

The miners' strike

Steelmen defy Scargill

From Tim Jones, Llanwern

The steel workers of Llanwern defied Mr Arthur Scargill's call to halt all production yesterday and said they were not prepared to allow the miners to turn their community into an industrial desert.

As the rail blockade on all iron supplies to the plant began to bite, the steelmen said they would use any supplies from any source to maintain the works.

The trade union committee at the plant, representing more than 4,000 workers, believe they are faced with a desperate situation.

One battery of coke ovens at the works has already collapsed and others are in danger. But far more crucial, the blockade is threatening the two huge blast furnaces which are vital for the production of steel.

Mr Peter McKim, committee chairman, said: "Any lengthy disruption could result in the loss of one or both of them. If this were to happen then the future would at the very least, be bleak."

The committee, representing the seven unions at the plant, decided to make public its fears after the collapse of an agreement it had with the South Wales branch of the National

Union of Mineworkers to provide enough supplies to maintain the plant in good and safe working order.

Mr John Stephens, the Steel Union Cold Mill representative, said: "Arthur Scargill has called us traitors but he does not realize we have been out collecting for our miner brothers."

"There are people here whose fathers are miners and we are not out to criticize them. But many of us have got children here and we have to care for them."

"I think the miners in South Wales realize this but unfortunately they have been overturned at national level. We have been singled out because we are the easiest to hit."

Mr McKim said that the plant has shed 5,000 men to survive and after that sacrifice they were not prepared to see it die a slow death.

He added that the jobs of at least 6,000 miners at six pits depended on Llanwern. "It is quite wrong for people to assume that Llanwern is dependent on the Welsh coalfield for future supplies."

The plant, which normally receives 27,000 tonnes of coal

and coke a week, has been getting only half that amount supplied by lorries from Port Talbot, 50 miles away. To move the 50,000 tonnes of iron ore a week which the plant normally receives by train would require 500 lorries a day.

Yesterday none of the trains scheduled to run into the works would pass the picket line.

● Mr Tony Benn has backed down on his call for wildcat strike action and a national Labour demonstration in support of the miners. A meeting of Labour's national executive was told yesterday (Anthony Bevins writes).

It appeared that by calling for widespread industrial action, adding that "no one need wait for permission to begin" by suggesting a joint NUM-Labour national demonstration, Mr Benn had overstepped the mark.

He had successfully alienated the union barons and Labour leaders, who preferred to take their own decisions.

In a substitute resolution he suggests that the Labour executive should consult urgently with the NUM with a view to launching a joint national campaign to explain the full strength of the Miners' case

Pledge for rail unions on coal transport

The National Union of Mineworkers has assured railway unions that when the pit strike is over it will allow coal to be carried from pit heads by rail only. There are fears that the National Coal Board plans to switch transport to road (David Felton writes).

Leaders of the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen will also press the steelworker's union to ensure that the bulk of steel freight transport goes to British Rail.

Mr Arthur Scargill, NUM president, has said that the miners will need to repay debts to the transport unions which are blockading steel works.

Mr Jimmy Knapp, NUR general secretary, believes that the coal board and British Rail are discussing switching some coal transport to lorries.

£60,000 shoe fund for children

Doncaster Council, in South Yorkshire, is making up to £60,000 available to buy shoes for the children of striking miners and Labour-controlled Sheffield City Council was under attack yesterday from Conservatives and ratepayers for its decision to donate £100,000 to a fund set up to ease the hardship of miners' families (Craig Seton writes).

The Labour controlled Doncaster Council has used the Education Act to establish a scheme for shoe vouchers worth up to £10 each for children whose fathers are on strike.

The council leader, Mr James MacFarlane, said: "The Education Act allows councils to provide clothing for children in need."

Conservatives in Sheffield will ask the district auditor to investigate whether the decision to donate the £100,000 is legal.

Sit-in Kent miners are dismissed

The National Coal Board yesterday dismissed another striking miners for gross misconduct bringing to 43 the number who have lost their jobs after sit-in protests at collieries (Craig Seton writes).

The men had occupied the control room at Tilmaston Colliery, Kent, for the day. Twenty-nine miners from Bette-shanger Colliery, also in Kent, were sacked on Tuesday, together with five striking miners from Whitwell Colliery in Derbyshire.

The Board reported the biggest turnover of miners since the strike began in North Derbyshire.

With about 10,000 miners in north Derbyshire, the drift back to work, although slow, has been growing by the day and 633 men reported for work on three shifts within 24 hours. A spokesman said: "Four weeks ago the figure was barely 200."

The miners' strike.

From Tim Jones.

The Times (London, England), Thursday, Jun 28, 1984; pg. 2; Issue 61869. (950 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS34967260