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CONFIDENTIAL

01 211 6402

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
Parliament Street  
LONDON SW1P 3AG

11 May 1984

*Dear Chancellor*

The NUM have endeavoured to portray the management of the potential closure of Cortonwood as an example of the ruthlessness of the National Coal Board. I thought you might like to see the attached letter which the Board sent to all miners at Cortonwood on 28 March. I am copying this to other members of MISC 101.

*Yours sincerely*

*J S Neilson*

*pp*

PETER WALKER

*(approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence)*

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National Coal Board  
South Yorkshire Area, Golden Smithies Lane,  
Wath-upon-Deerne, Rotherham S63 7EW  
Telegrams: Coalarea Wath-upon-Deerne  
Telex: 882161 (CBHOB G)  
'Station Code' SYK

**NCB**

28th March, 1984

Our ref  
Your ref

For the past few weeks the normal methods of communication between us have not been open and we have had, in effect, to talk to each other through the media. I think it is right for me now to write to you personally, to give you the full facts about the future of your colliery and, hopefully, rid your mind of any nagging doubts you may have.

The first thing I must stress is that every man who wants a job will have the opportunity of transferring to another local pit. What I said at the Area Review Meeting, attended by all Trade Unions' Representatives, was that I intended to offer men over the age of 50 the opportunity of voluntary redundancy and the younger men the chance to transfer elsewhere with the usual transfer allowance of up to £1,550. But nobody will have to leave the industry against his will.

All the younger men at the colliery who still have long careers ahead of them are well aware that Cortonwood has only a short life, even if all the reserves were to be worked out. In two years' time when the North area is exhausted, there would have to be a big reduction in manpower, and three years after that the remaining reserves would all have gone. By bringing forward these inevitable transfers of men, I can guarantee everybody a job. At this stage I cannot possibly give such a guarantee for up to five years from now.

At the Area Review Meeting I proposed that we should meet again quickly with the local representatives of each Union present. Two of the Unions have agreed to such a meeting but the N.U.M. have not. After the meeting with the local Branches, it is still open to any of the Unions to appeal against my decision to bring forward the closure. I also gave an undertaking, which still stands, that until the Review Procedure had been fully exhausted and the outcome known, I would take no steps to implement the closure. No developments will be stopped or production districts salvaged.

The majority of the other pits in South Yorkshire Area have reserves to last for many years to come and most of them are already profitable. The Area is still investing at a rate of £30 million a year to guarantee a prosperous coal-mining industry in South Yorkshire well into the future.

cont.....

Telephone: Rotherham 873331 (Daytime)  
872277 (Night)

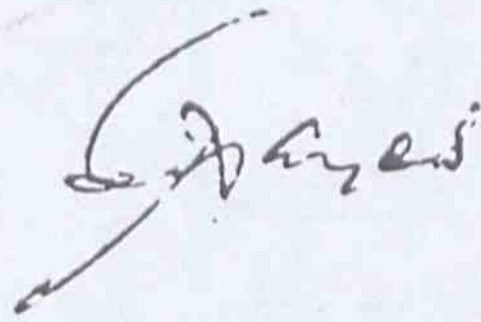


I am well aware that more than 80 of you have only moved from Elsecar within the last few months and are obviously concerned at the prospect of a further upheaval. I am sorry if any of you feel misled by the advice which was given to you in good faith at the time. Those of you who did move from Elsecar, however, will be entitled to the same conditions as everybody else on Cortonwood's closure, and those who want to stay in the industry will, of course, be entitled to the normal transfer allowance when they move to another pit.

I hope this letter has cleared up some of the misunderstandings that have occurred in recent weeks. On an important issue such as this, however, there are obviously many points that need to be raised and many details settled that can only be done when we are able to get together round a table.

I hope that before long this will be possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'G. Hayes', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

G. Hayes  
Director