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10 DOWNING STREET

21 December 1981

Dear Ivan

The Coal Industry

Many thanks for your letter of 18 December enclosing the interesting and helpful papers suggesting a publicity strategy in the period up to the miners' ballot, and some detailed non-attributable briefing. We had a word about this this morning, and I agreed to let you have any comments in the course of the day, with a view to our having a word this evening so that I could, if possible, consult the Prime Minister tonight.

That is, I think, my first point: you told me that your Secretary of State had agreed to this general publicity line, and I explained that I thought we here would be wise to ensure that the Prime Minister also agreed the overall publicity strategy. I do not propose to show her the detailed briefing, but to explain to her what we are up to.

We agree, and it seems to me that it would be consistent with the conclusions Ministers reached in discussion on the MISC 57 report, that the publicity effort between now and the miners' ballot should be based on these principles:

- (a) Ministers should keep in the background;
- (b) The impression should not be given that the Government is prepared to find more money to pay for a higher settlement; and
- (c) Facts should be put unattributably into circulation, indicating that the miners have no grievance and have been made a good offer.

(b) does perhaps require some clarification. Douglas Smith has explained to me that he is unhappy with the last paragraph of Ian Gillis' note, which might be read to indicate that the Government had already taken a decision about what to do if the ballot supports the Executive's recommendation. I think Douglas Smith and I are agreed that we should be entirely neutral about that: we should counter any impression, such as that mistakenly given by the Lord President, that the Government would automatically make more money available because the miners are a special case; but equally we should not let it be said that the Government has decided that under no circumstances would they make more money available.

/On the details

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On the details of the enclosures to your letter, Bernard Ingham here has commented that it is important to do any unattributable briefing with individual journalists, not with the Lobby as a group. He will arrange for the Directors of Information in the Departments concerned - HM Treasury and Employment, as well as Energy - to co-ordinate this effort. He has also commented that it would be helpful to have these facts in the points to make, since they are likely to be asked:

- (i) This year's EFL, and the one proposed for next year.
- (ii) What use has been made of Government support for conversion from oil to coal.
- (iii) The breakdown on coal stocks between pithead and power station (I believe that some figures are publicly available).

I have already suggested to Ian Gillis that we might be able to use a rather higher figure for mine-workers' relative earnings than the 23 per cent suggested in the note, if we compare the miners with all industries and services, rather than manufacturing industry.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the recipients of yours.

Yours
John Baker.

I.T. Manley, Esq.,
Department of Energy.

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