

1005V

Not and coal



NBP

ms 24/2

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG  
01-233 3000

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson, MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

23 February 1983

*Dear Nigel*

PIT CLOSURES

I was interested to read John Moore's letter of 18 February. It is helpful to have this account of forthcoming developments. My reading of the situation which John describes is that though there is always the danger of local action spreading, this is not regarded as a serious risk over the next few weeks. But we can consider the matter again after his report on Philip Weekes' meetings.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Home Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Employment, Industry, Scotland and Wales, to John himself and to Sir Robert Armstrong and John Sparrow.

*John*

GEOFFREY HOWE

Nat Incl

Coal

P+7

24 FEB 1983

10 11 12 1  
9 8 7 6 5 4  
3 2



Prime Minister (2)

Ms 23/2  
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
THAMES HOUSE SOUTH  
MILLBANK  
LONDON SW1P 4QJ  
01-211  
3932

CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
Parliament Street  
LONDON SW1

22 February 1983

mf

Dear Geoffrey,

PIT CLOSURES

As foreshadowed in my letter of February 18, Philip Weekes held three meetings today on Tymawr/Lewis, Blaengwrach and other pits in the Welsh coalfield. The meetings were attended by BACM and NACODS, but boycotted by the NUM.

At Tymawr/Lewis Mr Weekes formally announced that he would be stopping any further development and that the pit would close by the holiday season. He has informed the Welsh Office, local MPs, and the NUM. At Blaengwrach he said that he expected the pit to close when the present faces ceased operation. Everybody was now clear that this pit would close later in the year, although a formal announcement will be delayed until nearer the time.

At the general meeting he said that he was very worried about both Brynlliw and Abertillery as well as mentioning a number of other pits which were giving cause for concern. There will be a re-convened meeting on Brynlliw on 2 March. At that meeting it is expected that the NUM will ask for a technical inspection of the pit. If so there will be a further meeting within a month, at which the actual closure will be announced.

It seems probable that the NUM Welsh Area will hold a delegate conference tomorrow, which will consider a recommendation to hold a ballot on Friday on whether the coalfield should take strike action next Monday. The Board's preliminary estimate is that there is likely to be widespread industrial action in South Wales next week.

As you may have seen from the media a 'sit-in' is already taking place at Tymawr/Lewis, which is led by Des Dutfield, the South Wales NUM President. Strike action is also taking place at Mardy, Tower, Nantgawr and Penrikyber, which is reported to be against the NUM for having failed to take earlier action against closures in the coalfield.

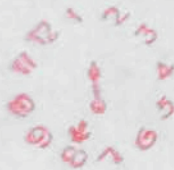
The Coal Board's proposals for Snowdown were endorsed last weekend by Kent miners and are now being put into operation.

I will report further as the position develops.

I am sending copies of this letter to the recipients of my letter of 18 February.

*John Moore*  
JOHN MOORE

22 FEB 1983



Prime Minister *Lee J* Nat *J*

CONFIDENTIAL

MUS 21/2



DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
THAMES HOUSE SOUTH  
MILLBANK  
LONDON SW1P 4QJ  
01-211 3932

Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
Parliament Street  
London SW1

18 February 1983

Dear Chancellor

PIT CLOSURES

I am writing to let you have an account of the latest developments.

Earlier in the week the Board started interviewing all the men at Snowdown to establish whether they were interested in redundancy or in transfer to the three other pits in Kent. The Board will also be interviewing older men at Betteshanger and Tilmanstone to establish whether they would be interested in redundancy, thus making room for men from Snowdown. So far there has been no strong reaction from the NUM. I have just heard, however, that there will be a mass meeting of the men at Snowdown on Sunday, when the local NUM branch will be recommending acceptance of the Board's terms.

In South Wales, the working party on Britannia set up in December (which included an NUM representative) seems to have accepted that the pit would close when the present workings were exhausted in 12-18 months' time. Philip Weekes, Area Director for South Wales, will be holding three colliery review meetings on 22 February. The first will be on Tynawr/Lewis Merthyr, where he will tell the NUM and other unions that it is not technically possible to continue working the pit for very long. There will consequently be no further development at the pit and it will run to closure at holiday time, ie about July. Those wanting other jobs will be found them at nearby pits. At the separate meeting on Blaengwrach the unions will be informed that there will be no further development and it will have to close in the autumn. The pit is on its last face and already 25 men are being transferred to other pits. There would be a third meeting dealing

CONFIDENTIAL



with other collieries. At that meeting Philip Weekes will express his concern about Brynlliw, Abertillery, Wyndham/Western and Blaenant. He will say that he was particularly concerned about the workability of Brynlliw and that he would want a further meeting on this pit in a month's time. He would also say that a decision on Wyndham/Western and Abertillery cannot be long delayed. At the same meeting by way of diversion he would also mention Blaenant. This is a productive pit, but loses money because of the poor market for its output. The Board are not planning to close it in the near future, but they do plan some retrenchment there. Celyn South would also be mentioned, although there is no plan to close this colliery in the immediate future.

On the positive side the Board will be looking favourably at a substantial investment at Betws, limited development at Deep Navigation and possibly some additional exploration for anthracite in South Wales.

The Board would certainly expect some reaction from the NUM, although on balance they doubt whether there will be industrial action either as a result of the decisions on closure taken at Tymawr/Lewis Merthyr or at Blaengwrach, both of which most of the Welsh NUM leaders, at least in private, show signs of accepting as inevitable. The NUM might appeal to the main Board who will want to turn down the appeals. While the Board think there is a greater danger of local industrial action over Brynlliw, this closure is likely to be more difficult to handle at the meeting in late March than the meeting next week. The Board's general assessment is that Arthur Scargill would probably not want a national strike over closures while Norman Siddall remains as Chairman. They cannot, of course, every rule out the possibility of local action spreading.

In addition National Smokeless Fuels, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Board, will be announcing on 28 February their intention to close the Coedley coke ovens in South Wales and the Fishburn coke ovens in Durham. While the Board had originally been planning only to close one set of coke ovens, they are now intending to close two in view of the deterioration in the market.

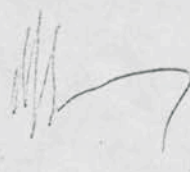
I will send you a further report after Philip Weekes's meetings on 22 February.

CONFIDENTIAL



-3-

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Home Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Employment, Industry, Scotland and Wales and to Sir Robert Armstrong and John Sparrow.

 Private Secretary

PP JOHN MOORE

(approved by Mr Moore and  
signed in his absence)

CONFIDENTIAL