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## BUILDING ON VICTORY

For twelve months the Government has had to wage a battle of resistance against the challenge of Scargillism. It was as necessary to do so in the interests of the majority of trade unionists as it was in the interests of the nation as a whole. Now, thanks ultimately to the support given to the elected government by those same working people, there has been a victory. But it has been at a high cost and now it is won there is a risk the question will increasingly be asked: was it all really necessary? It is at this point that the most difficult task confronts Mrs Thatcher.

When there is a battle to be fought on a single over-riding issue her leadership is constant and her courage never falters. That was true of her insistence in the last Parliament that there really was no alternative to the fight against inflation, and of her refusal to yield to those colleagues who besought her to take the easy road of trying to spend her way out of political difficulties. Even more conspicuously, she never compromised her conviction that the aggression against the Falklands had to be resisted.

It is not, however, clear that Mrs Thatcher is as good at building on victory as she is at achieving it. The Government's failure in this parliament to go on from resisting the immediate menace of inflation to deal with its fundamental long-term causes is a case in point. There is now also a danger that Mrs Thatcher may be less adept at handling the victory over Scargillism than she was at winning it.

It is not that there are any quick answers to the practical problems the strike has brought up, and there are certainly none to the questions about the coal industry itself, the details of whose future have to be worked out carefully in the coming

months. Nevertheless, at the end of a period which has put both the Government's strength of leadership and the people's attachment to democracy under some considerable test of nerve, the Prime Minister now needs to sum up for the nation what it has all been about and to give her guidance on where we go from here. For now it is all over, there will inevitably be retrospective doubts about whether it was all worthwhile, and about what the future holds.

Indeed, doubts repeatedly surfaced during the dispute. There were anxieties about the means and cost of enforcing the law and what the law should be; about the violence unleashed by the need to resist picket-line intimidation; about the role of the police; about the heavy financial cost of the strike both directly and indirectly to the nation. But at every stage such doubts were resolved because the nation, like Mrs Thatcher herself, instinctively recognized democratic necessity. That is why there was a victory. But now the doubts may set in more seriously.

First, how real was the victory and how is it to be measured? A victory there certainly was and it can best be understood by each citizen's asking himself and herself what would have been the consequences for liberty, parliamentary government and prosperity if Scargillism had again triumphed, as it did in 1974. But the nation needs to be guided towards asking and answering these questions for itself, and that guidance can best come from the Prime Minister.

Secondly, we have to look forward from what is behind us and to build on it, with working people giving the same support to the reconstruction of industrial attitudes as they gave to the resistance that brought victory

All this points to the Prime Minister's taking an early opportunity to speak to the nation, and the logical means is a ministerial broadcast. Neither Mrs Thatcher's well-known preference for a long discursive interview, nor the politician's dislike of a forum which gives the opposition a right of reply should deter her.

Such a broadcast should explain why there really was a victory and describe its nature. It would not be a triumphalist broadcast since the victory was democracy's. It would have to describe not so much the Government's detailed plans for the future but rather its broad aims. These must include a determination to assist the emergence of new and better work in the areas where pits must close, as well as making the coal industry itself more prosperous for its workers, perhaps through schemes of joint ownership. It has to show above all that it is not Mr Scargill who is the real friend of the mass of working people, and that their energies and aspirations can be released only if his kind of backward-looking and restrictive approach is removed from their environment.

Now that it is almost all over, and the miners are seen marching proudly back to work, demonstrating the natural instinct of decent people to be loyal to what they take to be their natural allegiance, there is a danger that misgivings may set in among the wider public whose sympathies are naturally with the apparent underdog in the hour of his supposed defeat. The sooner Mrs Thatcher can reinforce the message that Mr Scargill's defeat was a victory for the miners, and for working people generally, the better for the nation, not to mention the Government itself.

**Building On Victory.**

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