

# Government backs MacGregor tactic

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent<sup>2</sup>

The Government yesterday gave firm public support to the attempt by Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the National Coalboard, to break the 15-week miners' strike, and indicated that ministers share his confidence that a return to work will gather pace next week.

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, voiced the Government's support for Mr MacGregor's strategy of appealing directly to every miner over the heads of the National Union of Mineworkers. "I believe the miners in this country recognize that they are being used for the political purposes of Arthur Scargill", he said on BBC Radio's Jimmy Young programme in a reference to the NUM's president.

The political conflict in the two main parties' approach to the dispute sharpened later when Mr Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader, accused the Prime Minister of being the "ringleader" of violence on miners' picket lines. He said on a BBC North-east television programme: "My colleagues in the House of Commons earlier this week called her the ringleader of the violence and in a very direct sense Mrs Thatcher is."

As the political arguments continued there were fears about the growing impact of the coal and coke blockade of steel plants. Supplies at Llanwern in south Wales were said to be in a critical state and local miners' leaders appealed to railway

workers to "black" deliveries of iron ore to the complex next week in retaliation for the British Steel Corporation's decision to take coal into the plant in convoys of lorries yesterday.

Leaders of the NUM and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation are to meet next week to seek an agreement on the level of deliveries to the steel plants, but Mr Bill Sirs, ISTC general secretary, said last night that he was not optimistic.

Steel union leaders were angry that the miners, backed by transport unions rejected Mr Sirs' appeal for the blockage to be lifted during the talks.

The transport unions have threatened to halt iron ore supplies to the steel plants if the ISTC does not agree to NUM demands that sufficient coal should be allowed only to maintain blast furnaces but no production. A decision to implement that threat would quickly lead to the shutdown of many furnaces.

● A striking miner at Coventry colliery was dismissed by the coal board yesterday for allegedly assaulting a working foreman on the picket lines. (the Press Association reports). Fellow strikers demanded his reinstatement, but a coal board spokesman said he would remain dismissed for gross misconduct. However his case could be considered in the normal process of union negotiations.

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