

The Miners And the TUC Conference.

Pine Martin:
This is a
commentary on
Tony Thompson's
pdm

A new survey carried out by Opinion Research and Communication on behalf of The Standard today shows that, across the board, Mr. Scargill and the NUM have comprehensively lost the support both of the general public and the great majority of trade union members.

The survey also puts a warning shot across the bows of other unions who are due to consider next week at the TUC Conference what degree of support they should give to the miners' strike.

For seven out of ten members of the general public and almost as many trade union members believe that:-

(a) it would be against the country's interests for the TUC to give stronger support, physically and financially, to the striking miners.

(b) it would damage the reputation of the trade unions with the general public for the TUC to give stronger support to the miners.

(c) Any help offered by the TUC conference should only be given after Mr. Scargill has held a secret ballot of NUM members to show whether a majority of miners support the strike.

Even more clear cut is that an astonishing 95% of the public think that the other unions at the TUC Conference should now start to look seriously for ways to bring the strike to an end.

The survey also gives confirmation that Neil Kinnock,

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Leader of the Labour Party, was correct in starting to distance himself from the miners' strike.

For one in two members of the general public believe that it would harm the reputation of the Labour Party with ordinary voters if the TUC conference next week voted to give stronger support to the miners either physically or financially.

The poll was carried out between 22nd and 23rd August with a national sample of 1074 people.

The consistency of the hostility towards the strike is such that there can be little doubt that Mr. Scargill and his colleagues have completely forfeited the sympathy of the great majority of the public and trade union members.

Disapproval goes almost across the board, whatever the question. Virtually the only crumb of comfort is that there is a good deal of sympathy among trade union members with the striking miners. Nearly half of the trade union members (48%) are in sympathy with the strikers. But even this is only partial comfort. Only 17% of trade union leaders are in "complete sympathy" compared with 31% "in sympathy to some extent."

The extent to which the TUC conference gives strong backing to the miners' strike is clearly of great importance. In this context it is significant that those union leaders who have already given backing to the miners appear to be running contrary to the public will and to that of trade union members generally.

Eight out of ten members of the public think that the miners strike is going to harm the reputation of the trade union movement generally with themselves and with the mass of ordinary workers.

Between seven and eight out of ten members of the public do not favour the miners' strike being supported by...

The dockers (75% against)

The steelworkers (77% against)

The railwaymen (76% against)

The seamen (78% against)

Lorry drivers and haulage workers (76% against)

In all, three quarters of the general public disapprove of the efforts of those union leaders trying to widen the strike by getting their membership to help the miners in various ways.

The reason is not hard to find. A clear majority (58%) want the National Coal Board to win and only 21% (29% of trade union members) want the miners to win.

The chance of victory for the miners is rated even lower-- 11% of the public and 12% of union members think that the miners will win compared with 53% of the public and 49% of trade union members who think the Coal Board will win.

One question in the survey likely to be of particular interest to union leaders gathering for next weeks TUC conference concerns the possible long term effect of the miners strike. Almost six out of ten people (59%) think that as a result of the mass miners pickets the Government should bring in tougher laws to limit picketing.

Disapproval of the way Mr. Scargill and his colleagues have handled the strike is overwhelming. More than seven out of ten people and 67% of trade union members think that the strike is political and that Mr. Scargill is using the miners to change Society in Britain. Only 21% of the public think that the strike is about safeguarding miners jobs.

A massive 89% think that the NUM is wrong to have kept the strike going for nearly six months without giving miners the chance to express a view by means of a secret ballot.

And disapproval of the tactics used to keep the strike going is extremely strong. 94% strongly disapprove of the strong arm tactics used by some of the mass pickets--smashing car windows, setting fire to buses, intimidating working miners.

77% think that striking miners are not within their rights in trying to bring other miners out by mass picketing tactics.

72% think that the strike is still going not because most miners support it but because they are afraid to go back due to intimidation and threats.

The great majority of the public (73%) believe that if the NUM did hold a secret ballot the majority of miners would vote to go back to work. The sympathies of the public (and trade union members) are also unmistakably with the working miners and not with the strikers (74% with working miners and 19% with striking miners).

Disapproval of attempts to stop production at British Steel's works and to starve the Central Electricity Generating Board's power stations is very strong.

86% say it is wrong to use mass pickets to stop production at British Steel works at Ravenscraig, Scunthorpe and Llanwern.

85% say it is wrong to use mass pickets to stop coal reaching the CEEGB's power stations.

Almost as many - 80% of the general public and 75% of trade union members --think it is wrong to use mass pickets in Nottinghamshire and Lancashire to persuade those miners still working to join the strike.

There is widespread public awareness that the miners' strike poses a serious threat to the jobs of steelworkers.

86% think that if miners pickets succeed in stopping coal getting into the huge steel complex at Ravenscraig in Scotland there is a serious possibility that Ravenscraig will close with the loss of thousands of jobs.

The same number think that the miners should allow coal trains in to Ravenscraig to safeguard steel workers' jobs.

The general public is also strongly opposed to the efforts of the leaders of the railway unions to use the muscle of their membership in order to help the miners.

A clear majority (63%) agree with Mr. Bob Reid, Chairman of British Rail, that there is no genuine railway grievance to justify the threatened work to rule. They believe that is simply a cover by left wing union leadership to give support to the miners.

74% think that an unjustified work to rule by railway unions will damage British Rail's business and put a lot of railwaymen's jobs at risk.

72% disapprove of the work to rule plan and 69% think that railwaymen should not take sympathetic action to support the miners.

The public is also strongly opposed to the dock strike. Only 14% think that the dockers have a genuine grievance in the British Steel coal ship incident compared with 76% who think the dock strike is just a move to help the miners.

Overwhelmingly the public and trade union members think that Mr. Scargill has handled the strike badly (80% of the public, and 75% of trade union members).

Seven out of ten people also think that in the recent abortive talks with the NUM the National Coal Board went as far as it could, with only 16% thinking they should have met Mr. Scargill's full demands.

There is also a clear view among a majority of the public (70%) that if the strike goes on long enough, far from offering more concessions, the Government and the Coal Board will harden their position. There is no doubt that the public think that the miners have a great deal to lose by keeping the strike going now.

The survey also shows that the police are given a vote of confidence for their handling of the strike...

75% of people think the police have handled the mass pickets of miners either very or quite well, with only 21% thinking they have handled the situation very or fairly badly.

Only 6% think that the police are responsible for the violence at collieries compared with 61% who blame mass picketing miners and 28% who say both sides are to blame.

Tables.