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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 September 1984

I attach a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from the Leader of the Opposition requesting a recall of Parliament to discuss the present industrial situation. The Prime Minister would be grateful if this could be discussed at tomorrow's meeting of MISC 101. At present her inclination is that this request should be refused and the attached suggested reply is drafted along these lines. I should be grateful for any drafting comments as soon as possible.

I am sending copies of this to the Private Secretaries to members of MISC 101, the Lord Privy Seal, Chief Whip and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Tim Flesher

Miss Janet Lewis Jones
Lord President's Office

cc

DRAFT REPLY TO MR KINNOCK

Thank you for your letter of 3 September with which you enclosed a resolution of the Parliamentary Committee of the Labour Party seeking a recall of Parliament to discuss the industrial situation.

I am surprised at the timing of your request, coming as it does immediately upon the announcement by the Chairman of the National Coal Board of fresh talks with the National Union of Mineworkers aimed at ending this damaging dispute. We must all hope these negotiations succeed. As you know, the Government has already intervened in the dispute to ensure a pay deal which will keep miners 25% ahead of average industrial earnings; which will ensure no compulsory redundancies in the coal industry; which will provide the most generous voluntary redundancy terms in any industry at any time; and which will maintain investment in the coal industry at levels far above any achieved or planned by the last Labour Government.

Far from what you call a "refusal to undertake constructive intervention" in the dispute, that offer has encouraged over 65,000 NCB employees to remain at work and provided the basis for seven days and 35 hours of talks between the NCB and the NUM. The only point preventing a settlement in these talks has been the NUM's persistent demand that pits should remain open whether or not they are beneficial to the industry. You will be aware that this is a totally unreasonable demand. The last Labour Government set out in their tripartite report/Plan for Coal

/that uneconomic

that uneconomic capacity would have to be closed; they embodied principle that/in legislation; and, of course, they endorsed the closure of uneconomic pits.

In the debate in the House of Commons on 31 July the Labour Party did not deny this and claimed that the dispute was essentially about the procedure for the closure of uneconomic pits. Since the Chairman of the NCB subsequently issued a statement, making it clear that this procedure remained unchanged from the period of the Labour Government, the way is clear for a settlement based on the offer made by the NCB to the NUM in July. I hope that you will therefore urge the leadership of the NUM to drop their unreasonable demands and to put the NCB offer to a democratically conducted ballot of their membership of the kind you yourself supported in the House on April 12.

Your letter requests a recall of Parliament for a debate on the dispute. As you acknowledge, your letter reiterates the allegations which the Labour Party has been making since the beginning of this dispute. These allegations have been discredited time and again in the House of Commons, most recently in the debate on 31 July. The arguments have not changed since then and I do not believe that any useful purpose would be served by repeating them. Nevertheless, the Government would, of course be ready to request a recall of Parliament should we consider that the situation demands such a course.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Office of the Leader of
the Opposition

3 September 1984

Dear Pami Munster,

The enclosed statement was agreed upon by the Parliamentary Committee this morning.

I hope that you will meet our request as a matter of urgency.

Yr sincerely

Nat Munster

Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP

The Parliamentary Committee calls on the Prime Minister to seek the recall of Parliament to debate the Government's responsibility for the present industrial situation, its refusal to take any initiative to bring the two sides in the coal mining dispute into negotiation and its willingness to allow Britain's deterioration of economic, industrial and social condition.

There is now strong and widespread feeling amongst the general public that the Government must become actively involved in seeking a resolution to the coal mining dispute. We have been pressing that view for months past. The Government's continued refusal to undertake constructive intervention to promote a settlement is a desertion of its plain duty.

Last Wednesday, 29 August, the Prime Minister cancelled her trip to the Far East scheduled to start on 14 September because 'against a background of the present industrial situation, it would not be right for her to be so far from Britain for this period'.

In the view of the Parliamentary Committee it would indeed be wrong for the Prime Minister to be away from this country at a time when her Government's neglect of its obvious responsibilities during the 26 weeks of the coal mining dispute has brought the nation to such a state of crisis.

The Parliamentary Labour Party voted against the adjournment of the House of Commons at the beginning of August because

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it felt that Parliament should be able to monitor the effect of the industrial dispute.

The Prime Minister has made a clear if reluctant admission that the industrial situation has deteriorated by cancelling her visit to South East Asia. But cancellation is all that she has done. She must now try to explain her failure to take action to resolve the mining dispute. She owes that to the British people and she must do it in the House of Commons.