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CENTRAL ELECTRICITY GENERATING BOARD

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From the Chairman
The Lord Marshall of Goring Kt, CBE, FRS

9 July, 1986

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

(Through The Secretary of State for Energy)

Dear Prime Minister,

I recently returned from a visit to Scandinavia, where I was the guest of the Norwegian Academy of Science and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, to review the position on acid rain deposition in Scandinavia. I am writing separately to the Secretary of State for Energy about the conclusions I have come to as a result of this visit, but I thought it worthwhile to write directly to you to summarise the sense of an unexpected meeting I had with the new Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland, at her request.

My host in Norway was Professor Lars Walloe, who is a fully qualified medical doctor, but is nowadays more interested in computers and epidemiological studies. Some decades ago, he was the research supervisor to the Norwegian Prime Minister when she was doing medical research and from that time, Mr and Mrs Lars Walloe have remained close personal friends of Mrs Brundtland. It was through that personal friendship that the Prime Minister requested a half hour meeting with me, with Professor Walloe in attendance.

The Norwegian Prime Minister said that she was very much looking forward to your visit to Norway. She was proud of the fact that you both had a scientific training before entering politics and said that "we scientists must stick together and set an example to other people".

She knew about the Royal Society research project, was obviously very knowledgeable about acid rain and asked me how I saw the problem. I replied that we were unconvinced that sulphur emissions were directly affecting the health of forests in either Germany or Scandinavia, but we were concerned that we might be affecting the acidification of lakes and rivers in Scandinavia and particularly in Norway. I explained that we had found it difficult to assess the significance of this problem for two historical reasons.



First, some of the early research done in Scandinavia on this subject was of doubtful scientific validity and working at a distance, it was difficult for us to decide what arguments were valid and what arguments should be ignored.

Secondly, the Norwegian Government had abandoned research on this subject without following up the crucially important effects of the soil on the rain as it flowed through the ground to the streams and lakes and the response of that soil to reduced acid deposition.

As we saw it, therefore, we were exposed to strong political lobbying without scientific evidence to justify it. I said that the CEGB would be willing to be convinced by good scientific research but my instinct was to ignore political lobbying. The Prime Minister asked me about your own personal views on this matter. I replied that only you could give a reply to that question, but I was inclined to the view that you would be more responsive to a scientific analysis of the facts than the reiteration of a political argument. I also pointed out that there was good reason to be worried about the acidification of surface waters in South Norway. That was a problem the CEGB had already acknowledged, was researching urgently and which I was investigating on my visit to Scandinavia. It was therefore best to concentrate discussion on that issue rather than broaden it to consider hypothetical damage to forests or fanciful risks from Dounreay. This last brought forth a very sympathetic response from the Norwegian Prime Minister. She told me she had already had words with the new Minister for the Environment and explained that she, herself, did not think the Dounreay argument was either valid or helpful. At the end of this part of the discussion, the Norwegian Prime Minister said she would ask her Minister for the Environment to stop making public arguments on acid rain, forests and the Dounreay reprocessing plant. She said she would now concentrate on putting to you the scientific facts of surface water acidification in Southern Norway and let those facts speak for themselves.

(Previous to this meeting, I had explained the CEGB position to Professor Walloe and he told me that Mrs Brundtland herself had been concerned about the low quality of some of the early Norwegian research and that is why she had put him in charge of it some years ago (that was when she was Minister for the Environment). Some years later, when she was then in opposition, she opposed the Government decision to stop the research programme. She argued at the time, "How could they expect other countries to take Norwegian arguments seriously when they themselves were stopping research on the subject)?

Therefore, I was not surprised when Mrs Brundtland indicated that she understood the CEGB concerns as I had outlined them. But she went on to argue that she thought the Norwegian scientific argument was now much stronger and better established scientifically than it was some years ago, and she would rely on the British to acknowledge that scientific evidence and take appropriate action in the near future. I told her that I was unable to detect any serious difference in scientific approach between Professor Walloe and myself and that the present Joint Research Programme was a good beginning to getting a fresh understanding between our two countries on this important subject.



-3-

The Prime Minister then asked me about the Chernobyl incident and what that implied for nuclear power worldwide and in the United Kingdom. She indicated she was a strong supporter of nuclear power, although the Norwegians did not need it themselves. She was appalled at the emotional outcries and the public's fear of radiation and she looked forward to discussing nuclear power issues with you when you visit Norway.

Yours sincerely,

Marshall of Goring

