

# Pit strikers would vote to return now, mines survey indicates

By Paul Routledge and Barrie Clement

Soundings of the mood of the miners in two "barometer" coalfields suggest that if a strike ballot was held today there would be a vote for a return to work.

It is notoriously difficult for outsiders to assess the true feelings of pitmen in dispute, but the views of the National Union of Mineworkers' in Lancashire and Derbyshire tends towards a "no-strike" result should the union's executive change course and order a secret pithead poll.

An assessment of opinion taken in informal surroundings by *The Times* labour staff over the past few days in the two areas, which have consistently been closest to the national result in miners' ballots, prompted predictions that the anti-strike majority would be between 50 and 60 per cent of those voting.

In the Labour Club in the pit yard of Golborne colliery, Lancashire, the strikers and those who are still crossing the picket lines are refusing to talk to one another. Their union branch secretary, Mr Ronnie Gaskell, fears for relationships within the colliery when work eventually resumes.

"If Arthur Scargill ballots the membership, they will vote no to a strike", Mr Gaskell argued. "It would be slightly larger than the 59 per cent majority", the figure recorded in a coalfield poll when the dispute began.

It would, therefore, be "stupid" to hold a ballot, he added, and the Lancashire area of the union has called on its 7,000 members not to cross their own picket lines. About 1,000 men in the coalfield were reporting for work last week, but only one pit, Agecroft, near Manchester, was working normally.

The men there have vowed to sign on for their shift every day until a strike ballot is held, but men like Mr Alan Mitchell, aged 46, a Golborne development worker, insists that the miners must support the Scargill line after voting him into the presidency. "We have to back him up; he has never told us any lies, so we have to believe him now."

Mr Peter Varkulis, aged 31, an electrician, was "very sad" to

## Kent leader to appear in court

Mr Malcolm Pitt, president of the Kent miners, is due to appear before Ramsgate magistrates today after being arrested for an alleged breach of bail conditions in going to a power station picket line. He was arrested on Saturday afternoon shortly after arriving at Richborough power station with a visiting Japanese miners' union official to show him the picket line. Mr Pitt, who will be held at a Ramsgate police station until the hearing, and 11 Kent miners had earlier been charged with obstruction and threatening behaviour.

## Village school

Parents at the mining village of Pantyffordd in West Glamorgan, have set up their own school in a village hall after being told that their children's bus fares to a state primary school would no longer be subsidized.

## Denning defence

The police should have a right to defend themselves during violent demonstrations without being accused of brutality, Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, said yesterday. Speaking on TV-am, he commended officers for their handling of the miners' dispute and their action in stopping coachloads of miners from reaching Nottinghamshire pits.

be crossing the picket line, but said that it was a matter of principle, a view which made some of the strikers pick up their drink and leave. That bitterness will remain long after the return to work, union officials fear, as those who struck and those who went in return to their confined underground environment.

In north Derbyshire, the mood of militants and convinced moderates is deeply entrenched and often bitter. There are still those, neverthe-

less, who can be swayed by events.

A national ballot now would probably result in a vote for resumption of work in north Derbyshire, but it would be close. Even local leaders of the union admit privately that a ballot would be finely balanced. There is no talk among the leadership of a vast majority.

The volatility of the situation is illustrated by men such as Mr Ged Vodden, aged 24, an oil sampler at Markham colliery, a "big-hitting" pit complex hard by the M1.

At the start of the strike Mr Vodden was a self-confessed "scab". Mr Scargill and the intimidation of the massed pickets did not stop him going to work, he said.

Now he says he realizes that Mr Scargill is right: "The best man who ever put on a pair of boots." It was the police behaviour on picket lines which convinced him, and a speech by Mr Tony Benn.

But on Friday, at Markham, much to management's surprise, a solitary pitman turned up for work. The National Coal Board predicts that today he should have plenty of company.

Mr Andre Bradley, aged 44, a control room operator, and his son, Garry, aged 18, a haulage worker underground, are convinced that police activity has produced a move towards militancy which would give a big majority in favour of the strike.

Mr Gordon Butler, area secretary of the union, believes a ballot now would be irrelevant "because of the sacrifices that have been made by the people on strike".

The indication of a "No" result from Lancashire and Derbyshire will, if anything, stiffen the resolve of the left not to hold a pithead ballot that could backfire, even though only a simple majority of those voting is required to mount a full strike.

The value of the two coalfields as "barometers" may be overestimated in the present dispute because the sheer size of Yorkshire could make all the difference to the result.

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