

The miners' strike

£4m loss as fire pit is flooded Kinnock pours scorn on 'big bang' protest

By Peter Davenport

National Coal Board engineers yesterday began an emergency operation to pump millions of gallons of water into a colliery to quench a fire raging across an entire coalface in an incident the board attributed directly to the miners' strike.

The action to seal off the fire with a water barrier at Fryston colliery, near Castleford, West Yorkshire, meant that equipment worth almost £4m had to be abandoned.

Mr Michael Eaton, the Yorkshire area director, said: "It is a very worrying development and is directly attributable to the dispute. It is the sort of thing we have warned about for many weeks."

"We have been accused of scaremongering, but now it has happened and with a vengeance. It is the first time in my 30 years' experience in this industry that I have known a whole coalface to be in flames."

At 1.30 yesterday morning automatic monitors on the surface at the colliery detected a build-up of carbon monoxide into a situation known in the industry as a heating.

But by the time a team from the mines rescue organization had arrived and descended, a section of the 83S face in the

highly productive Beeston seam was on fire along a section 60ft long by 6ft high.

The fire had started by spontaneous combustion and there was no chance of fighting it, a coal board spokesman explained.

Fryston Colliery employs 1,000 men and the 83S face produced half the pit's annual output of half a million tons

Earlier yesterday police in Nottinghamshire foiled an apparent attempt by 5,000 flying pickets to besiege the Warsop colliery but only after a pitched battle.

In the early morning darkness up to 2,000 pickets clashed with police, equipped with riot shields, in the village of Cuckney, three miles from the colliery.

As police stopped cars carrying the miners at a road block on the outskirts of the village pickets launched a hail of bricks and stones injuring two officers who were treated in hospital but were released later.

After the violence at Cuckney and Warsop police in Nottinghamshire again blamed pickets organized in Yorkshire. A

spokesman said: "It would appear that some careful planning had gone into the operation as members of the National Council of Civil Liberties and TV were in the area before and during the violence."

● The National Dock Labour Board is to be asked to rule on the dispute about a shipload of 87,000 tons of coal bound for the Hunterston terminal on the Clyde (Ronald Faux writes).

The coal is urgently needed at the British Steel Corporation works at Ravenscraig but the Transport and General Workers' Union dockers and tugboat men have threatened a national dock strike if the ship attempts to unload at Hunterston without their assistance.

The decision to refer the issue to London and a meeting of the Dock Labour Board on Wednesday was taken after lengthy talks in Glasgow yesterday by the West of Scotland Dock Labour Board.

● The National Coal Board in Scotland yesterday said that 94 miners had turned up to work yesterday, the highest figure since the start of the miners' strike.

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

Mr Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party leader, said last night that a "big bang" approach to the miners' dispute, with trade unions joining together in a concerted effort to confront the Government, would be a monumental gamble.

Neither the trade union leadership, nor the membership, would support such a move, he said.

Mr Kinnock, interviewed on the independent television programme *The Week Tonight*, said that some trade unionists might support the big bang theory because there was widespread support for the miners.

But he added: "I don't think the union leadership would go for it because it would be such a monumental gamble, and also because that is not the way British trade unionism works. It would be importing ideas from the United States or the Continent which British trade unionism has never been prepared to accept."

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, last night welcomed the "substantial increase" yesterday in attendance of miners at the Bilston Glen colliery, near Edinburgh, and the record attendance at Warsop, Nottinghamshire.

Inquiry into police role

The National Council for Civil Liberties is launching an inquiry into the policing of the miners' dispute, it was announced yesterday (Michael Imeson writes). But it has already come under attack from the editor of the Police Federation's magazine *Police*, who described the proposed inquiry as biased and "a farce".

Mr Lary Gostin, the general secretary of the NCCL, said yesterday that the inquiry would be independent. Its terms of reference are: "To enquire into and thereby establish the fullest possible account and the civil liberties implications of the role of the police, police authorities and the criminal courts in the events".

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The Times (London, England), Tuesday, Aug 14, 1984; pg. 2; Issue 61909. (830 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS34836238