



Mr Neil Kinnock with picketing miners at Celynen South colliery, near Newbridge, Gwent.

NCB confident of big return soon

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

Senior National Coal Board officials are becoming increasingly confident that there will be a big return to work next week by striking miners after more than 600 men reported for work in the last two days.

The board is optimistic that there will be marked progress next week towards the point at which the number of working miners exceeds that of those on strike.

Pits in several coal board areas, notably Scotland and Yorkshire, are continuing their holiday break until the weekend and previously the board had said it would not be publishing return to work figures until the holidays were over.

The fact that yesterday the board released details of the return to work is another indication that officials believe there is a gathering momentum of miners wanting to end the strike. A board statement said that yesterday's "new faces" totalling 250 were in line with expectations and it believed miners would continue to return to work.

The number of pits producing at least some coal has risen to 71 out of a total of 174, with the addition of four pits in the North-east in the new year. The board also claimed record

attendances in Yorkshire at 13 pits where 3,106 men reported for work, 70 more than the previous highest attendance just before Christmas.

Some officials of the National Union of Mineworkers are suggesting privately that the main aim during the coming weeks is to prevent the number returning from reaching half the 188,000 workforce, which is seen as a critical psychological barrier. Mr Ian MacGregor, board chairman, has said that once that barrier has been breached he will regard the strike as effectively ended.

TUC leaders remain adamant that the return to work will not produce a conclusion to the strike, but there is little prospect of an early resumption of talks to find a negotiated settlement.

● The board's pleasure at the record attendance in Yorkshire was marred by the failure of deputies at the Shireoak colliery to cross picket lines, preventing NUM men at the pit from beginning underground work leading to a resumption of coal production (Peter Davenport, writes).

The deputies turned back yesterday morning after being abused and threatened by by up to 60 pickets at the pit gates.

Churches put pits plan to Thatcher

From Tim Jones, Cardiff

Ten Welsh church leaders, including two Archbishops, have written to the Prime Minister urging her to set up an independent review body to settle the coal strike.

The Most Rev Derrick Childs, Anglican Archbishop of Wales, the Most Rev John Ward, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cardiff, and eight other leading churchmen in the principality warn Mrs Margaret Thatcher that divisions caused by the dispute could last for generations.

They say the independent body, composed of representatives of the union, the coal board, the Government and other interested bodies, should examine the future of the industry in the context of a long-term energy policy not subject to the vagaries of an undisciplined free market.

According to the churchmen, the establishment of such an independent body would be supported by both the coal board and the union in South Wales.

● Three striking miners, charged with murdering Mr David Wilkie, the taxi driver, who died when a concrete block hit his car as he was driving a miner to work, appeared before Merthyr Tydfil magistrates in

South Wales yesterday.

All three were remanded in custody for seven days. Committal proceedings are likely to begin on January 24.

Anthony Williams, aged 26, of Ty Coch, Rhymney, married with two children and a miner from Markham colliery, was arrested and charged with murder yesterday. An application for bail was refused.

The other men, Russell Shankland, of Manest Street, Rhymney, and Reginald Hancock, of Rhymney Bridge, Rhymney, both aged 21, made no application for bail.

● Mine rescue squads and working miners were fighting an underground fire yesterday at one of Scotland's showpiece pits.

One of the three main faces at Seafield colliery, Kirkcaldy, was seen to be "glowing red and smoking." A coal board spokesman said the £3 million face was "in imminent danger".

● Mr Glynne Deere, a striking miner, of Askern, near Doncaster, collected a £127,682 football pools win yesterday. Mr Deere, aged 34, the father of four children, said he would buy himself a new pair of boots and be back on the picket line on Monday.

NCB confident of big return soon.

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent and From Tim Jones.

The Times (London, England), Friday, Jan 04, 1985; pg. 2; Issue 62027. (763 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS34574372