

The miners' strike

Success for pit fire team

From Peter Davenport, Doncaster

A decision to seal off part of a pit where an underground blaze is raging putting hundreds of miners' jobs at risk, was delayed yesterday because of the success of a small team of fire fighters.

Working round the clock, 2,100ft below ground, the men are managing to contain the fire at Rossington Colliery, near Doncaster, although according to one coal board official it was "like trying to put an oven out by spitting on the hot plate".

The fire, and its potential consequences, has fanned a major row between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers at the pit. The board claimed the

union has ignored pleas to allow in striking miners to fight the fire, and the union accused management of exaggerating the seriousness in a propaganda exercise.

Automatic monitoring equipment at the pit first detected an increase in temperature on Friday evening in a roadway being driven to create a new coalface to replace one lost in May after an outbreak of spontaneous combustion.

If the area eventually has to be sealed off, it will mean the loss of £1 million of development machinery and extensive coal reserves.

The coal board said that

around 36 men were fighting the fire. They included management staff and a handful of working miners. Deputies, members of Nacods, have been prevented from crossing picket lines to join the operation, the board claimed, adding that they needed 150 miners to be sure of beating the blaze.

Yesterday Mr Jack Riley, the NUM branch secretary, said that the union would help in the fire-fighting only if police were removed for good from the pit gates, working miners at the colliery were withdrawn, and 24 dismissed strikers reinstated.

The board has rejected the offer as "industrial blackmail".

County to sue over policing bill

By Our Home Affairs Correspondent

Cambridgeshire's Police Committee has decided to sue Derbyshire County Council for nearly £900,000, said to be owed for additional police cover during the miners' dispute.

The clash between the two authorities has simmered throughout the autumn, after Mr Jack Barton, Cambridgeshire's director of finance, accused Derbyshire in September of refusing to pay but without legal grounds.

At the time more than £9 million was being withheld by Derbyshire from other auth-

orities whose police forces had sent officers to the miners' dispute in the county. A council spokesman said 28 other police forces were involved.

The committee was said yesterday to be the first in the country to take legal action against Derbyshire. The committee will consult the Home Office before taking legal action in the new year.

A Derbyshire spokesman last night said it was its policy not to pay any other authorities as the council considered it to be the responsibility of the Government to meet the full cost.

Miners' strike blamed for loss of BSC profit

The British Steel Corporation claimed yesterday that the miners' strike had wiped out one of its first profits for years. In the six months to the end of September the corporation's pre-interest profits of £27 million became a loss of £68 million as a result of the estimated £95 million impact of the dispute.

While steel output has not been affected by the strike, the corporation has suffered additional expense

NCB criticized by engineering employers

Engineering employers last night condemned the National Coal Board's strategy during the 40-week miners' strike and cautioned other employers against using an "unnecessarily provocative" stance.

Dr James McFarlane, director general of the Engineering Employers' Federation, said in a general discussion of management philosophy that the coal board's strategy appeared to be "too uniquely focused on the economic factors".

West area dispute nearly over

The miners' strike is almost over at most of the 16 pits in the National Coal Board's Western area, which covers Staffordshire, Lancashire, north Wales and Cumbria, and they are all producing coal, the board said yesterday.

Eight out of every 10 miners are working in Staffordshire's seven collieries, six out of every 10 in Lancashire, nine out of 10 at two collieries in North Wales, where the strike has collapsed, and all the miners at Haig colliery, Cumbria.

● Stuart Stephenson, aged 21, a miner, of Seventh Street, Horden, Co Durham, who was identified from a police photograph of a crowd overturning a car at Easington colliery, was jailed for four months at Teesside Crown Court. He admitted causing £3,000 damage.

● Three striking miners were jailed for 60 days by Chesterfield magistrates for stoning three coal lorries and a coal board bus taking miners to work. Three younger strikers were sent to a detention centre for a similar period. All six admitted causing damage.

● Delegates to the National Union of Students' conference in Blackpool voted overwhelmingly to donate £1,000 to the NUM.

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From Peter Davenport.

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