

# Thatcher postpones Far East trip to tackle strike crisis

● The Prime Minister has postponed a two-week tour of South-east Asia because of the docks and pits disputes

● The fate of Britain's biggest peace time military exercise, Lionheart, could depend on whether men at Felixstowe and Dover decide to join the docks strike

● Employers and unions stepped up their campaigns to win support over the ports stoppage

● Miners' leaders are confident that their call for active backing from the TUC will succeed after tactical manoeuvring produced an agreed text to put to Congress

By Anthony Bevens, Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister last night postponed a two-week visit to South-east Asia, due to begin on September 14, in the face of mounting industrial confrontation.

If the dock strike begins to bite hard, there are strong chances that a state of emergency would have to be called, and Mrs Margaret Thatcher would feel it necessary to be present to handle the delicate political controls of such a crisis.

The decision to put off the visit, to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, underlines the Prime Minister's personal resolve to beat the strikers.

A statement from Downing Street said: "The Prime Minister has decided that against the background of the present industrial situation it would not be right for her to be so far away from Britain for this period."

It is also accepted that the public might have resented seeing television coverage of Mrs Thatcher against an exotic tropical background at a time of industrial and economic difficulty.

The underlying resolve of Mrs Thatcher and her ministers to beat off the miners' and dockers' demands was graphically expressed by Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, who said in a BBC radio *World at One* interview yesterday that the Government was facing a situation where miners' leaders were "seeking to point a pistol not at the employers but at the country."

Talks had broken down on the "extreme, fanatical demand" that come what may, every ounce of coal must be mined

however much money is lost as a result".

Mr Brittan said: "That is something no industry in the country could possibly accept."

Mr John Smith, shadow spokesman for employment, said on the same programme that the Government had abandoned any responsibility for good industrial relations.

## Threat to biggest army exercise

The dock strike threatens to disrupt Britain's largest peace-time military manoeuvres (Our Defence Correspondent writes).

Exercise Lionheart, which involves ferrying 23,000 troops and 9,000 vehicles across the Channel on civilian ships, is due to begin on Monday.

The Ministry of Defence said yesterday that it was watching the situation closely. If the strike is enforced at the east coast ports it will destroy more than a year's detailed planning of the exercise, to be held in West Germany.

Dover is the most important port from the Army's point of view, because more than half the troop-carrying sailings are scheduled to be made from there.

It would be a huge defeat for the Government if it had to cancel or substantially curtail the exercise.

There is also the prospect of inflammatory scenes if military convoys were to attempt to push their way through heavy picketing at ports trying to continue working.

During the first week of the exercise the level of activity will be small, devoted to establish-

ing lines of communication and control procedures.

It is in the second week, beginning on September 10, that large flows of troops are scheduled, culminating in a huge exodus of Territorial Army units and their vehicles on September 15 and 16. In those two days more than 30,000 TA members are due to cross by sea and air.

There is no evidence that the Government would attempt to use Royal Navy vessels to replace strike-bound civilian ships, and Whitehall sources said that no policy decision had been taken on what to do if the ports are subjected to heavy picketing.

It seems unlikely that an effective exercise could be mounted solely on movements by air, because this would produce unbalanced forces lacking vehicles and other heavy equipment.

Exercise Lionheart is the biggest test of Britain's ability to reinforce the 55,000 troops of the British Army of the Rhine.

In all about 55,000 members of the regular and Territorial Army and reservists are due to go to Germany, of whom 32,000 are scheduled to travel by air.

They are due to join BAOR forces and American, Dutch and West German troops in a two-week exercise involving 130,000 personnel.

One of the problems for the Government caused by the dock strike is that it is obliged to get the reservists and TA members back home on specific dates to resume their civilian jobs.

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A haulage driver (right) squares up to a picket as anger spills over between TGWU members at Tilbury docks, London, yesterday (Photograph: The Standard, London).

## US deficit in July at record \$14bn

From Bailey Morris, Washington

US economic activity dropped for the second-time in two months during July, indicating that the rapid expansion

economy shows signs of re-inflating, have been looking for signs that growth is slowing.

## Ship carried enriched uranium

Belgium said yesterday that the French freighter which sank in the Channel on Saturday was carrying enriched

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By Anthony Bevins, Political Correspondent.

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