

The miners' strike

Coal board predicts pithead ballots

By Barrie Clement
Labour Reporter

National Coal Board officials are predicting that there could be pit head ballots within the next few weeks at the heart of the miners' strike in Yorkshire.

Board strategists detect moves in smaller collieries to arrange the kind of referendum which took place at Bersham colliery in North Wales.

All such votes have been declared unconstitutional by the National Union of Mineworkers, but the board has privately told back-to-work activists that premises and facilities would be made available where necessary.

The board does not argue that larger pits will conduct votes, but believes that isolated ballots would receive a great deal of publicity and encourage pitmen to go back.

Officials have received indications that some miners would be prepared to organize votes. It is a question of ascertaining the degree of support for such moves.

Meanwhile the board is attempting to distance itself from the National Working Miners' Committee because of its increasing reputation as the "bosses' men".

It is hoped that strong and traditionally faithful NUM members will increasingly take over the job of persuading men to go back to work.

The committee is sending speakers out to South Wales, Northumberland and Yorkshire in an attempt to encourage men back to work when collieries begin to open between January 2 and 7.

Although the vote at Bersham went in favour of the strike, fewer than half voted and the overwhelming majority are back at work.

Police investigating forged national coal board letter

By Paul Vallyely

The police are investigating a forged letter, purporting to come from the National Coal Board, which has been sent to working miners in Yorkshire.

The letter, which is being widely circulated among strikers in other coalfields as proof of the board's "deceitful unreliability", tells working miners that their full protection cannot be guaranteed away from the board's premises.

It also says that those who have returned to work may have to move, at their own expense, to different coalfields when the strike is over.

The letter bears the signature of Mr Alfred Tuke, the board's Doncaster area director. Yesterday he condemned the letter as a "clever, mischief-making forgery".

The letter states: "I can assure you that the board will endeavour to protect you from any intimidation... in all honesty, this will not last for the rest of your life, and indeed will be continued for only a few weeks after the strike."

It may become necessary to move you to another area or make other arrangements immediately the strike ends. The colliery manager will be speaking to you about this matter. The board will of course pay you the normal transferred worker's allowance but I regret we will not be able to find new accommodation [sic] or pay any removal costs."

If it becomes necessary for you to be transferred more than once to avoid further intimidation at your new pit, then we will of course consider the situation at that time."

The letter was sent to 30 working miners at Brodsworth colliery, near Doncaster, five weeks ago, but it is now being circulated among strikers in the Durham, Derbyshire, and South Wales coalfields, it is believed to be genuine and "proof of perfidy and deceitful unreliability of the NCB".

Yesterday Mr Tuke said: "It is my signature and it is coal board notepaper. They were taken from a genuine letter I

sent out to all the workforce in July."

Mr Tuke wrote to all the working miners concerned and told them the letter was a forgery. "The letter is a complete fabrication aimed at playing on men's fears for the future."

The production and circulation of the document is the latest move in the propaganda battle to win the hearts and minds of the indecisive members of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The union and the board feel that there is all to play for in the coming weeks when the pre-Christmas "drift back to work" will either be accelerated or stemmed. The union makes much of the idea that many of those who returned to work for Christmas bonuses will be back on strike next week.

Union officials talk readily of strikers who have returned to work and then later rejoined the strike, but examples of such men are hard to find.

One such miner at a pit in the Durham coalfield went back to work for only two days, local strikers say, before deciding that the strike was right. In the privacy of his own home the man, who asked that neither his name nor his colliery should be disclosed, told a different story.

"I was out because of loyalty to the union, but when Scargill refused the Nacods settlement I decided to go back. Immediately there were threatening phone calls to my mother, so I rejoined the strike to spare her."

Last night, Mr J H Thompson, an executive member of the union's Yorkshire area, was confident that the 120,000 strikers would remain resolute. That was why, he said, the union did not need to involve itself in forgery. "That was nothing to do with the NUM."

Holiday for miners' children

Two charter flights from Britain landed yesterday at Milan and Bologna airports with 100 British miners' children on board who have been invited for new year holidays by families of Italian trade unionists.

Holiday hospitality is one feature of a campaign of solidarity with striking miners launched by Italian trade unions led by the left-wing confederation CGIL.

Collections of money are being taken among union members for the TUC relief fund for miners' families.

Earlier in December Mrs Anne Scargill, wife of Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the miners' union, spent six days touring Italy.

● Belfast dockers and their employers yesterday ridiculed claims by officials in the National Union of Seamen that they had been "bought off" by huge bonuses to handle foreign coal shipments to Northern Ireland during the miners' dispute.

Mr John Nelson, NUS strike co-ordinator with the National Union of Mineworkers, had criticized what he called the

"mercenary" attitude of dockers in Belfast and said they were earning up to £1,100 a week breaking a trade union embargo on shipments to Belfast.

● Mr Dennis Skinner, Labour MP for Bolsover, who is giving

all his salary to the National Union of Mineworkers, yesterday called on all other Labour MPs to give the 5 per cent pay increase they will receive on New Year's Day to the same cause.

Scargill given apology for Hitler radio gibe

By A Staff Reporter

Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' leader, has received an apology from Capital, a London commercial radio station, after a disc jockey described him as "Hitler number two".

But Capital said yesterday that it did not intend to broadcast a public retraction because the comment was made as light-hearted banter, and an on-air correction would appear to make it serious.

Ms Harriet Harman, Labour MP for Peckham, complained to the Independent Broadcasting Authority about the remark, made on December 1 by Greg Edwards while handing over to another presenter.

The director general of the IBA, Mr John Whitney, a former managing director of Capital, replied: "We find (the remarks) unacceptable. We have spoken to Capital management and understand that the presenter will be spoken to in the strongest terms and that Mr Scargill will be written to with an apology on behalf of the station."

Ms Harman welcomed the comments yesterday, but said that Capital ought to broadcast an apology.

Capital said that Miss Harman was the only person to complain. We have written to Mr Scargill to apologize and we thought Ms Harman was satisfied with that."

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By Barrie Clement Labour Reporter, By Paul Vallely and By A Staff Reporter.

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