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35.
cc: Mr. Ingham
Mr. Turnbull

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 September 1984

Dear Michael

Miners' Wives Back to Work Campaign

Mrs Fjaelberg (South Wales), Mrs McGibbon (Kent) and Mrs Linton (Derbyshire) came to see the Prime Minister yesterday at their request to discuss the coal dispute. They reported on their role in encouraging the men to return to work and in helping them and their families to sustain the pressures which this would create.

They put a number of points to the Prime Minister:

- (i) Most miners were still ignorant about the details of the NCB offer. They did not appreciate the extent of the Board's plans for investment in new capacity but, more particularly, they were in the dark about the prospects for their own pits. In such circumstances, rumours about imminent closures were able to thrive. The Prime Minister asked how information could be got across. The wives said the men were not reading national newspapers but did see the free distribution newspapers. They received but probably did not read Coal News.
- (ii) While talks were going on or were in prospect, it was difficult to persuade men to return to work. It should be made clear that there was nothing more on offer and that the Board and the Government could resist for a very long time.
- (iii) They gave an account of the extent and nature of the intimidation. Shops were being blackmailed into supplying strikers and into withholding supplies from working miners. Families of working miners lived in fear of attack to themselves or their property. The wives were full of praise for the police who had made strenuous efforts to protect them and enable their husbands to get to work. The Prime Minister pointed out that under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875

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it was a criminal offence to beset someone's house.

- (iv) When the strike was over life would be extremely difficult for those who had led the return to work. They would be forced to move to other areas or to leave the industry altogether. The wives suggested that the NCB could give an assurance that it would transfer miners in this position or would give them priority in applications for redundancy. The Prime Minister said she was sure the NCB would be loyal to those who had stuck by it.
- (v) They said that their campaign had experienced difficulty in securing access to the media, whether local or national newspapers or radio and television. The BBC were said to be particularly unhelpful.
- (vi) Local NCB management in a number of areas had not been helpful in promoting a return to work and in Kent had sided with the NUM in discouraging men from returning.
- (vii) The active pickets were not short of money or supplies. The money raised from collections and the food parcels were being channelled to them and the non-militant miners were being left to fend for themselves. Many had been able to get by through moonlighting though with winter approaching it would be more difficult to find such work.
- (viii) For the most part gas and electricity bills were being allowed to mount up without disconnections though telephones were cut off. Shops were in general not repossessing goods.
- (ix) They asked why the NCB had not organised a management ballot or followed up its civil actions. The Prime Minister went over the various arguments with them.
- (x) They had been able to raise a small sum of money themselves and had received some assistance from the National Working Miners Association. But in general their organisation was run on a shoestring. They wished to adopt a higher profile in respect of publicity and were thinking of ways in which legal action could be brought against the NUM. They asked the Prime Minister whether she would welcome such legal action. She said this would be a helpful development but it was important for cases to be soundly based.

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- (xi) They suggested that where there was a number of pits close together it would be better to group returning miners in one pit in order to get production started.

The wives said they were hoping to have meetings with Mr. Kinnock, Mr. Steel and Dr. Owen. It was agreed that no publicity would be given to this meeting though if knowledge of it became public No. 10 would brief along the lines of the attached note. The Prime Minister thanked them for coming to see her and said she would be happy to receive any information on the course of the dispute and the return to work which they wished to put to her.

The Prime Minister will raise a number of these points with your Secretary of State. In particular, she is concerned to find ways of getting the NCB's message through to ordinary miners, and ways to increase the incentive to return to work.

I am copying this letter to Peter Gregson and I would be grateful if it were retained in your offices.

*Yours sincerely
Andrew Turnbull*

Andrew Turnbull

Michael Reidy, Esq.,
Department of Energy.

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