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I much appreciate the care and thought which went into your letter of 23 October on the dispute in the mining industry. I am glad that you have found my letters informative and useful: your own analysis is certainly most useful to me.

The resolution of the dispute with NACODS has demonstrated the will of the NCB to reach a balanced settlement with those willing to negotiate. In marked contrast, Mr Scargill has again frustrated subsequent NCB efforts, under ACAS auspices, to negotiate with the NUM.

I have no doubt that the lesson of these conflicting outcomes is plain to the country and to the miners themselves. For our part, the Prime Minister and I have made it clear that we regard the settlement reached by the NCB with NACODS as fair and reasonable. If there is to be a settlement with the NUM, it must be on that basis. This message has also come across publicly from the Board. They have spelt out the terms that are on offer in personal letters to the miners and in fresh advertisements.

These developments have brought us to a new phase in the dispute. We are resolute. I have assured the House that the power stations are well stocked and that we are prepared to take any necessary action to safeguard electricity supplies. The dilemma is now the NUM's and the TUC's and the Labour Party's. This week has seen a substantial movement among striking miners to return to work. The message is getting across that there is no continuing industrial justification for the strike.

Against this background, it would not be right to paint an uncompromisingly bleak picture of the future for the industry. Certainly damage is being done to investment, to coal conversion, to future competitiveness and to markets. But provided its unions are



realistically led, this is an industry with a future. I would not wish to suggest otherwise to the many loyal miners who have remained at work, nor to those who may have to face up to intimidation in order to take the steps necessary to save their jobs from the depredations of their present leadership.

PETER WALKER