

Police set to match pickets man for man

By David Walker

The miners' dispute has led to a huge mobilization of police manpower, with some 8,000 officers deployed since last Thursday from more than 20 of the 43 regional police forces in England and Wales.

This total of officers moving to and from the Midlands is considerably more than the figure of 3,000 given by Mr Leon Brittan, Home Secretary, on Friday.

The senior policeman who has organized the deployment from a Scotland Yard control centre spoke yesterday of the most mobile and sophisticated police reserve yet assembled in Britain. He indicated that flying pickets of miners from Yorkshire or anywhere else would be matched man for man by equally mobile officers.

Mr David Hall, Chief Constable of Humberside and controller of the National Recording Centre - the coordinating centre for assistance to forces in the Midlands over the past few days - said: "If a problem moves from point A to point B we would move to assist local police forces as necessary.

"I and my fellow chief constables are resolute in our desire to ensure that law and order is maintained. So far as possible anyone who wishes to work should be allowed to do so."

Mr Hall denied strongly that the police were "being used as a weapon of the Government". The centre was no instrument of political control of the police.



Mr Hall: "We will cope for as long as it takes."

Since the centre was activated on the thirteenth floor of Scotland Yard last Wednesday 8,000 men have been mobilized from police Support Units, which are trained in riot control and now maintained by all forces. A "substantial number" of forces have contributed to the reserve sent to Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Derbyshire; units have brought their own riot equipment.

The cost will bear heavily on the counties requesting assistance. Half will come from the Home Office; the rest will have to be found by ratepayers. The total cost is estimated at about £500,000 a day, or £1½m so far.

Mr Hall gave unprecedented publicity to the existence and workings of the National Re-

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cording Centre. Conceived in the wake of the Saltley power plant episode in 1972 when flying pickets prevented the delivery of coal, the centre has been activated on at least three occasions since to provide manpower for chief constables facing major incidents. Lord Whitelaw paid brief tribute to its work in the House of Commons after the disturbances in Toxteth and Brixton in 1981.

Mr Hall said that on the first full day of operations last Thursday a thousand officers had been mobilized in three and a quarter hours.

The centre is on full alert, with 10 staff, mainly from the Metropolitan Police, working 12-hour shifts. "We will cope for as long as it takes", Mr Hall said.

The centre is theoretically an unofficial body, run by the Association of Chief Police Officers, of which Mr Hall is president. Mr Hall said it had been his decision to activate the centre last week, but the Home Office had been fully consulted through the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Lawrence Byford.

Sir Lawrence has been in

Nottinghamshire over the past few days providing Mr Brittan with a first-hand account of events.

Two Home Office civil servants liaise with the centre, along with other members of the inspectorate. One of these, Mr Stanley Barrett, said yesterday that the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Unit, which can mobilize troops for civil use, was not involved.

Both Mr Hall and his adjutant, Mr Andrew Sloan, Chief Constable of Bedfordshire were at pains to emphasize that they have no operational role in policing the dispute. The convention - which is being rigidly adhered to by Nottinghamshire's Chief Constable, Mr Charles McLachlan - is that the local police force takes control of the mobile reserve. "Policing picket lines is the sole responsibility of the local chief constable", Mr Sloan said.

But the details supplied by Mr Hall of the extent of the operations suggested detailed liaison between local operations chiefs and the centre.

The Home Office was anxious yesterday to dispel any idea that such mobilization constituted the arrival in Britain of a national police force.

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