

# Kinnock 'won't be scapegoat' for pits defeat

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by Michael Jones  
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NEIL KINNOCK, the Labour leader, intends to make it clear he will not be made a scapegoat by his party's hard left for the expected defeat of Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers. Instead, he will insist that lessons will have to be learned from the failure of the 11-month strike, a period which the party leadership is now referring to as "Labour's lost year."

Kinnock's allies are already preparing for the post-mortem on the strike, which they accept will not be settled on terms favourable to the strikers, and have no doubts what the lessons are:

- A clear rejection by the overwhelming majority of trade unionists and traditional Labour voters of attempts to impose industrial mob rule and by-pass democratic processes.
- An end to Labour's over-dependence on manual unions in declining industries.
- A new look at the needs and attitudes of two groups key to any future Labour victory at the polls: skilled manual and white-collar workers.

A swift purge of "Scargill men" by moderate miners of the NUM leadership is also predicted by Labour front-benchers. Arthur Scargill is expected to survive as NUM president, shorn of his militant influence. But Kinnock's allies are adamant that any special pleading by him "will not wash" and that his strategy "is bust".

NUM moderates are determined to ensure that Scargill does not succeed in blaming the strike's defeat on them and the Labour and TUC leaderships. Scargill is thought likely to remain aloof from any settlement accepting uneconomic pit closures but the coal board remains insistent on Tuesday's resumed talks with the union leading to a new pit closure procedure before any settlement can be agreed.

One of Kinnock's close associates said yesterday: "We've moved into a new phase. There's a clear mood that the miners have been beaten. So let's have a decent settlement that provides a viable future for those pits that will remain."

Kinnock yesterday launched a strident attack on Mrs Thatcher who, Kinnock said at Cheltenham, was guilty of spite, selfishness, stupidity, obduracy and an instinct for malice "nothing short of evil".

His attack, at a rally of 2,000 trade unionists to mark the anniversary of the banning of trade unions at the government's CCHQ communications headquarters, was seen by senior Labour figures as a necessary move to boost his party position before turning to the harder job of forcing them to face up to the post-strike lessons.

Kinnock also thinks Labour can gain if Mrs Thatcher appears bent on the NUM's surrender. "She does not want a negotiated agreement, she wants punishment," he said.

Mrs Thatcher had proved that she wanted to use the hardship of strikers wives and children as a weapon to secure political ends. "It is completely destructive, it contradicts the



Sombre Scargill leaving his Worsborough home yesterday

best conventions of the British character and it poisons the prospects for the advance of our country."

Cabinet ministers, however, have been reassured by police and coal board reports that there is far less bitterness in areas of high return to work by striking miners than had been feared.

Peter Walker, the energy secretary, shares the Kinnock camp's view that the major outcome of the strike will prove to be the failure of mob rule - first to close the Nottingham pits which balloted to stay at work, then to stop steel production and later to close the

Oregrave coking plant.

Both party leaderships at Westminster agree that a new NUM could rise from the strike's ashes and that a long period of reconciliation is needed to restore the industry's fortunes.

Revising Labour's fortunes is also seen as a long-term task, and party leaders are thankful that the government has another 2½ years to run before it needs to call a general election.

"How voters feel about the strike will not be uppermost in their minds when that time comes", a leading Labour strategist said yesterday. "But we have lost a year out of the

calendar and the most damaging aspect has been the strike's domination of attention away from other issues."

The latest opinion poll surveys show how much the miners' strike has damaged Labour's position, and underline the party's need to put the strike behind it. A Marplan poll for the Guardian on Friday showed that only 17% of white-collar C1 voters back the NUM in the strike against 54% who back the coal board, while skilled manual C2 category split 42-30% against the union. These are groups that Labour needs to attract if it is to overtake the Tories.

Asked if the strike made them more or less likely to vote Labour, the white-collar voters went 56-9% against Labour while the skilled manuals divided 44-19% against the party.

The breakdown of a Gallup poll for The Daily Telegraph, issued in detail yesterday, has more bad news for Labour. It shows a hardening of opinion against the party on the grounds that people believe it to be too extreme (65%), has poor leadership (65%) and is too divided (75%).

Even more ominously, 53% of those questioned disagreed that Labour is the only party that can turn out Mrs Thatcher's government, a 10% jump since last September.

Labour's post-strike electoral thrust will aim at reversing these trends in time for the May county council elections. The key battleground will be the East Midlands - centre of the anti-Scargill Notts, Derby and Leicester coalfields - where the Conservatives won 34 of the 42 House of Commons seats in the 1983 election.

Labour strategists have no doubt that, however well most working and striking miners adjust to a general return to work, the internal union battle between moderates and hard-liners will be "bloody".

"Throughout the country, Scargill's supporters are going to get it in the neck," said a senior Labour analyst. "The hard-left line that only industrial action could get rid of the Tories and that parliamentary opposition was impotent has patently exploded."

"Kinnock now has a much stronger base against the Trot-skyites and Bennites - if he wants to use it. But we also have to redefine our class analysis. We can win only if we are capable of recognising this and listening to what people are saying."

● Arthur Scargill appealed yesterday to striking miners to remain solid as union leaders go into new negotiations this week, writes Donald Macintyre.

Scargill said in Shafton, Yorkshire, that he hoped that Tuesday's talks would lead to "an acceptable negotiated settlement".

However, Tony Benn struck a different note from the leadership in the Labour party or the NUM. He insisted at Chelmsford yesterday that: "The miners' strike will end quite soon in victory." Appealing for support for the strike, he said that all signs were that the government was "in a panic".

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