

# Miners' leaders will back all areas that strike

From David Felton, Labour Correspondent, Sheffield

Miners' leaders yesterday officially backed next week's strike in the Yorkshire and Scottish coalfields.

They also took the unusual step of declaring support in advance for strike decisions in other areas of the National Union of Mineworkers which are holding key meetings during the next two days.

The first step aimed at pushing the miners towards a national confrontation over pit closures was agreed by the union executive meeting in Sheffield, which at the same time heard the improved redundancy terms announced less than 24 hours earlier by the Government to persuade younger miners to leave the industry.

The terms being introduced at the end of the month guarantee £1,000 for every year of service to miners aged between 21 and 50 who agree to take voluntary severance, which in some cases amounts to a threefold increase on the present arrangements.

The first of the area meetings is in Cardiff today. Delegates from the militant South Wales coalfield will decide whether to strike with their colleagues from Yorkshire and Scotland next week.

Mr Emlyn Williams, the union's South Wales president, proposed the move at yesterday's executive meeting to support the northern strikes, and this may be a pointer to the possible outcome of the Cardiff meeting.

The moderate Lancashire and Nottinghamshire areas meet tomorrow but Yorkshire

members said last night that if miners in neighbouring Nottinghamshire did not join the strike they would send pickets to close the collieries.

Mr Ray Chadburn, the union's Nottinghamshire president, who has said his members will be instructed not to cross picket lines, had a rough reception from about 200 miners lobbying yesterday's meeting and shouting: "Scab".

Mr Michael McGahey, the Scottish miners' president, said after the six-hour meeting: "I think it is a situation that will escalate".

The executive backed the Yorkshire and Scottish strikes after a right-wing attempt to commit the union to a ballot of its 180,000 members with a recommendation for a national strike was heavily defeated.

Only Mr Trevor Bell, general secretary of the union's white-collar section, who proposed the move designed to outflank the militants, Mr Ted McKay, of North Wales, and Mr Roy Ottey, of the Midlands power group, voted for the ballot.

The decision to support area strikes was taken under the rule allowing the executive to back strike decisions by area councils.

Militants hope that with the official backing there will be a "domino" effect and other areas will go for stoppages. The tactic also avoids having to call a national ballot in which the executive would need a 55 per cent vote for a national strike.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the union's president, said the executive took its decision in

response to the "belligerent" attitude of the National Coal Board and its chairman Mr Ian MacGregor, who on Tuesday announced a four-million-tonne cut in production next year threatening the future of 20 pits and 20,000 jobs.

A statement by the executive said: "No area is safe and none will escape from the 'MacGregor Plan'. Areas such as Yorkshire, north Nottinghamshire, the Midlands, as well as coke works, workshops, transport departments and the offices of clerical staff will all be affected."

The redundancy plan laid before the House of Commons in a Parliamentary Order on Wednesday is bound to prove attractive to younger miners who until now have been offered a severance scheme much inferior to the early retirement payments available to older miners.

Many miners in yesterday's lobby - from the 14 south Yorkshire pits which have been on strike all this week - said the scheme would encourage many more men to leave.

A miner aged 39, with 19 years' service, would get a lump sum payment of £19,000, compared with a £7,467 payment under the present scheme.

A miner aged 25, with at least five years, would expect less than £600 but under the new scheme would get £5,000.

Mr Scargill urged members not to be tempted by higher payments, which he described as selling "the job prospects of their sons and daughters".

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