

Thatcher would let coal strike last a year or longer

- Mrs Margaret Thatcher said the Government was prepared to contemplate the pit strike going on for more than a year
- Miners' leaders threatened to reimpose picketing at Hunterston and Ravenscraig after rejecting the dock strike peace deal
- The dock strike ended yesterday amid continued disruption as three Bristol tugboat men were dismissed for refusing to join the TGWU (Back page)
- The Confederation of British Industry warned the Government of the "disastrous impact" on jobs if the cost of the miners' strike was loaded on to electricity prices

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

Mrs Margaret Thatcher said yesterday that the Government was prepared to contemplate the 28-week-old pit strike going on for more than a year.

She also made clear her view that there could never be any surrender on the central issue of the dispute, the right of the National Coal Board to close uneconomic mines.

In what MPs and observers regarded as her most uncompromising statement of the Government's position since the dispute began, the Prime Minister said that the strike was being kept going by mob violence and the refusal of the miners' leadership to hold a ballot.

She accused the miners of sacrificing the jobs of other workers as well as their own future, and expressed the belief that if the strike continued Britain could get through the winter without power cuts.

"We can carry on for a very very long time - and shall", she said.

Mrs Thatcher's performance, during an hour-long interview on the *Jimmy Young Programme* on BBC radio, left MPs wondering last night how, if there was to be any further movement from either side in the dispute, it could possibly come from the coal board.

Mr Denis Healey, the former Labour Chancellor, later accused her of "glorying in confrontation".

She repeated time and again that uneconomic pits would have to be closed in the same way that uneconomic power stations, car factories or textile firms had to close.

"I make perfectly clear", she said. "It does not matter how long the strike goes on - uneconomic pits have always had to be closed, have always been closed and must always be closed."

But she said that if the strike went on for a year, or even longer, the condition in which the mines would be by then would close far more pits and far more faces than if the miners went back to work now.

Mrs Thatcher said that already 14 producing faces had been lost, 17 more were in a critical condition, 59 were causing concern and there were another six which had been worked out and where it had not been possible to salvage equipment.

Asked whether she was saying that she was prepared to go on as long as it was necessary to go on, she replied: "Indeed. What I am saying is that if it goes on as long as that, it will be the strike that closes the pits."

Mrs Thatcher said that she hoped no one would give in to mob violence and the refusal to put the strike to a ballot. The violence was repugnant not only to the working miners but to many of those on strike.

She said: "In the end... you believe more people are responsible than are not. In the end you believe mob violence will be seen for what it is - an attempt to get their way when commonsense and the ballot will not prevail. If ever one were to say that that triumphs, it is the end of democracy."

She added that she did not think the TUC would want to lend its authority and support to those who had used mob violence and refused to hold a ballot.

When Mrs Thatcher was given the news during the interview of Mr Arthur Scargill's refusal to accept the deal between the dockers and steel workers over the delivery of coal to Ravenscraig, she reacted angrily.

She said: "They are prepared to sacrifice other workers' jobs on a very large scale. They are prepared to sacrifice the whole of the steel industry and jobs in other industries because they want to compel coal to be mined no matter what the cost."

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Mrs Thatcher with Jimmy Young in a Broadcasting House studio yesterday.

King gives new pay

Alliance split looms

Strike may last a year, says Thatcher

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She again displayed her dislike of the idea of third party intervention in the coal dispute. The problem had to be sorted out between the management and the union, she said.

They had had 12 days of talks and come to the sole point of difference - a fundamental challenge by the union leadership to the right of the management to manage under Acts passed by Parliament and objectives given to the board.

The confidence of Mrs Thatcher's prediction of the unlikelihood of power cuts startled some MPs. There had been many threats of cuts, she said, but added: "There are not going to be power cuts this side of Christmas. I do not believe there will be power cuts the other side of Christmas. There won't be any power cuts for a very, very long time, if at all".

Mrs Thatcher said that if the management of any of the nationalized industries involved wanted to invoke the civil law on picketing she would not put a spoke in their wheel.

There had been more than 6,000 arrests and it was taking time for the cases to be heard, but the Lord Chancellor had ready any number of stipendiary magistrates to be brought in to speed up the hearing of cases.

She confirmed that the Government was looking at the way the public order law operated. "We must look at the procedure. We have not had this sort of mob violence for a very long time".

● The Labour leader Mr Neil Kinnock, said last night that Mrs Thatcher had once again demonstrated that she was "much more anxious to strike postures about surrender in this dispute than she is to find a solution".

Mr Kinnock, speaking in Plymouth, where he was visiting Devonport dockyard, said that a responsible government would try "to stop this awful division".

● Mr Joe Benham, national treasurer of Nacods, the pit deputies' union told a mass meeting in Sunderland last night that the union was about to succeed by democratic voting in brining the coal industry to a standstill, which the National Union of Mineworkers had failed to do without a ballot.

If the Nacods men vote next week on a call for national strike action from October 1 - a 66 per cent majority is needed - every pit will stop because the deputies carry out safety work.

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