

# TUC tells miners not to accept aid from Libyans

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, suffered an unprecedented public rebuke last night from the TUC for allowing his chief executive officer to "consort" with the Gaddafi regime. The miners have agreed not to accept any money from Libya.

Mr Norman Willis, TUC general secretary, moved swiftly yesterday to defuse the latest crisis caused by Mr Scargill's political gaffe in allowing Mr Roger Windsor to take up an invitation to meet Colonel Gaddafi last week.

Mr Willis demanded a categorical assurance from him that the miners would not ask for, or accept support from the "odious tyranny" in Tripoli. Under this TUC pressure Mr Scargill backed down from hardline statements suggesting that the NUM would accept aid from any international source.

But the Willis intervention did not end there. "I have expressed to Mr Scargill my condemnation of the meeting with Colonel Gaddafi. This has created the impression that the NUM is prepared to consort with a government which is heavily implicated in terrorist campaigns outside its own borders."

His readiness to break weeks of diplomatic silence spent in intensive activity behind the scenes to get a settlement of the pit strike clearly indicates the scale of Mr Willis's anger at the embarrassing *faux pas* that has handed strike critics an unparalleled propaganda opportunity.

Mr Willis insisted that Mr Scargill had assured him that the purpose of the visit by Mr Windsor had been to explain the strikers' case to trade unionists in Libya, "as has been done by the NUM in 50 countries".

The unheard of public nature of the TUC rebuke suggests that it wants to see the Gaddafi affair rapidly forgotten. But it is unlikely to go away as quickly as the TUC's "four wise men" monitoring the dispute would like.

Leading NUM moderates plan to raise the issue at a national executive committee meeting in Sheffield on Thursday and other voices in the labour movement are almost certain to be raised in condemnation.

The latest twist in the coal strike comes just before further efforts are made by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to reach a compromise. The NUM and

National Coal Board are expected to resume the peace process under Acas auspices in London on Wednesday, although neither side is optimistic about an early agreement to end the conflict, which today enters its thirty-fourth week.

The executive move is being initiated by Mr Ted McKay, secretary of the North Wales pitmen, who last night described Colonel Gaddafi's regime as "murdering thugs," and expressed "absolute horror" at contacts with the Libyans.

Mr Peter Heathfield, union general secretary, yesterday defended the acceptance of the invitation to visit Tripoli.

"The NUM's international relationships cross the trade union international divide. We have had excellent relationships with them all, and in the middle of a dispute we are obviously exploring or having discussions, with all friends, both left and right. We shall be looking for money internationally."

Mr Heathfield was also critical of comments made yesterday by Mr Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party leader.

Privately, the NUM left and centre-right coalition that has

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dominated the mineworkers' executive since the start of the pit strike believes that Mr McKay's protest will fall largely on deaf ears.

Mr Sid Vincent, secretary of the traditionally moderate Lancashire miners, said: "If somebody sent me £100,000 for the lads on strike in Lancashire, I couldn't care less where it came from long as it was used to ease hardship."

That comment brought an angry response by Mr McKay, who said: "Sid Vincent asks: 'Is there something wrong with Libya?' My answer is that he should ask the parents of policewoman Yvonne Fletcher. She is only one of so many murdered by Gaddafi's killers."

Another prominent right-winger on the executive, Mr Trevor Bell, of the white-collar Cosa section, said: "I can only express surprise that someone should send a member of the staff to see a head of state without reference to the national executive."

"It is particularly disturbing when the country involved has a reputation that will put the miners' dispute into a new context in the public eye, with heavy political overtones that

will not go away whatever the eventual explanation

A less than full explanation was offered by the NUM when *The Sunday Times* disclosed that Mr Windsor went to Tripoli in response to the invitation a week ago.

Mr Scargill said in a statement: "Since the beginning of the coal industry dispute, the NUM has received and accepted invitations to visit well over 50 countries, to explain and campaign against pit closures and to seek financial support for the families of striking miners suffering severe hardship.

"On October 8, the NUM's chief executive officer and I visited the CGT miners' Paris headquarters to finalize arrangements for a food convoy from France to the British coalfields.

"We also met a number of delegations which were in Paris, including representatives from Hungary, Libya and the Soviet Union. Our general secretary was invited to attend a conference in Prague, and our chief executive officer invited to meet trade unionists in Libya. The invitations were accepted."

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