

Miners to ask TUC for total support as funds run out

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The National Union of Mineworkers is running out of money and will appeal on the floor of next month's Trades Union Congress for total support from the rest of the trade union movement in its dispute over pit closures.

Delegates to the mineworkers' conference were told yesterday by Mr Peter Heathfield, its general secretary, that there was only enough cash to run the union's administration at its present level for eight to 12 weeks.

The cost of the union's administration is £115,000 a week, and miners are looking to other unions for financial support to keep them going through the winter. A number of unions have already offered interest-free loans totalling between £3m and £4m, and the railwaymen will propose a 10p a head weekly levy on all the TUC's 10 million members.

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the union, side-stepped questions on finance after the delegate conference, but said: "We shall be taking our case to the floor of the TUC conference and putting arguments in favour of massive support for this union, which is carrying out congress policy in campaigning against job losses and against the Conservatives' anti-trade union laws."

Mr Scargill refused to condemn the violence in pit villages and on the picket lines, except to say that it was "violence by the police who should go back where they came from. I am not prepared to condemn the brave men and women of my union whose only crime is fighting for the right to work".

The delegate conference

approved its leaders' rejection of the peace proposals put to the union on July 18 by Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the coal board, and voted to continue the strike indefinitely.

Mr Scargill told the delegate: "There can be no question of this union negotiating the closure of pits on economic grounds. We made that clear on March 6. We have now re-emphasized it by a unanimous decision of our conference."

Threat to docks

A Transport and General Workers' Union official has threatened a national docks strike if a ship carrying 87,000 tons of coal for Ravenscraig steel works is unloaded at Hunterston terminal without union tugmen. Dockers are trying to stop coal reaching the plant in support of striking miners.

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The coal board will now have to decide whether to stand by its earlier threat to withdraw the "final offer" if it was rejected by the delegates. Mr MacGregor has been given a free hand by his board to withdraw the draft settlement at any time.

Mr MacGregor said last night: "Because the leaders of the NUM have again refused to consult their individual members about the offer we put forward last month, I am sure that more mineworkers will decide the time has come to make their views known in the most effective way possible and that is by joining their colleagues who are already working."

"We note the emergence of working miners' groups in

several coalfields and are gratified by the messages we have received from men inquiring about the possibility of their return to work. The number of ex-strikers returning is increasing and all the pits are open for work."

A coal board spokesman added: "In our opinion, Mr Scargill is interested in having talks with us. But we are equally convinced that he is not interested in a settlement."

The dispute looks set to continue for many more weeks, with the union saying that the ball is now in the coal board's court.

Mr Scargill said: "It is up to them to reopen negotiations with us." But new peace moves are thought unlikely in the run-up to the TUC conference which starts in Brighton on September 3.

On a vote on a new disciplinary procedure, the delegates decided on a card vote, by 167,000 to 22,000, to back rule changes that could be used to punish miners who have continued to work.

Three areas boycotted yesterday's conference: Nottinghamshire, South Derbyshire, and Leicestershire. The secretaries of the latter two areas, Mr Ken Toon and Mr Jack Jones, were followed to their cars after an executive meeting by strikers who shouted: "Scab", and kicked their car. "Remember, it's not their car, it's ours. It's union property", said one striker.

Nottinghamshire miners on strike want the union to exercise its new disciplinary powers to punish more than 100 branch and area officials who have defied the strike call.

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Ministers step up war of words

Strike 'enforced by mobs'

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

The Government launched last night its strongest verbal offensive against Mr Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers' leadership.

Reacting to the delegate conference's decision to continue the strike, Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, attacked the treatment of delegates who opposed the leadership's line and said that union funds were being used to pay mobs to prevent men from going to work. He criticized Mr Scargill and accused the union of keeping the strike going was by intimidation and violence.

Mr Walker's remarks, in a prepared statement and broad-

cast interviews, marked a significant heightening of the Government's response.

It will be maintained today when Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, is expected to attack "organized hooliganism" at collieries during the past few days, and accuse the union leadership of countenancing violence on a massive scale. The ministers' aim is to encourage rank and file pressure for a national ballot.

Mr Walker said that Mr Scargill's claim after the delegate conference that support for the strike was solid was absurd. One in three miners, those that had had the right of

ballot, had remained working and opposed to the strike.

Of the two thirds that were prevented from working, the great majority would do so if the were given the opportunity.

"If Mr Scargill really believes that support for this strike is solid, why are NUM funds being used to pay for mobs to prevent men from going to work?"

He said that if the union followed its guidelines on picketing, with six peaceful pickets outside each colliery, thousands of men would return to work.

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Pit strike 'enforced by mobs'

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Talking of the delegate conference, Mr Walker said that the public had seen the treatment given to delegates who expressed their democratic views. "These decent men have been spat at and have had their cars kicked in - all the methods of abhorrent violence which the country has witnessed in recent weeks have been used by the mob."

He called on Mr Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party, to renew his call for a national ballot on the strike.

Referring to Mr Scargill's reported allegation that some 70 pits would be closed, Mr Walker said: "this is the sort of tripe and total untruth we constantly have from him. He is lying."

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By Paul Routledge and By Philip Webster.

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