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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

19 MARCH 1984

2 Nigel.

NATIONAL DOCK LABOUR SCHEME AND THE FUTURE OF THE PORT OF LONDON AUTHORITY

I have seen Nicholas Ridley's paper (E(A)(84)17) on the National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS) and the Future of the Port of London Authority (PLA). I have also read Tom King's and Peter Rees's views. In my absence, I have asked David Mellor to attend the meeting tomorrow. But I thought it might help to register my own views on this matter in advance.

I do not dispute the deeply unsatisfactory nature of the NDLS, and recognise the right course to follow at an appropriate time is likely to be to abolish it. I also readily appreciate the difficulties which Nicholas Ridley faces in dealing with the PLA.

But I believe that to take, let alone to announce now, a decision to repeal the NDLS would be wrong. It is still too early to predict the course of the present coal dispute. As you know, a major co-ordinated deployment of police has been required to ensure that the law is upheld and that those who wish to work are able to do so. We should not under-estimate the strain which this is inevitably placing on many police forces. There is nothing which the NUM national leadership would prefer, I suspect, to an announcement of our intention to end the NDLS which, as Nicholas Ridley's paper fairly recognises, "would certainly provoke a national dock strike". We should not jeopardise a favourable outcome of the coal dispute by any action which would greatly strengthen trade union solidarity with the NUM and could impose a further major burden on the police.

The timing of any future decision to repeal the NDLS will clearly require careful preparation and handling. It should not be dependent on the immediate problems of the PLA - and as Tom King and Peter Rees point out, it need not be.

I am copying this letter to member of E(A) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*L
Lawson*

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson,

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Industrial Policy Pt 2
Parts

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