



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled

David Barclay Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London WC1

Prime Minister

There is a powerful case ^{19 September 1984}

for a concession on funeral

Dear David ~~expenses.~~

Content?

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20/9

Yes ✓

I spoke to you yesterday about the problem of meeting burial costs through supplementary benefit for claimants who were on strike.

As you know strikers do not normally qualify for single payments of supplementary benefit - but there are exceptions written into the legislation to cover urgent need for example for essential fares to visit a partner ill in hospital, or a close relative critically ill or dying, or to pay fares of special transport for a disabled child to get to school. Payment of funeral costs is not one of the exceptions. I attach a Press cutting which describes two such recent cases. Our best estimate is that around five or six cases arise normally each year.

Ministers here would like to change the regulations (which are negative) to allow such burial costs to be met through supplementary benefit - we would, meanwhile, make extra-statutory payments to claimants. (This has already been cleared at official level with Treasury.)

Given the particular sensitivities of these proposals coming forward during the miners' strike perhaps you would let me know if there is any objection to our proceeding along these lines. Copies go to John Neilson (Energy) and Margaret O'Mara (Treasury).

Yours ever,
Colin

C A H PHILLIPS
Private Secretary

Enc.

The Times

No funeral grant for strikers

By Nicholas Timmins
Social Services Correspondent

The families of striking miners are being refused grants to pay for funerals under supplementary benefit rules that came into force three years ago, the Department of Health and Social Security confirmed yesterday.

The decision, which has been applied in at least two cases recently, was bitterly attacked yesterday by Labour MPs.

The families of a 12-year-old mentally handicapped boy and of a 14-year-old boy have both been told they cannot receive supplementary benefit payments towards a basic funeral because the head of family was a striking miner, Mr Michael McGowan, Labour Euro-MP for Leeds, said yesterday.

In one case, a 14-year-old boy from Upton, near Wakefield, died while picking coal out of a spoil tip which collapsed, he said, while at Ferrybridge a 12-year-old physically and mentally handicapped child died from pneumonia. In both cases the families were refused help.

Mr McGowan said: "This is another example of the vicious attack and pressure our mining families are having to face."

A spokesman for the DHSS said that before 1981 funeral payments in such circumstances were discretionary. Since then families where one member was involved in an industrial dispute were not entitled to supplementary benefit single payments, which include funeral expenses.

Local office staff were told to direct families to the local health authority or local authority if a funeral had not been arranged, or to refer them to voluntary organization or charities if funeral arrangements had already been made.

In the village of Upton, where a door-to-door collection has been held to pay for the boy's funeral, Mrs Iris Knight, of the local miners' support group, said the village was disgusted at the ruling. The husband had been on strike for six months and had no money or savings.



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 September, 1984

Supplementary Benefit Payments to Strikers

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to David Barclay of 19 September and is content for the regulations to be amended so that burial costs claimed by strikers can be met through supplementary benefit.

I am copying this letter to John Neilson (Department of Energy) and Margaret O'Mara (H.M. Treasury).

ANDREW TURNBULL

Colin Phillips, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security

SR



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

3 October 1984

C E Phillips Esq
PS/Minister of State for Social
Security and the Disabled

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Dear Colin,

The Chancellor has seen your letter of 19 September to David Barclay (only received in this office on 27 September) about the problem of meeting burial costs through supplementary benefit for claimants who are on strike. He has no objection to Mr Newton's proposal.

I am copying this to David Barclay (No.10) and John Neilson (Energy).

Yours sincerely,

Margaret O'Hara

MISS M O'MARA
Private Secretary

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