

Thatcher had secret plan to handle strike

By Peter Hennessy

The Government has a detailed plan for handling the miners' strike. It was drawn up three years ago in the strictest secrecy on the Prime Minister's instructions by a Cabinet committee of senior civil servants.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher set up the committee after the Government's climbdown on pit closures in February, 1981. It was chaired by Mr (now Sir) Robert Wade-Gery, then head of the Cabinet Office's civil contingencies unit.

The committee, which was a small offshoot of the larger contingencies unit, prepared and costed options for buying time if the National Union of Mineworkers stopped coal supplies to power stations and essential industries.

The Wade-Gery group considered and rejected the possibility of training troops to drive coal trains if the rail unions

took sympathetic action in support of the miners. It examined the feasibility of boosting coal imports during a pit strike. Measures were also prepared to increase the contribution of oil-burning power stations to the national grid.

In early 1982, a threefold strategy was adopted by ministers:

- Bigger coal stocks at the power stations might discourage the miners from taking industrial action in the first place;

- If that failed, the stockpiles would ensure the miners suffered financial hardship during a protracted dispute, thereby increasing pressure on their leaders to reach a settlement before stocks were exhausted;

- Measures would be taken to replenish supplies during the strike by using private road hauliers

Thatcher had secret plan to handle strike.

By Peter Hennessy.

The Times (London, England), Wednesday, May 30, 1984; pg. 2; Issue 61844. (244 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS34311870