

Power base

Review 19/1/85

EVER since I unearthed the fact, it has always worried me just how much power Bernard Ingham will have in a nuclear war. The Prime Minister's loyal Press Secretary (he was, once a loyal Press Secretary to Tony Benn, so I'm not sure where his loyalties lie) is going to be very, very important.

It seems that when we have a State of Emergency, apart from stocking up with tins of baked beans, we will also have to take stock of Bernard. For he instantly becomes the head of the Press Association, director-general of the BBC, and will run the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

And Bernard Ingham is not prepared for his awesome powers. He recently held a meeting of senior personnel at the Ministry of Defence to discuss simple topics like nuclear war, the planning of. All sorts of eventualities were discussed: one of the MoD chaplains asked, 'What about SCIP?' Mr Ingham was puzzled and asked what it was. 'I'm not sure,' came the MoD reply, 'but you're in charge of it.' So, in case we have a nuclear war this weekend—and you never know—let me hastily tell Mr Ingham it stands for Strategic Committee on Information Policy.

MoD digs deep for bunker

25/7/85

Paul Brown on the revelations of new military control centres being built under central London

A NEW bunker control centre code-named Pindar is being built under the Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall six storeys deep at a cost of around £20 million.

The bunker, revealed in an article in the New Statesman, is connected by underground tunnels to the Cabinet Office and Downing Street.

The bunker will replace the Cabinet Office control centre known as Cobra, and the central military control room currently above ground in the Ministry of Defence.

Last night the Ministry of Defence confirmed that work was going on to restructure existing bunkers and build new communication centres under the ministry but

would not comment on reports of a second back-up bunker under High Holborn and plans by the Americans to build a bunker of their own under Goodge Street underground station.

Secrecy about the new bunkers was inadvertently punctured by the private builders brought in to do the work. Although there have been no visible signs of work the London Fire Brigade have twice been called to deal with serious incidents.

The first occurred on the sixth floor below Whitehall, when some generating equipment caught fire. The second was caused by the use of welding equipment in a large room on the fifth floor, with a build-up of heavy smoke.

The Pindar plan was first

devised in 1980 after the Cabinet had ordered a review of the Home defence plans. Current ministry operations rooms were vulnerable to conventional bombing attack and new Nato war plans assumed a phase of conventional attack before any nuclear strike.

Pindar and its back-up site in an underground telephone exchange under High Holborn — which is next on the list for enlargement and conversion — would come into operation while Britain is under conventional attack. Before a nuclear attack occurred it is foreseen that the War Cabinet, Central Defence Staff and military commands would be evacuated to bunkers in the countryside.

A two-year argument over

who should pay for the new bunkers was settled in 1982 when the Defence Secretary, Mr Michael Heseltine, approved the bunkers as a secret military project. The High Holborn exchange was first built as a wartime shelter but when it became the Kingsway telephone exchange it was connected to 12 miles of cable-carrying tunnels. Ownership is now passing from British Telecom to the Ministry of Defence.

BT's deep-level cable network reaches secret street exits as widely separated as Bethnal Green and Maida Vale.

The American plan to build their own bunker under Goodge Street is designed to replace surface facilities for controlling the



Michael Heseltine: funds approved in 1982

US Navy in the Mediterranean. However, the British Government is said to be nervous about providing bunker facilities for Americans in London when the civilian population remains unprotected. The Ministry of Defence said the new bunker space was needed because existing facilities were cramped.