

Unease over Labour levy for miners

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

The Labour Party's decision to back the miners with a suggested 50p weekly levy of its members is likely to create a precedent.

Party leaders accepted yesterday that other unions would probably be backed in similar disputes where employers such as the National Coal Board, had indicated their readiness to engage in a long struggle.

Although some shadow cabinet members were expressing astonishment yesterday at the national executive committee

Mr Kinnock repeated, however, that he favoured a national ballot on the strike, which would give cohesion to miners' efforts to try to prevent pit closures.

Dr David Owen, leader of the Social Democratic Party, said last night that the Labour levy was "as open a political endorsement of strike action as anything we have seen since 1926".

Constituency parties welcomed the levy decision (Robin Young writes). But even the best organized admitted that there would be logistical problems collecting the money.

Many parties involved in district council elections have only one meeting before they formally disband to concentrate on elections for the European Parliament.

Many parties have taken collections for the miners, or have volunteered other help.

Wigan Labour Party raised more than £1,000 last weekend for miners on strike in Lancashire. It has "adopted" the Bold colliery with the objectives, according to the agent, Mr Ian McCartney, "of sustaining the strike and doing the best we can to alleviate hardship".

Holborn and St Pancras Labour Party has given £511.

The agent, Mr David Gardner, said: "We welcome the national executive's decision, and will ask members to donate 50p in our next newsletter, but a lot is going to depend on individuals making their own response".

In Peterborough, the Labour Party has called on members to give miners' children accommodation for a week over half-term. The call for a 50p levy will be considered "as a matter of urgency" at the next meeting, on May 19.

Darlington Labour Party, whose general management committee met on Wednesday is one of the few to have pledged support for the appeal. A collection among the general committee raised £45, and branch circulars requesting 50p subscriptions will be going out "over the next day or so".

Nottinghamshire Police Committee, which is Labour controlled, decided yesterday to cut spending by £2m to compensate for the cost of policing the miners' strike, estimated at £12m.

Police stations below subdivisional level will be "moth-balled"; vacancies frozen; site purchases and the computerization programme deferred; and the force will withdraw from the regional crime intelligence system. The police have been asked to make savings on prosecution costs and communications.

The Chief Constable, Mr Charles McLachlan, said he was gravely concerned by the cuts, the effects of which would become progressively more serious. They would cause operational problems and stop development.

decision on Wednesday to call for a levy, Mr Neil Kinnock made clear his support.

He said on *The World at One* that the money, which could exceed £100,000 a week, would be used to relieve the hardship of miners' families.

Some of Mr Kinnock's colleagues were privately expressing concern at the dangers of the party being seen to ally itself so firmly with a divided union.

The executive's decision not to attach conditions to the money risked accusations that the party was financing flying pickets, some Labour MPs felt.

But Mr Kinnock emphasized several times that the money would go to those most badly affected.

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Mr Arthur Scargill making an aside to photographers while waiting for marchers to catch up during a rally at Blyth, Northumberland, yesterday.

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