

# Chaos as miners choke motorway with 5mph crawl

By Craig Seton

Striking miners adopted the tactics of French lorry drivers yesterday and brought chaos to an eight-mile motorway section of the A1 in South Yorkshire by driving 150 cars in convoy down the south-bound carriageway at only five miles an hour.

The protest by Yorkshire miners was described by police as "sheer cussedness" and eighteen of the drivers were arrested for alleged obstruction.

Another convoy of miners mounted a blockade on the M1. About 100 cars joined the motorway at Balborough, on the South Yorkshire/Derbyshire border, and, straddling the three lanes, crawled north for about 10 miles. They left the motorway at the junction with the M18 to Rotherham.

Elsewhere in the coalfields eight policemen were hurt during scuffles on a picket line outside the National Coal Board Area headquarters in Doncaster and in Staffordshire four miners in the Hem Heath Colliery Stoke-on-Trent staged a sit-in 3,000 feet underground to protest against strike action. In the Midlands there were signs that hundreds of miners were defying a strike call by the NUM's Area Council.

The A1 protest started early yesterday when about 150 miners' cars, lined abreast across both lanes of the carriageway and in convoy crawled southwards at a snail's pace for eight miles between Wadworth, South Yorkshire, and the Blyth roundabout on the Nottinghamshire border where they were stopped by police.

The protest was thought to be a retaliation for the action of Nottinghamshire police in stopping flying pickets from Yorkshire at road checks and sending them back.

Yorkshire police closed the affected section of the motorway for two hours to avoid adding to the chaos but hundreds of vehicles were trapped by the block of miners' cars and the tailback of traffic stretched for nearly 12 miles.

Superintendent Peter Owen, of Doncaster police said: "It was sheer cussedness on their part. They were trying to adopt French lorry drivers' tactics but to use it was a straight offence of obstructing the highway."

Some of the miners involved had earlier picketed the Yorkshire headquarters of the National Coal Board in Doncaster where yesterday eight policemen were hurt and 20 miners

arrested. PC Stephen Fairclough, aged 23, collapsed during scuffles and was taken to hospital, but no injuries were found. Seven other policemen received minor injuries caused by heaving and pushing on the picket lines but staff at the headquarters were able to get through to work.

Hundreds of other miners in Staffordshire and Warwickshire yesterday defied the strike call by the Midlands Area of the NUM and ignored angry pickets to keep at least some production going at five of eleven pits.

The Area Executive called on its 13,000 miners to strike despite a 3 to 1 vote against such action in a ballot two weeks ago. Mr Joe McKie, the Area President of the NUM said he expected all pits to be at a standstill by the weekend.

At Lea Hall Colliery, Rugeley, Staffordshire, where about 50 per cent of the morning shift defied angry South Wales pickets and went into work, windows in two coaches carrying workers were broken by pickets, police said last night.

In Nottinghamshire all 25 pits were working normally, but 20 pickets were arrested at the Silverhill Colliery, near Mansfield. In North Derbyshire eight out of nine pits were at a standstill. In South Derbyshire about 1,000 pickets, mostly from the north of the county were at the Cadley Heath Colliery near Swadlincote where normal attendance and production was reported.

The Scottish triple alliance of steel, rail, and mining unions yesterday increased their action in support of the miners' strike by picketing the Ravensraig steelworks, in Lanarkshire. The NUM is to send more pickets today to Inverness and Peterhead where cargoes of up to 1,000 tons of coal have been landed by ship in recent days despite picketing by miners.

● Fifteen miners who clashed with police during the picket in Doncaster yesterday were later fined a total £1,550 at Doncaster Magistrates' Court.

The cases against others were adjourned until April 13, and they were bailed on condition that they do not go within a quarter of a mile of the NCB headquarters in Doncaster. A total of 22 pickets appeared variously accused of breach of the peace, assault and criminal damage.



Rough and tumble: Scenes outside the National Coal Board headquarters in Doncaster yesterday. Above: Police leading away a picket and (below) a tangle of bodies after a fence collapsed.

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