

TUC sanctions strikes in support of miners

● The TUC approved legally-risky industrial action in support of the pit strike over jobs, but decided against putting the labour movement at risk of contempt of court.

● Mr Arthur Scargill, the NUM president, left talks at Congress House claiming a "very successful and productive day"

● Mr Tony Benn urged the labour movement to prepare for a general strike of 24 hours or longer to protect free trade unionism.

● Mr Herbert Brewer, aged 67, wants to step down as receiver after failing over five days to secure money lodged in foreign banks Page 2

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The TUC gave the go ahead last night for legally-risky industrial action in support of the pit strike, but drew back from taking any steps that would bring the wider labour movement into contempt of court.

After day-long talks with leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers, the TUC's seven-man liaison group monitoring the 39-week strike called on all affiliated unions "to redouble efforts to take action that will bring the National Coal Board back to the negotiation table in order to settle the dispute."

The TUC body also agreed to support "all possible measures designed to enable the NUM to continue with its functions" but legal advice has ruled out direct financing of the NUM on the grounds that it could be seen as a challenge to the authority of

the High Court-appointed receiver, thereby putting the entire labour movement into contempt.

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the miners' union, left the talks at Congress House last night claiming a very successful and productive day. But the TUC formula falls far short of the pitmen's original demand that the TUC should mobilize the labour movement behind industrial action to back the coal strike, and pump money into the mineworkers' organization so that it could lease new offices in Sheffield and pay its way in defiance of High Court receivership.

Senior sources within within TUC, however, indignantly denied that it was "an NGA style sellout" and pointed out that the TUC has effectively sanctioned strike action in

support of the industrial objectives of the NUM.

Legal guidance tendered to the TUC suggests that industrial action will not be in contempt of the High Court provided it is in support of the miners' objectives in halting pit closures and not designed to thwart the activities of the receiver appointed to manage the finances and assets of the union.

But the same counsel's advice argues that the TUC would find itself in the dock for contempt along with the NUM if it supplied money to the miners' union to rent offices, pay its staff and run the day to day operations of the 200,000 member union.

The liaison group agreed yesterday: to reiterate support for the NUM in line with Congress policy and to call on affiliates to redouble efforts to

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take actions that will bring the NCB back to the negotiating table in order to settle the dispute in the coal industry; to support all possible measures designed to enable the NUM to continue with its functions; that urgent and detailed discussions will take place between the TUC and the NUM and their respective advisers as to the manner in which the above matters shall be implemented, it being acknowledged that the most important factor is to achieve a negotiated settlement.

Mr Norman Willis, general secretary of the TUC, read out a three-paragraph statement after yesterday's talks adding: "We are seeking to get a negotiated settlement. We understand the urgency. It is not just Christmas - it is the future of the coal industry and the pits."

But the TUC openly acknowledges that stoppages in support of the miners would still lay any union and group of workers open to litigation under the Government's labour laws that forbid secondary strikes.

The TUC team charged with the almost-impossible task of implementing Congress policy to support the miners by "blacking" the movement of coal and oil are under no illusions about the problems last night's declaration will bring.

Leaders of the Dutch, German and Belgian trade union national organizations are to meet the TUC tomorrow.

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