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Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

15 August 1984

David Barclay Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

Dear David,

MINERS' STRIKE: COAL FOR RAVENSCRAIG

I have spoken to you today to bring you up to date on the latest position which BSC finds themselves in following the decision of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the National Dock Labour Board this morning to defer a decision on the rules governing the unloading of the "Ostia", carrying coal to Hunterston for BSC Ravenscraig.

2 I explained to you that the decision of the NDLB to defer a decision until they had received further legal advice and had a meeting of the full Board would probably mean that there would be insufficient coal available to keep Ravenscraig running at normal levels after the end of Friday (17 August). BSC, understandably, are most concerned about the implications of this and would have welcomed an earlier meeting of the NDLB. I know that Mr King and officials in the Department of Employment are seeing whether there is any possibility that the Board might meet earlier, but we clearly cannot rely on this.

3 In the meantime, I have consulted my Secretary of State about the line he would like to adopt, given the deadline that BSC are up against and given the possibility which must remain that the NDLB would anyway return an adverse decision. My Secretary of State feels that it would be potentially most damaging, and very rash, if BSC brought in the "Ostia" before all the NDLB procedures had been exhausted, given the possibility that the legal advice, and the decision of the Board, could be adverse. His feeling is, therefore, that the procedures should be followed (as quickly as can be arranged). In the event that the Board's decision is adverse, the Secretary of State would be inclined to recommend to

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colleagues that the ship should be brought in, and unloaded, and if necessary that BSC should apply for an injunction to ensure that coal gets through. In the meantime, the output of the coke ovens at Ravenscraig would have to be reduced. The implications of this are uncertain; I understand from Mr Haslam, Chairman of BSC, that this would not involve the laying off of men, but it would clearly mean reduced production and could do damage to the ovens themselves. If BSC were still unable to get coal supplies to Ravenscraig by the first few days of next week, they would be obliged to bank the furnaces, which would have much more serious implications.

4 Mr Tebbit has asked me to stress that his view is provisional, and he will be consulting the Lord Whitelaw and Mr King further this evening to see whether they are content with it. I have relayed the view my Secretary of State expressed to Mr Haslam, subject to the caveat that Mr Tebbit has not been able to consult colleagues about it, and Mr Haslam has expressed himself willing to go along with it, and not to move the "Ostia" into Hunterston in advance of the NDLB ruling.

5 I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of other Ministers on MISC 101, and to Richard Hatfield in Sir Robert Armstrong's office.

Yours ever,  
*Ruth*

RUTH THOMPSON  
Private Secretary

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