

Flying pickets defy High Court and return to the pits

● Flying pickets from the Yorkshire coalfield returned in force last night to continue their blockade of Nottinghamshire pits

● They acted in defiance of a High Court injunction granted to the National Coal Board confining them to their own workplaces

● More than 200 pickets clashed with the police at Ollerton colliery, Nottinghamshire, and there was fighting there between pickets and local youths

● The Deputy Speaker of the Commons, Mr Harold Walker, criticized the action of Mr Ian MacGregor, the coal board chief, in the dispute

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Flying pickets from the strike-bound Yorkshire coalfield returned in force last night to continue their blockade of pits in Nottinghamshire in defiance of a High Court order earlier yesterday.

The police and the National Coal Board were initially deceived by a concerted withdrawal by the pickets, who yesterday halted production at another 28 pits. But the strikers returned before the 10pm night shift and there were clashes with the police.

The board is expected to return to the High Court today or tomorrow to complain that the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mineworkers is disobeying the terms of injunctions granted by Mr Justice Nolan restraining them from organizing unlawful secondary picketing.

The court can levy unlimited fines for contempt of its orders made under the 1980 Employment Act, and could make further orders for damages from the Yorkshire miners' £8m assets.

The board was notified by its local management that at the time the night shift was due on, pits all over north and south Nottinghamshire were once again being covered by York-

shire colliers seeking to "picket out" moderate miners who are due to vote in a secret ballot on industrial action over the next two days.

Board sources estimated that between 300 and 400 strikers had descended on the coalfield within hours of Mr Justice Nolan handing down the injunctions forbidding such activity.

Most of the men came from Yorkshire but some were from Scotland and South Wales, suggesting that it was a well-organized movement of pickets from the traditionally left-wing areas of the union. They also moved into Lancashire and management at Parkside colliery near Newton-le-Willows reported that after the Yorkshire pickets were told of the High Court ruling, they telephoned their headquarters in Barnsley and were told to stay there all night before being relieved in the morning.

More than 150 Kent pickets last night succeeded in turning many Leicestershire miners away from their collieries.

Officials of the traditionally moderate area are to call on the union's national executive to hold a national ballot of all 180,000 men in the industry. Under union rules a 55 per cent

majority for an all-out strike is required.

The present strike began in Yorkshire four days ago and has now engulfed three-quarters of the industry, either through sympathy stoppages or through closures after men have been "picketed out".

The board calculated that 133 pits had already been shut before last night's intensive picketing restarted, leaving only 41 still working normally.

The impact of the resumption of unlawful picketing will not be clear until local managements report to the board's headquarters this morning, but the scale of it is understood to be so great that the board will be obliged to go back to court and draw its attention to the widespread and flagrant breaches of its orders.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the union's president, said that the board's legal move was "a clear attack upon the union as a whole". He added: "We feel certain that the use of this legislation will always stiffen the resolve of our members

"Now the NCB has invoked the Tory Government's anti-trade union legislation in an attempt to defeat the union's industrial action, and thus

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setting itself in direct conflict with the national union and all its constituent bodies", he said.

Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the board, told journalists yesterday: "My friend (Scargill) is not interested in the welfare of miners", and when asked how long the strike would last added: "Three months, six months - who knows?"

Miners at the Haig colliery in Cumbria heard yesterday that 580 jobs are to go, leaving only 130 men at work looking for new seams under the Solway Firth. The men are voting today on whether to strike and Mr Harry Hanlon, local agent of the union, said: "They now have nothing to lose by striking".

The Home Secretary, Mr Leon Brittan said yesterday that "considerable" police resources were available to ensure that "anybody who wants to go to work has the right to do so, whether that involves crossing a picket line or not".

He told a press briefing: "It is clear that anybody who tries to obstruct somebody going to work is guilty of a criminal offence.

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor.

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