

PRIME MINISTER

LESSONS OF THE 1984-85 MINERS STRIKE

Ministers have been asked to endorse the follow up action on endurance, law and order and on other matters such as supplementary benefit and public presentation. We already envisage a meeting of a small group of Ministers to discuss endurance once Sir Walter Marshall's report on what CEGB can achieve is available. You may also want to have a meeting with a separate group of Ministers to ensure that the recommendations on law and order are vigorously pursued.

The report is extremely interesting, though it tends to present the strike as a uni-directional struggle in which the Government gradually overpowered the miners. It does not convey the fluctuating fortunes and how near, on occasions, the Government came to disaster. It does not, for example, bring out low points such as the wait for the result of the Notts miners' ballot, the first and second dock strikes, the moments when it appeared that NCB had conceded too much in negotiations, and the NACODS vote. The outcome did not become inevitable until the return to work picked up again in the New Year.

The key point was possibly right at the start on Wednesday 14 March when, by chance, Mr. MacGregor came to see you to discuss Euroroute, and reported that miners who wanted to get to work in Nottingham were being prevented by violent picketing. At the meeting which immediately followed you galvanised the Home Secretary, who in turn galvanised the police into keeping the entrances to the pits open. This led immediately to the activation of ACPO. If that first battle had been lost, the rest would have been academic.

It is clear, however, that the Government under-estimated the time for which miners could be kept out, even on limited supplementary benefit, by a combination of union solidarity and intimidation.

AT

Andrew - the report is too narrow, too little insight - see p. 11

24 May 1985