

Thatcher riled by hit list talk

By Julian Haviland
Political Editor

The impotence of Parliament to the coal dispute was yesterday reflected in sterile exchanges between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Neil Kinnock pressed questions which he has put several times before, and Mrs Margaret Thatcher repeated previous answers, each to the other's irritation.

Earlier at 10 Downing Street the Prime Minister presided at another meeting of the ministerial committee monitoring the dispute.

Whereas Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, had on Monday declined to give the Commons precise figures of coal stocks, saying merely that there was "plenty of coal moving". Government sources claimed yesterday in private briefings that about 15m tonnes were now held at power stations.

Question time in the Commons was muted by the shared hope on both sides that the resumed talks at Acas would produce a change. Mrs Thatcher said that a strike by the deputies' union, Nacods, would do great damage

Mr Kinnock wanted Mrs Thatcher to say whether the National Coal Board's original proposals for the loss of 4m tonnes of productive capacity were now withdrawn. He riled her by talking, as Mr Arthur Scargill does, of a "hit list" of pits.

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