

Strike abandoned in N Wales pits

- Pit leaders in North Wales abandoned the strike, putting psychological pressure on other coalfields
- The coal minister said miners were becoming disgusted with a political strike "which relies on Libyan paymasters and Soviet backing"
- The TUC general secretary accused the coal board of pushing and paying miners to go back. The strike will leave hatred "from primary school to the grave"

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Leaders of the North Wales pitmen yesterday became the first area of the National Union of Mineworkers formally to abandon the 37-week-old strike over colliery closures, and a further 940 men across the industry joined the "drift back to work".

Mr Ted McKay, the pitmen's leader, also broke ranks with his national executive colleagues and condemned violence and intimidation in the strike.

Though statistically insignificant, it involves only two pits and 1,000 miners, the Welsh decision is likely to add to the psychological pressures on other coalfield union leaders desperately trying to staunch the haemorrhaging of support for the strike.

Mr David Hunt, coal minister at the Department of Energy, said that increasing number of miners were "voting with their feet" by returning to work. "Deprived of their democratic right over a ballot, they have no alternative," he added.

"Mr Scargill's support is slipping away as increasing numbers of miners become disgusted with a political strike which relies on Libyan paymasters and Soviet backing. More than 63,000 NUM members are not on strike. More than 10,000 have returned to work over the last two and half weeks, rejecting this tragic, pointless, divisive strike."

The return to work was spread fairly evenly across the coalfields yesterday, with the exception of South Wales, where the strike is still almost totally solid.

More than 220 men went back in Yorkshire, bringing the number of working miners in the heartland of the conflict to 1,989, and almost 40 per cent of the 10,000 pitmen in the "barometer" coalfield of North Derbyshire have returned to their jobs, according to the National Coal Board.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' president, accused the Government, the coal board, the judiciary and the police of using the press and broadcasting organizations to attack and cripple the mineworkers' union. "The truth is that over 140,000

miners remain on strike and, despite the weight and savagery of the combined assault on our fight to save pits, jobs and mining communities, we will not be defeated," he insisted.

Transport union leaders last night promised fresh help to the miners in their campaign to halt coal imports, and Mr Norman Willis, general secretary of the TUC, charged the coal board with "lunatic management" over its return to work strategy.

In a speech in Birmingham that did not touch on his earlier, controversial condemnation of violence on the picket lines that prompted South Wales miners to lower a noose in front of his face last week, Mr Willis argued that the present tactics of the

Miner killed

Mr. John Gorman a striking miner, died yesterday after an earth collapse trapped him up to the neck as he dug for coal near his home. Mr Gorman, aged 38, of Milne Avenue, Auchinleck, Ayrshire, and a fellow striker, Mr. William McClelland were digging on an old railway embankment when it collapsed.

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coal board in encouraging miners to return might change the nature of the dispute but would not solve it.

"Pushing and paying people to go back will be a long-term disaster," he said. "I see the hatred being created and, inevitably as each and every miner goes back, that will last from before primary school to the grave. To go back underground with the labour force split every way seems to be lunatic management. Every miner that goes back means another problem, another degree of bitterness."

Coal board spokesman denied the charge, adding: "Mr Willis seems to be implying that the board is in some way forcing the men back to work but it is the men themselves who are deciding to go back and voting with their feet."

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