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Mrs Anne Scargill and
Mrs Betty Heathfield
Women against Pit Closures
St James' House
Vicar Lane
SHEFFIELD
S1 2EX

November 1984

Mrs Anne Scargill and Mrs Heathfield

Thank you for your letter of 12 October.

May I first of all make it clear that your husbands have organised a strike for which there is no industrial justification.

If their real concern was to improve working conditions and the environment they would, of course, have rejoiced at the fact that not only was every miner guaranteed a job, but the National Coal Board have made clear their willingness to invest vast sums of money in new machinery, new equipment and new collieries, where the working conditions will be much better than in those collieries now close to exhaustion.

These offers to miners and the coal industry are unique. But in addition, the Board, with the Government's support, has created a new company with the objective and the means of bringing new enterprises and businesses to mining communities.

Your husbands also know that the Board have offered generous terms for early retirement in areas where pits have become exhausted of coal which can be produced on a sensible basis.

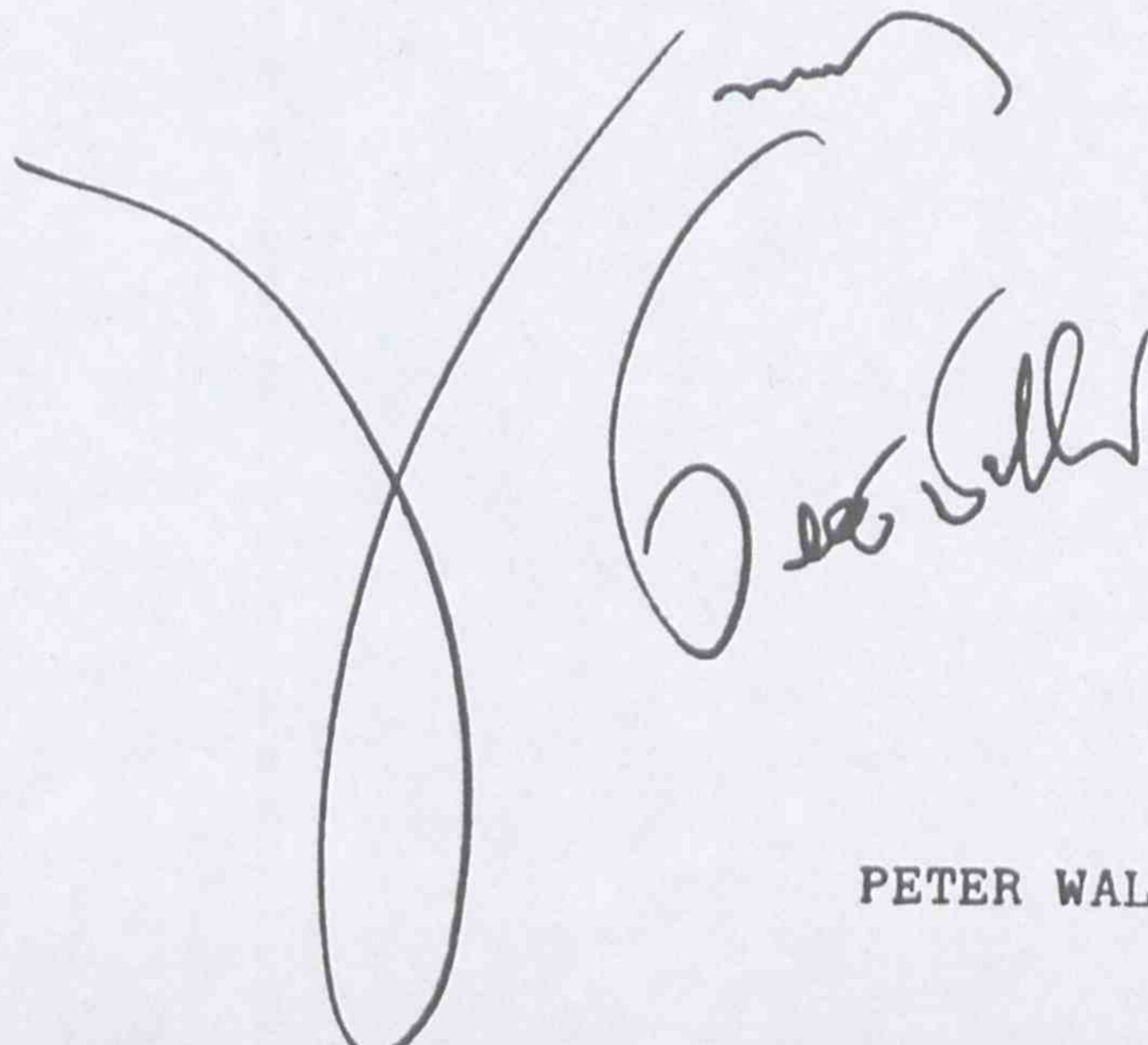
You have expressed concern about the plight of your children because of the deduction from social security of amounts deemed to be equivalent to strike pay. I hope you will both ask your husbands why it is they have not paid strike pay in order to help the children concerned. Why have your husbands decided that it is better to spend union funds on paying for mob picketing, when that method of picketing is not only against TUC

guidelines but also against the traditional practice of the National Union of Mineworkers.

You both know that if your husbands had decided to call for a national ballot of miners at the beginning of this dispute, and if the majority of miners had shared their views and voted for industrial action, then not one member of the NUM would ever have crossed a picket line. All you would have needed would have been one picket at each pit. The money that has gone in to organising mass pickets could have been given to the wives and children of striking miners. Your husbands did not do this. A third of the miners rejected your husbands' methods and had a ballot, and you know that these voted by more than two to one against strike action.

The actions of your husbands are certainly damaging mining communities. Principally the violence has adversely affected miners and their families. Coal faces that would have produced good jobs for the future have been destroyed. All of this has happened during a year when, if your husbands had not taken this action, miners' pay would have been good, £700 million of new investment would have taken place in the industry, and a thousand industrial firms would have converted to coal. Several thousand miners would have happily retired in their mid 50s to enjoy an early retirement on the most generous terms. That was the year which would have been possible. The year that your husbands have created has been a year of the union's funds being wasted, miners being plunged into debt, miners' children suffering and mining communities being deeply divided.

My deepest sorrow is for the families of those men who are denied work by intimidation and violence. You can be assured that when this damaging and unnecessary dispute has ended, I will be doing all in my power to get this industry back on its feet and to see that miners' families are restored as quickly as possible to a state of happiness and confidence. I only hope that the National Union of Mineworkers will have a leadership which will be collaborating in this task.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large loop on the left and a more complex, cursive-like structure on the right.

PETER WALKER