

# Thatcher ready to tackle total pit shutdown

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The Government has prepared contingency plans for a total pit strike in two weeks. Cabinet papers from the civil emergency sub-committee have gone out to the electricity generating authority in readiness for a complete cessation of coal supplies.

Ministers calculate that tomorrow's special delegates' conference in Sheffield of the National Union of Mineworkers will either spread the "rolling strike" through more intensive picketing or halt the industry by a national strike ballot.

Their forward planning for power supply envisages a series of thresholds through which coal and power supply could pass in the next few weeks.

The worst scenario is an all-out strike early next month which would halt the million-tonne a week supply of coal going into the power stations in the Trent Valley, critical to the operation of the national grid.

If that happens, the generating authorities calculate that coal stocks in the power stations will last at least 16 and up to 20 weeks. The operating lifetime of the stations could be extended if the oil burn is maximised.

But the Cabinet plans are still optimistic that moderate miners in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and south Derbyshire will continue normal working, supplying vital coal supplies that could keep the national grid going "almost indefinitely".

If there is an all-out strike, the Government is preparing to ask the construction companies, Taylor Woodrow, McAlpine and Wimpey, for the loan of 30-tonne trucks that could be used as "lorry trains" to break a miners' union blockade of pithead coal stocks.

That initiative is regarded as more diplomatic than the use of troops to shift coal out of strike-bound collieries to the power stations when supplies begin to run out within the next few months.

Officials of the generating authorities have been taken aback by the vehemence with which the Government is pursuing its policy on the coal strike. They conceded grudgingly in private that Mrs Margaret Thatcher is willing to spend any amount of money to ensure that the Government is not again defeated by the miners' union.

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