

12th Feb.1985

PRIME MINISTER.
FROM DAVID WOLFSON.

1. PONTING WAS PROSECUTED AND ACQUITED. WE MUST AVOID, AT ALL COSTS, LETTING HIM BECOME PERSECUTED AND A MARTYR! IF HE WITHDRAWS HIS RESIGNATION, HIS TRANSFER MUST BE HANDLED WITH GREAT CARE OR WE WILL BE SEEN TO BE OVERTURNING THE DECISION OF A JUDGE AND JURY. THAT WOULD BE AS DAMAGING AS THE VERDICT ITSELF. WE ARE THE PARTY OF THE RULE OF LAW.

2. THE COAL DISPUTE. DON'T GET TOO HOOKED ON THE POLICY OF NO NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT NUM AGREEMENT TO TERMS. IT IS SPLENDID AS A STRATEGY: WE DON'T WANT TALKS IF WE KNOW THEY MUST FAIL. BUT IT IS NOT A MORAL PRINCIPLE. IT WOULD BE BETTER, IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, TO HAVE ANOTHER ROUND OF QUICKLY ABORTED TALKS THAN HAVE PUBLIC OPINION BELIEVE WE, NOT SCARGILL, ARE IN THE WRONG. I CAN SEE A POSSIBILITY, WHICH YOU SHOULD NOT IGNORE, THAT THE COAL BOARD MIGHT BE BETTER TO START TALKS WITH A DEMAND THAT ITEM ONE ON THE AGENDA IS THE QUESTION WHICH IS AT THE ROOT OF THE STRIKE: SCARGILL'S ABSURD DEMAND THAT NO UNECONOMIC PIT SHOULD EVER CLOSE. THE TALKS WOULD BREAK DOWN. WE SHOULD THEN HAVE TO ARGUE PUBLICLY THAT £1 BILLION PER YEAR IS AN UNREASONABLE SUM TO KEEP OLD PITS GOING, ELECTRICITY DEAR, OTHER INDUSTRIES PENALISED AND JOBS LOST AND SO ON. WE CAN PRAY IN AID THE NACODS SETTLEMENT. THIS ARGUMENT IS EASY, BUT THE ARGUMENT THAT NCB SHOULD NOT TALK UNTIL SCARGILL AGREES TO CLOSE UNECONOMIC PITS MAY BE MORE DIFFICULT TO WIN IN PUBLIC. WE AREN'T WRONG TO TRY, BUT THE PRINCIPLE WE CAN'T GIVE UP IS THE CLOSURE OF UNECONOMIC PITS, NOT THE REFUSAL TO HAVE TALKS UNTIL THIS IS AGREED BY THE NUM IN ADVANCE.