

Miners set to defy court over militant meeting

● The NUM intends to discuss disciplinary moves at a militant policy conference today in defiance of a High Court order.
 ● Draft agreements to end the miners' strike have been published, with divergences, by both the coal board and union

● Britain's major ports are at a standstill as dockers obeyed a strike call to protest against the use of non-registered labour.
 ● Police and a large crowd clashed in a West Yorkshire mining town yesterday after £100,000 of damage was caused to a driftmine

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From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, Sheffield

Miners' leaders last night set themselves on a fresh course of legal confrontation by defying a High Court judgement that they must not change union rules so as to discipline men who have defied the strike call.

Sir Robert Megarry, the Vice-Chancellor, ruled that the National Union of Mineworkers' extraordinary delegate conference starting today in Sheffield must not vote on or adopt a rule change introducing new disciplinary procedures.

But Mr Michael McGahey, the union's vice-president, made clear that it would defy the ruling.

"I do not know what power he has got to decide what our union does. We will carry on with the conference and with the democratic procedures we have established over many years."

When told of the judge's decision, Mr Sid Vincent, moderate leader of the Lancashire miners, said: "Whatever the judge says it won't make the slightest difference. There will be an overwhelming decision in favour of the change of rule no matter how Nottinghamshire decided to vote."

The NUM leadership appreciates that there is a risk of contempt of court in going ahead with the conference agenda as it stands, but is seems certain to do so. The court order lasts until next Tuesday, when the case comes back to court.

This morning at the Sheffield conference a vote will be taken on the controversial rule change introducing the so-called "Star Chamber" disciplinary tribunal.

But the High Court ruling is unlikely to have any immediate effect as the NUM is directing its energies towards strengthening the strike rather than towards disciplining members who have continued to work. It still remains possible however, for the "dissident" Nottinghamshire miners who have continued working to make a fresh complaint to the court that NUM leaders have acted in contempt of its instructions, leaving the NUM and its officials open to unlimited fines.

The conference is certain to endorse an emergency resolution unanimously approved by the executive which opposes all pit closures other than on grounds of seam exhaustion, and any reduction in manpower. This is designed to give fresh impetus to the strike.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the union president, last night denied that the new disciplinary rule had anything to do with the dispute. It had been agreed by last year's conference.

Miners leaders meeting in Sheffield last night were clearly less excited about the court moves than the prospect of a very much longer strike. Mr Scargill insisted: "We are not, we will not, have not and shall

not discuss the question of economic pit closures. The only closures we are talking about are those where exhaustion of reserves has taken place."

The National Coal Board had indicated orally that it would withdraw its closure programme, but was reluctant to put that on paper, he said. But the union would ask for an agreement on these lines when it met Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the NCB next Wednesday.

The latest legal crisis in the dispute blew up when 17 working miners from the Nottinghamshire coalfield who have been elected to the 31-man area council applied yesterday for court orders to restrain the union from going ahead with its plan for the new disciplinary procedure.

The conflict came out into the open two days ago when dozens of striking miners in the traditionally-moderate area invaded their coalfield union headquarters to halt debate on the controversial disciplinary measures. They left yesterday when police in riot gear surrounded the NUM headquarters in Mansfield.

But Nottinghamshire area officials named in the action refused to meet the court's initial deadline, set yesterday, for holding an area council meeting that would mandate delegates to oppose the rule

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Pickets and police clashing yesterday at the Llanwern steelworks in South Wales, when more than 200 strikers mounted a surprise mass picket; 31 were arrested

Maxwell lifts bid for Mirror to £100m

By Philip Robinson

Mr Robert Maxwell the millionaire publisher yesterday

Jenkin resists call for council freeze

By Julian Haviland and Philip Webster

Cabinet ministers last night had their first serious discussion on whether to impose a freeze on capital spending by local authorities, a step that they know would draw heavily on

months, leave little room for manoeuvre.

Mr Jenkin has been given ample warning in recent weeks that a freeze would encounter

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change. "It would be impossible to meet the deadline", Mr Henry Richardson, coalfield union secretary said.

Last night the judge said the Nottinghamshire miners had been "frustrated" in their efforts to get the meeting and it seemed the "process of democracy in the union had been suppressed".

The area leaders, who have supported the strike against the wishes of a majority of their members locally, insisted that they would ignore any court instructions and would abstain from today's crucial conference vote on the disciplinary machinery.

The NUM was last night proceeding with its arrangements to hold the delegate conference at a hall in Sheffield University. There will be a report on the dispute by

officials. Mr Stanley Orme, Shadow Energy Secretary, and Mr Ray Buckton, chairman of the TUC, are listed to give fraternal addresses,

As well as opposing closures, the emergency resolution calls for the Government to give coal "the same financial assistance as is given to nearly all our competitors" and build more coal-fired power stations. It urges settlement of the 1983 wages claim, and a four-day week.

● Police reinforcements had to be rushed to the Llanwern steel works last night when South Wales miners mounted a surprise mass picket (Tim Jones writes). Thirty-one pickets were arrested.

More than 200 miners scuffled and fought with a similar number of police. At least one miner was injured as coal and iron ore lorries went into the plant.

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From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor.

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