

# Scargill still miners' choice

by Donald Macintyre and Roger Ratcliffe

ARTHUR SCARGILL would comfortably win an election as president of the National Union of Mineworkers if it took place tomorrow, according to a poll of miners taken within two days of the year-old coal strike's end last week. But a majority of those who already see the strike as ending in defeat blame Scargill or the union leadership.

The poll, carried out by Market Opinion Research International for Channel Four Television's Union World, also shows that while almost all miners believe that at least some miners should be reinstated, 60% believe that only those guilty of lesser offences should be taken back. Only 36% of miners support all miners being reinstated, irrespective of the offence.

The poll findings were revealed last night after miners in Kent, the last area to hold out support of an amnesty for sacked strikers, voted to return to work on Monday. Only about 30 of the 1,000 miners at the meeting in Ramsgate voted to stay out. Several thousand Nottinghamshire miners worked their first overtime shift in 15 months yesterday after their area leaders' decision to defy

national policy and lift their ban.

The new poll of 739 miners shows that 57% of NUM members would vote for Scargill in a ballot; 30% said they would vote for another candidate and 10% did not know. Scargill was elected in December 1981 with a 70% majority. The turnout was 80%, so 56% of eligible NUM members voted for Scargill then.

Under the union's rules, Scargill is president until he retires, in the year 2004. But there will be concerted pressure on him to conform with the Trade Union Act 1984 by submitting himself for re-election within five years of taking office. The union can be taken to court - and in the long term have its assets sequestered again - if it fails to comply.

Only voting members of the union's executive fall within the act and Scargill could avoid its provision if the union changed its rules to deprive him of his casting vote.

The poll shows that most miners had not, last week, reached a clear conclusion

about the outcome of the strike.

Only one in four considered it a defeat, while one in seven saw it as a victory. By far the biggest group, 61%, saw it as neither.

The most worrying result for Scargill is that of the group which saw the outcome as a defeat. Unprompted, 45% blamed Scargill. A further 17% blamed the "NUM leadership". A small proportion of these blamed both.

Significantly, only 1% blamed the TUC and only 1% blamed "other unions" for the defeat. Nine per cent blamed the working miners, 12% Mrs Thatcher, 13% "the government" and 9% Ian MacGregor, the chairman of the National Coal Board.

Scargill claimed yesterday in Chesterfield that men who were jailed for offences connected with the pits' strike were "political prisoners".

He called on the Labour party to give a commitment to an amnesty if, and when, it returns to power. "The next Labour government should wipe the slate clean," he said.

Scargill insisted that after "the most expensive strike in the history of the world" the dispute was not at an end.

Coal board managers expect strong internal pressure on the NUM executive to call off the 15-month-old overtime ban so that negotiations on pay - dating back to October 1983 - can begin. Some senior board officials favour a three-year deal for November 1983-86, but others argue that once pay for last year and this has been settled, talks should begin on a long-term deal which could guarantee stability for at least two more years.

Privately, senior board managers expect the overtime ban to start crumbling at individual pits in the Midlands, Lancashire and even parts of Yorkshire.

● Andrew Hogg writes: The home secretary, Leon Brittan, has called for an urgent report on an attack on the wife of a rebel South Wales miner. He said he was "deeply shocked" by the incident.

Joy Watson, 42, narrowly escaped serious injury on Friday when a concrete block was thrown through the passenger window of her car, and landed between the front seats.