

MR NORGROVE

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pps please

Prise Minister

24 October 1985

Agree to write as
proposed, over? DR

EMLEY MOOR COLLIERY 25/10.

(A) The efforts of a group of some 30 miners to take over a near-exhausted pit, in order to carry out a tail-end salvage operation, might seem insignificant. But symbolically, it is important, particularly at this time. We need to get a tide running in the direction of a UK coal industry based on a diversity of private sector participants, including the small-scale.

Unfortunately, my probing confirms that Emley Moor is not a candidate for this type of operation. It is simply too big and expensive to operate, even in the most rudimentary mode. The pity is that, for reasons yet to be established, the group of miners has broken off discussions with the NCB on other small-scale licensed mining operations in the vicinity of Emley Moor.

(B) My fear is that, in spite of Ian MacGregor's encouragement, the miners may have been put off by an NCB ethos which is alien to small-scale, low-overhead private mining. The NCB operates within a cumbersome framework of mining practices and standards which have not kept pace with advancing technology. Moreover, those who have worked in private licensed mines point out that the NCB's assumptions about manning levels, particularly away from the coal faces, are unnecessarily inflated.

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I suggest that your response to the Department of Energy should:

- Urge them to promote the re-establishment of exploratory discussions between the miners and the NCB.
- Suggest that if the miners' hang-up stems from the alien culture of the NCB, they could be given access to fresh independent advice, eg from men like Stocks and Down at the Royal School of Mines. You could also suggest that companies like Hampton Goldmines might be interested in developing a joint venture with the miners.

This would all be phrased more gradually in my letter

With wider reference to the NCB's framework of mining standards and procedures, it would be timely to urge the Department of Energy, and more particularly the Department of Employment, to get some real urgency into the measures needed to break NACODS' outdated, inefficient and damaging stranglehold on operational safety cover in deep mines. We understand that the NCB haven't ^{only just} yet registered ^{the need to act} ~~this as a~~ matter of priority. Presentationally, moves in this direction will have to be set in the context of the need to bring out-of-date practices into line with today's technology, coupled with the need to increase flexibility and productivity.

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JMW

Now that the ^{terms of the} new Calvey Review Procedure have been ^{set agreed} they should become a ^{priority} item.