

Pit output 'higher than before strike'

By Craig Seton

All 52 Midlands collieries are producing coal for the first time in 11 months, while the western area reported that production and productivity were higher than before the strike, with fewer men working.

Nationally, production reached 667,000 tonnes this week, the best since last March, representing about 30 per cent of the average pre-strike figure.

Three more pits started production yesterday: Renishaw Park in North Derbyshire, Kiveton Park, near Rotherham, and Ashington Colliery, North-umberland.

National coal production is expected to rise significantly over the next few weeks to more than 40 per cent of normal.

In Nottinghamshire, where the national overtime ban is still in force, production reached 340,000 tonnes this week, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the "pre-strike" figure.

North Derbyshire reached

	New faces		Total at work	% at work
	For day	For week		
Scotland	18	207	4,180	33.3
North-east	30	560	6,112	27.6
Yorks	39	465	5,588	11.0
Western	44	115	11,742	83.0
S Wales	0	25	338	1.5
N Derby	37	147	6,348	62.0
S Mid (inc Kent)	0	1	9,485	81.0
Notts	0	9	25,700*	95.0*

*Approximate. Source: NCB

70,000 tonnes, less than half the usual production, while in the south Midlands area (Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, and Warwickshire) about 105,000 tonnes were produced, more than 65 per cent of normal.

Only one in ten of Yorkshire's 50,000 miners are at work, and production was 36,000 tonnes. The average weekly figure before the strike was more than 600,000 tonnes.

More than 30 per cent of miners are at work in Scotland, but production was 10,000 tonnes, one-tenth of normal.

National production will,

however, reach a plateau at some stage if the strike remains strong in Yorkshire, the largest coalfield, South Wales, Scotland and Kent.

After the breakdown of the latest talks, the coal board expects a substantial return to work on Monday.

Officials in the western area, which includes Lancashire, Staffordshire, North Wales and Cumbria, said 83 per cent of its 17,000 miners were working. Its pits will have produced 150,000 tonnes of coal at 2.5 tonne per man-shift. Last year, during the overtime ban, it was producing

142,000 tonnes, at two tonnes per man-shift.

Within the next few weeks production will start at a new £60 million drift mine at Silverdale, near Stoke-on-Trent.

Another 170 miners returned to work yesterday, bringing the total for the week to nearly 1,600. The number of working miners has risen to nearly 80,000 representing about 42 per cent of NUM membership, the board says.

● Two striking Derbyshire miners who ambushed a working colleague by stringing a plastic cable across the road in front of his motor cycle in August were sentenced to 18 months' youth custody at Derby Crown Court yesterday. Simon Brookes, aged 18, and Robert Travis, aged 19, both from Killamarsh, worked at Whitwell colliery.

The rider, Mr Philip Wheelhouse, was not hurt.

Cool response to NUM 'initiatives'

In a letter sent to Mr M. Spanton of the National Coal Board yesterday the NUM said: I am in receipt of your letter dated January 31 1985, and must express great disappointment at the board's response to the union's initiatives. The five proposals of the union are undoubtedly positive initiatives to provide the basis for resumed negotiations, and pay due regard for what has taken place in the industry over the past eleven months.

1. **Plan for coal:** This proposal is based upon previous submissions by the board which have been accepted by the union.

2. **Future of collieries/units:** The union's proposal takes account of the board's own suggestions when we met with Acas. This would provide for all matters relating to the future of collieries/units to be dealt with in accordance with procedures operating prior to March 6 1984, and of course the union have previously accepted an amendment to the procedures to provide for an independent review body, and we feel that the broad recognition given to this proposal during informal discussions could lead to agreement in negotiations.

3. **Five collieries:** The union's proposal accepts that these five pits

remain within the procedure on the understanding that undertakings given by the board within the procedure will be honoured. This new proposal also provides for any unforeseen major mining problems to be discussed in the normal way, and we feel this point is manifestly fair and sensible.

4. **March 6 proposals:** The union's proposal is, of course, a statement of the present situation and has been publicly acknowledged by the board's spokesman, Mr Eaton, in an Independent Radio News interview on January 31.

5. **Amnesty:** It is inconceivable that in any discussions leading to a resolution of this dispute that the question of dealing with those men who have been dismissed in the course of the dispute cannot be a matter for discussion between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers. Indeed, in my meeting with Mr Smith on January 21, it was acknowledged that the union would pursue this matter when negotiations resumed. It seems a matter of equity that the same principle applied in 1972 and 1974 be applied in the current situation.

I find your refusal to resume negotiations without preconditions

extremely disappointing. Should the board change its mind, however and decide that it does want to see a settlement of this dispute, I reiterate that the union's national executive committee is available for talks at any time.

Yours sincerely,
P. E. HEATHFIELD,
Secretary

'No grounds' for new discussions

A statement issued by the NCB yesterday said:

The National Coal Board regret that the National Union of Mineworkers have provided no further grounds to enable the present round of discussions to continue, because they have publicly and rigidly refused to move from their impossible demand that all uneconomic pits should remain open.

The board remain ready to resume negotiations when the union make it clear they are prepared to have meaningful talks to accept the procedure to deal with the problem of uneconomic coal mining capacity. This is the central issue to resolve in order to reach a negotiated

settlement of the NUM's dispute. However, in all the correspondence of the past few days, a procedure to deal with uneconomic capacity has not once been mentioned by the union.

A way to deal with the problem of uneconomic capacity is the essential issue in view of the many public statements that have been made by the leaders of the NUM. The board made it clear to the union, at Tuesday's informal talks and in writing, that they required the NUM to put forward proposals to provide a basis for the board to determine that it was worthwhile to enter negotiations to reach a settlement of the dispute. No such proposals have been put forward by the NUM.

It transpired there was nothing new in the points raised by the union, apart from seeking an amnesty for dismissed employees - and the board have made it clear that this can form no part of discussions leading to a resolution of the dispute.

The board re-affirm their commitment reached with the officials' union Nacods. This includes a re-examination of the colliery review procedure to improve its effectiveness.

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