

Scargill says only 8 weeks' coal left

By Our Labour Reporter

Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' leader, claimed last night that coal supplies are down to eight weeks and miners were clearly winning the dispute.

Addressing a meeting at Gronant, near Prestatyn, north Wales Mr Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers, said that it was only the refusal of some miners to accept the democratic strike decision that was enabling power stations to function at all.

Promising intensified picketing during the next week, including the Point of Ayr Colliery, he said that the dispute had so far cost the British taxpayer £1,350m enough to keep every pit open for the next 10 years.

As the strike enters its ninth week a top-level trade delegation from Poland is due to arrive in what is thought to be an "opportunistic" attempt to sell coal.

Poland, which has a contract already to sell the British Steel Corporation a grade of coke which the National Coal Board could not offer, is now trying to break into the long-term domestic market.

It is feared that wholesalers will agree to three-year contracts with Poland in order to replenish stocks depleted since the miners started their overtime ban last November.

The coal board feels that this will undermine its ability to fulfil its promise to the National Union of Mineworkers to maintain a given productive capacity and may create an extra threat to jobs.

Mr Bill Sims, general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, said yesterday that his members would use whatever fuel their employers could obtain to keep the blast furnaces and coke ovens going at Ravenscraig, Scunthorpe and Llanwern.

Interviewed on *The World This Weekend* on radio, he said: "Our job is to use material provided by our employer. It is not our job to intervene in any picketing."

"My people have no intention of letting this industry fall back into the position it was in when Mr MacGregor was with us."

The strike could produce fresh violence today at the Ravenscraig works, near Glasgow, where a mass bank holiday picket is expected.

The coal board disclosed that it had received 2,000 inquiries about voluntary redundancy payments through its telephone answering service in Northumberland and Durham. It intends to extend the idea to other coalfields.

● The Prime Minister, also interviewed on *The World This Weekend*, said that there was no chance of government intervention in the dispute. "In a free society people must be presumed to intend the consequences of their own action. They must know that if they go on strike, it is going to cost them jobs," she said.

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