

Pit leaders seek backing for big pay increase

From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, Perth

Miners' leaders last night agreed on a sizeable new pay claim, backed by the threat of strike action, which will be put to their delegate conference today.

With only one dissenting vote the 24-strong executive of the National Union of Mineworkers agreed in Perth to demand "substantial increases" in wages from November 1, together with consolidation of incentive bonuses into basic rates.

The resolution being recommended by the executive argues that wages are not the cause of inflation and that an increase in purchasing power is needed for miners. Failure to agree on an increase regarded as "substantial" would lead to a special delegate conference being called, at which a proposal for strike action would be formulated.

The pay package demand had the backing of left-wing and moderate coalfields alike, with only the Midlands area standing out against it on the grounds that the claim does not incorporate flat-rate increases across the board for all pitmen.

At a social function last night the miners' leaders agreed that the wage resolution must be supported, but there were serious reservations about the prospects of winning a pithead ballot in favour of a strike to give effect to such demands.

The NUM's claim for "substantial" wage rises marks a shift in policy away from previous years when the left insisted upon precise cash dimensions to the annual demand. This policy, it is argued, has outlived its usefulness and so no figures appear in the 1983 claim.

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the NUM, yesterday admitted past mistakes and called for the mass politicization of his union's 220,000 members in readiness for extra-parliamentary action against government policies.

In his presidential address to the conference he conceded for the first time that the union had taken for granted the wholehearted support of its members in the two abortive strike ballots last winter.

But he said that miners would have to take "direct action" to save their jobs and insisted: "We need to put politics back into the centre of our activity."

Mr Scargill's second presidential address, delivered in a cooler and less demagogic manner than his first in Inverness last year, suggests that more calculating Mr Scargill is emerging from the setbacks of defeat at the hands of his members.

Delegates will tomorrow endorse a proposal for yet another strike ballot, but it will leave the NUM national executive the freedom to go to the pithead polls "at an appropriate

time" - that is, when they feel they are most likely to win.

"A fight back against this Government's policies will inevitably take place outside rather than inside Parliament", Mr Scargill said. "When I talk about 'extra-parliamentary action' there is a great outcry in the press and from leading Tories about my refusal to accept the democratic will of the people.

"I am not prepared to accept policies proposed by a government elected by a minority of the British electorate. I am not prepared quietly to accept the destruction of the coal industry, nor am I willing to see our social services utterly decimated.



Mr Scargill: Admitted ballot errors.

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This totally undemocratic Government can now easily push through whatever laws it chooses. Faced with possible parliamentary destruction of all that is good and compassionate in our society, extra-parliamentary action will be the only course open to the working class and the Labour movement."

Mr Scargill was applauded when he accused branch officials of being too ready to give in to the lure of redundancy instead of fighting proposed closures.

"This is a fundamental problem which our union has not confronted. The time has come to stand up and face it. We must begin a campaign and start a far-reaching educational programme to win our members wholeheartedly for the fight to defend this industry and their own jobs."

Mr Scargill then confessed: "I believe we have fallen into the trap of taking that wholeheartedness for granted - something we must never do again."

● Mr Scargill criticized the "pin-striped smoothies" who had invested his members' pension funds in video "nasties" without their knowledge (the Press Association reports).

He said that as a result the NUM had refused to sign the pension fund's annual accounts.