

The miners' strike

Lorry drivers defy union advice

By Our Labour Correspondent

The impotence of the Transport and General Workers' Union in persuading its lorry drivers to join the blockade of the steel plants highlights the problems faced by Britain's largest union in imposing national policy decisions on a reluctant membership.

The lorry drivers' decision to ignore advice from Transport House - the union is not allowed under rule to instruct its membership - to join rail unions in the blockade has been taken in spite of threats that they will face disciplinary action when the miners' strike is over.

Union members taking supplies in to the Llanwern plant in Gwent, south Wales, have been warned by the union's regional committee that they face a £30 fine each time they cross an official National Union of Mineworkers' picket line. That means that on each trip, involving crossing picket lines at Llanwern and Port Talbot coal depot, drivers face fines of £60 a day.

Failure to pay the fines would

lead to a disciplinary hearing before the regional committee which would recommend to the general executive council, based in London, that the members involved should lose their union cards. However, union officials privately acknowledge that it is unlikely to happen because of divisions within the union over support for the miners.

The policy of supporting the mineworkers' fight against pit closures emanates from the executive. It has twice called on its members to give moral, financial and physical support.

Executive decisions are passed down to 11 regional committees that in turn instruct district organizers to put the policy into practice. It is the last chain of command that has broken down in the present dispute.

Disaffection with the union's stance on the strike is unlikely to lead to mass defections because TUC rules prevent union transfers during a dispute.

Labour curb on policing pit strike

By Staff Reporters

Relations between Labour local authorities and police over the policing of the miners' strike touched a new pitch of bitterness yesterday with the imposition of financial restrictions on Mr Peter Wright, chief constable of South Yorkshire, aimed at limiting his freedom of operation.

The controls, imposed by the police authority in South Yorkshire, scene of the violent clashes at Orgreave, near Sheffield, prevent Mr Wright from spending any money on the dispute without the authority's approval. The Police Federation condemned them.

● The Merseyside Police Authority has backed down from its plan to take its Chief Constable, Mr Kenneth Oxford, to court over his policing of the miners' dispute.

● Three rebel mining officials in Staffordshire, suspended by the Midlands union from holding office for five years for refusing to strike, will have their challenge to the decision heard in the High Court on Monday.

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