

NCB may withdraw job guarantees if strike continues

● The coal board said that it may withdraw its guarantees of no compulsory redundancies if the miners' strike continued

● Miners at work by next Friday will be paid £175 on account pending the final settlement of the 1983/84 wage claim

● A gang of hooded men armed with baseball bats beat up a working miner in his home in Yorkshire

● Mr Neil Kinnock told Soviet trade union leaders in Moscow that the Russian media coverage of the miners' strike was misleading

By Barrie Clement and Philip Webster

The National Coal Board last night made it clear that it could not offer a cast iron guarantee that there would be no compulsory redundancies if the miners' strike continued.

The board's announcement proved another embarrassment to the Government which indicated that it did not expect pitmen to be forced out of the industry.

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, said that the back-to-work guarantees were still intact, but the stoppage could mean the loss of jobs in previously viable collieries.

The clash emerged during a conversation between Mr Ian MacGregor, the coal board chairman, and management unions, in which he said that there could be no absolute jobs guarantee because of the deteriorating state of the pits.

A statement issued yesterday by the board reiterated the policy of no compulsory severance as a result of the industry's "normal review procedure".

But it added a warning: "In exceptional circumstances beyond the board's control where the industry's assets are destroyed or become unworkable because of strike action or vandalism, it may not be possible to apply this guarantee."

The difference was being

treated as one of emphasis, but the board seemed to be keen to add a stick to the financial carrot it offered pitmen yesterday.

The coal board are to pay a maximum of £175 on account to working miners pending the final settlement of the 1983/84 claim. The new incentive is being offered in response to protests from working miners who criticized the bonus payments offered to those returning to work.

The new bonus will be eligible only for those miners at work by next Friday.

Meanwhile the coal board said that 941 "new faces" reported for work yesterday, bringing the total for the week to nearly 6,000, compared with last week's 5,016.

Mr MacGregor said in Paris on Thursday that if 15,000 more miners returned to work, he would consider the strike over.

The dispute over the redundancy issue came after Mr Ken Sampey, president of the National Association of Colliery Overmen and Deputies (Nacods), claimed that Mr MacGregor had gone back on his assurances.

At a meeting last Tuesday of the Coal Industry National Consultative Council, Mr Sampey reminded Mr MacGre-

gor that he had refused to give a "no compulsory redundancy" guarantee at earlier talks. He asked him to do so.

Mr MacGregor replied: "I cannot alter that minute and I cannot give you any assurance that there will be no compulsory redundancies."

Mr Sampey said that the reason given was that it was not possible to know how many coal faces would be lost by the time all the men were back at work. He was told 21 pits had already been abandoned.

Mr Sampey, who disclosed the exchange with Mr MacGregor on the BBC radio programme, *World at One*, yesterday, said that the chairman had given the assurances in public and so had Mr Walker.

Mr Walker, speaking last night on the Channel Four programme, *A Week in Politics*, said that Mr MacGregor's statements had been incorrectly reported. He said the coal board chairman's position was that if any miner lost his job because his pit was uneconomical and therefore closed, the board would guarantee that miner a job in another pit. However, if "economic" pits were lost because of the dispute those jobs would be forfeited.

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