got up, and after a brief visit to the medical centre he has continued his programme. It appears therefore, that this was a nasty incident but that no injury has resulted. We will report further if there is anything new eg

" THIS WAS A NASTY INCIDENT BUT NO INJURY RESULTED "

P.T.O

Andrew
1
1954



TO DOWNING STREET

Mr MacGregor's account of the
incident.

AT

22/2

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COAL CHIEF KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS ON PIT VISIT
NATIONAL COAL BOARD CHAIRMAN MR IAN MACGREGOR WAS THIS AFTERNOON
KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS DURING A VISIT TO A NORTHUMBERLAND PIT.
MORE THAN 30 POLICE WERE TRYING TO HOLD BACK PROTESTING MINERS,
WHO THRUST FORWARD THROWING EGGS AND SLICES OF BREAD WHEN HE TRIED TO
LEAVE AN OFFICE AT ELLINGTON COLLIERY.

AS POLICE WERE PUSHED BACK, MR MACGREGOR, 72, WAS FORCED AGAINST
A FENCE WHICH COLLAPSED UNDER THE PRESSURE.

HE WAS HURLED TO THE GROUND AND LAY UNCONSCIOUS. SHOCKED
DEMONSTRATORS PULLED BACK, ALLOWING POLICE TO GO TO HIS AID.

AS POLICE AND NEWSMEN CARRIED MR MACGREGOR TOWARDS A WAITING CAR
HE CAME ROUND AND SAID: 'GET ME TO THE CAR'. HE MANAGED TO WALK THE
REST OF THE WAY FLANKED BY POLICE.

AFTER THE VEHICLE SPED AWAY THERE WAS A FURTHER ANGRY SCENE
OUTSIDE THE OFFICES. COLLIERY MANAGER JACK TUBBY TOLD NUM BRANCH
OFFICIAL GEOFF GOBIN THAT THE INCIDENT WAS 'A BLOODY DISGRACE'.

MR GOBIN SAID EVERY ATTEMPT HAD BEEN MADE TO KEEP THE
DEMONSTRATION PEACEFUL.

MR MACGREGOR HAD BEEN DUE TO SPEND TWO AND A HALF HOURS
INSPECTING COALFACE PRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT WORK SIX MILES OUT
UNDER THE SEA.

BUT ABOUT 600 MINERS FORMED A MASS PICKET OUTSIDE THE 2,600-MAN
COLLIERY IN A PROTEST OVER CLOSURE THREATS AND CUTBACKS AT OTHER
NORTH-EAST PITS. AND HE WAS PREVENTED FROM REACHING THE PIT CAGE.

THE TYRES OF THE CAR IN WHICH HE ARRIVED WERE LET DOWN - AND
LATER CAME THE INCIDENT IN WHICH HE WAS KNOCKED OUT.

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