

The miners' strike

Ministers face dilemma on cost

Ministers are divided over whether the cost of the miners' strike should be recovered by increasing electricity charges or by cutting other public spending programmes.

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, who is understood to be opposed to the imposition of the so-called "Scargill surcharge" sought by the Treasury, made clear yesterday that no decision had been taken on the issue.

He was replying to a letter from Mr John Lyons, general secretary of the Electrical Power Engineers' Association, who had warned him that loading the dispute's cost on

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

electricity bill "would inflame opinion in the industry."

The dispute about electricity seems certain to go to a meeting of the Cabinet next month. It is thought unlikely that it can be settled by the so-called "Star Chamber" committee which begins work this week to try to cut some £3,000m off departmental spending bids this year to keep the Government's spending on course.

The committee will be chaired by Lord Whitelaw and dominated by present or former Treasury ministers.

The other members are Mr George Younger, Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr Peter Rees, Chief Secretary to the

Treasury, and his two predecessors, Mr John Biffen, Leader of the Commons, and Mr Leon Brittan, Home Secretary.

Its decisions and that on energy prices will be needed for the Chancellor's autumn economic statement next month.

In his letter to Mr Walker Mr Lyons said that if the Government puts the cost of the dispute on the bills it would make a nonsense of its argument that closing uneconomic pits was necessary to keep down the electricity price.

Mr Walker said: "No decision of any description has been made in this area."

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Runcie and Habgood renew plea

By Clifford Longley

Both archbishops of the Church of England expressed their continuing anxiety about the state of society in speeches at the weekend, and both emphasized the dangers of a nation divided in two sections, the employed and the long-term unemployed.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, said at a Salvation Army service in St Paul's Cathedral: "For all the many changes for the better that have occurred in this country, it would be a grave mistake to assume that crippling economic and social conditions are a thing of the past."

Most of the population appeared to be better off, while there were "pockets of poverty, frustration and despair".

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood, told his diocesan synod: "Until this week, and with one or two exceptions, churches and church leaders have kept silent about our present troubles, fearing, I suspect, to make matters worse by an injudicious word."

He said it was hardly possible to over-emphasize the importance of local mediation and reconciliation in mining communities. Often the churches were the only bodies still in touch with both sides. "And if the churches can not do it, who can?"

Electricians' leader supports police

By Barrie Clement
Labour Reporter

The role of the police in the miners' strike was strongly defended yesterday by Mr Eric Hammond, right-wing leader of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union.

The police had a hard, sometimes dangerous but important job to maintain the peace and deserved trade unionists' help and support. "They are human beings too", he told the biennial conference of the Electrical and Engineering Staff Association, a self-governing body within his union.

His implicit refusal to con-



Mr Eric Hammond

demn the activities of the police will further infuriate the left and strengthen Mr Hammond's growing reputation at being a worthy successor to Mr Frank

Chapple, the former general secretary of the union, as the bete-noir of the movement's leadership.

He told delegates, gathered in Birmingham City Council chamber, that the union had faced attempts to drown its voice over the pit strike

"We need to say clearly that this union does not see policemen as enemies. Some react with more than the minimum force necessary when confronted with violence, some infringe laid-down codes, but the individuals concerned are properly expected to account for such faults and correctly spotlighted by the media."

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