

Kinnock's 'lack of guts' attacked by Thatcher

By Anthony Bevins, Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister exploited Labour's vulnerability on the coal strike yesterday, accusing Mr Neil Kinnock of humbug on the question of a ballot, and of lacking guts on the issue of picketing violence.

There were strong signs at Westminster last night that Labour, already dragging 9 per cent behind in the latest opinion poll, was beginning to crack under the strain of the dispute.

On the one side, Mr Roy Hattersley's Shadow Cabinet allies showed their delight that the deputy leader had urged greater consultation of the miners by their leadership.

It was said, that Mr Hattersley wanted some formal consultative exercise so that the miners could have their say in the running - or ending - of the dispute.

More than that, it was said to be of vital political importance that the public should be able to

observe the exercise and know that if the strike continued then it was because more than 100,000 miners believed in it.

Mr Kinnock remained silent. Having endorsed Mr Hattersley's initiative, the leader's friends said that it was not for him to say anything.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher's broadside against the beleaguered Labour leader came after he had accused her of humbug for saying she wanted a quick end to the strike.

The Prime Minister said that she could not teach Mr Kinnock anything about humbug. "He said things about a ballot at the beginning of the strike and then we heard virtually nothing about it until a few days ago."

"It took a distinguished trade unionist to condemn violence at a mass meeting of the NUM and Mr Kinnock echoed it from

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a safe distance. Mr Kinnock did not have the guts to go and do it himself."

Meanwhile, ministers were moving in for the kill against Mr Arthur Scargill, NUM president, showing an eagerness to be magnanimous in victory

Commenting on Mrs Thatcher's remarks in the Commons Mr Norman Willis, the TUC general secretary, said last night: "If I have been distinguished for anything since becoming general secretary it is bending all my efforts to try to find a negotiated settlement to this protracted and increasingly bitter dispute. Mrs Thatcher, more than anyone else, has the power to initiate action to that end. That is the response I would like to see from the Prime Minister."

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