
Scargill spurns MacGregor offer on closures

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Miners' leaders yesterday spurned an olive branch offer of talks on pit closures offered by Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the National Coal Board, and promised to intensify their "rolling strike".

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) dismissed the coal board proposal to phase 20,000 redundancies over a longer period as "nonsense" and added: "As far as I'm concerned, pit closures and job losses are not negotiable".

National officials of the union will boycott a meeting in London today of the Coal Industry National Consultative Council at which the coal board had hoped to discuss extending the April, 1985, deadline for shutting about twenty "uneconomic" pits.

The decision came as a blow to private diplomatic efforts by the coal board to get talks going on slimming the industry. Mr MacGregor launched his peace initiative at a meeting with unions representing pit deputies and managers last week. But it appears to have suffered a swift demise.

Mr Scargill said last night: "I am making it perfectly clear that we are not prepared to sit down and negotiate pit closures or reductions in manpower. We are not attending the consultative council because it has no power, no authority, and no right to negotiate."

His union is drawing a clear distinction between the consultative machinery under which today's meeting will be held - chiefly to talk about research and development - and the more formal conciliation procedure under which wages and jobs are negotiated.

"If Mr MacGregor or the

Production stops at power station

West Thurrock, one of the major power stations serving London and the South-East, has stopped feeding power into the national grid.

The Central Electricity Generating Board said last night that the 1.2 megawatt station has been taken out of operation because of the seasonal fall in demand for power.

But miners from the Kent coalfield who have picketed the power station, blame a lack of coal supplies.

board wish to have further discussions within the normal agreed procedure of the conciliation scheme, bearing in mind they broke off negotiations, then all they have to do is pick up the phone and this union will meet them," Mr Scargill said. But in no circumstances would the mineworkers' union

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Scargill spurns pit offer

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negotiate about pit closures or reductions in manpower.

The coal board floated the idea of an extension of the one-year time limit for colliery shutdowns, but Mr MacGregor made plain to the management unions that the overall target of 20,000 job reduction and closure of four million tonnes of capacity must stand.

The board is pinning considerable hopes on the fact that miners in moderate areas are still reluctant to follow the strike call issued by a union delegate conference last week.

All seven pits open after the Easter holidays in Nottinghamshire yesterday were producing coal, though there was heavy picketing at two - Clipstone and Sherwood - and four arrests were made. In all, 14 pits were working, the remainder in Leicestershire, North Wales, and Cumberland.

After the less-than-lukewarm response to the strike call in traditionally moderate areas, NUM national officials will renew their efforts to spread the strike into Nottinghamshire.

In advertisements placed in newspapers circulating in the coal fields, the coal board sought yesterday to put its side of the story.

"In 12 months' time the industry's output and demand will be in balance. We shall then attack the market to increase sales. Our objective will be a minimum capacity of 100 million tonnes a year."

In 1983-84 the number of jobs was cut by 20,000 without anyone who wanted to stay in the industry having to leave it, and those who chose to go received the most generous compensation terms ever offered to industrial workers in this country, the board argued.

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