

NUM gets some control of assets to fight sequestration

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

National Union of Mineworkers' leaders won back yesterday partial control of £2.7 million of assets moved to a Dublin bank to prevent the sequestration of the union's funds.

The High Court in London was told that a Dublin court had granted an order to unfreeze some of the money so that the union could continue a legal battle to regain control of all its £8 million assets.

News of the Dublin decision came as the National Coal Board announced that 11 men abandoned the 41-week-old strike yesterday, bringing the total during the past five days to 174. In all, 16,868 men have returned since the board began a determined "back to work" campaign on November 1, 64 per cent of the union's 189,000 members are on strike.

That falls short of the board's target of getting a majority of men back to work by Christmas. It is now the finishing touches to fresh plans to woo more men back in the new year.

The union's success in Dublin was revealed yesterday by Mr Howard Page, counsel for the sequestrators, in the High Court.

He told Mr Justice Nicholls it was a most astonishing decision, which affectively gave the union access to funds

hitherto frozen to finance a court challenge to avoid payment of a £200,000 fine for contempt and sequestration of its assets.

The court-appointed sequestrators, who may appeal against the Dublin court order, are having great difficulty in getting their hands on the assets. The efforts to serve the union's head of administration, Mr Trevor Cave, in relation to £4.6 million transferred to a Luxembourg bank had failed. Leave was given to serve him by post.

Most pits in England and Wales will be closed for the Christmas holidays, but there is no sign of a truce between the strikers and the board. Militants fear that the board may try to move coal from the beleaguered pitheads, 26 out of 174 mines are completely strikebound.

However, the worst year in the board's 37-year history ended on a cautiously optimistic note as far as managers were concerned.

Priority work to get 82 more pits producing in the new year is under way, and the 66 producing collieries last week moved 600,000 tonnes, more than 100,000 tonnes above the October output level and probably enough to maintain the critical supply target to the power stations.

British Rail managers who are becoming increasingly alarmed at losses, now running at £200 million, caused by the miners' strike, have given a warning that they intend to take a new hard line against workers refusing to take out coal trains.

An emergency meeting is to be held next month when management will lay out the precise impact of loss of traffic to road haulage, and the implications which involve a cutback in investment for new locomotives and could lead to redundancies.

Union leaders recognize the difficulties caused, but are likely to resist any move to introduce disciplinary measures in an attempt to get coal moving again. BR estimates that £50 million of the freight losses can be directly attributed to railway workers obeying instructions not to take out coal trains.

If the pit strike goes into the spring total losses will amount to £250 million by April, destroying BR's hopes of breaking even this year.

Mr Henry Sanderson, direc-

Miners in assault case lose their jobs

Four North Staffordshire miners cleared of assault were told by the NCB yesterday that they will not get their jobs back.

The men were dismissed in September after being arrested outside Hem Heath colliery at Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent, and charged with assault causing actual bodily harm. They all denied the charge.

Mr David Wemyss, Mr Stan Edwards, Mr Brian McKean and Mr Keith Bolton had their cases dismissed at Stoke crown court when the prosecution offered no evidence after they all agreed to be bound over for 12 months in the sum of £50.

● Toys worth more than £10,000 given from all parts of the UK and abroad will be handed over to the families of striking Nottinghamshire miners today. Nottingham women's miners support group said the response had been "unbelievable".

● Paul Weller, the pop singer, has given £9,000 on behalf of his group, The Style Council, to the Miners Families Christmas Appeal. Some £100,000 was raised in the past week after Mrs Glensy Kinnock, wife of the Labour leader, called for last-minute donations.

● Customs officials have interrupted a big haul of turkeys to 17,000 striking miners in north-east England. Lorryloads of chickens and turkeys from France were due to arrive yesterday at Murton miners' welfare hall, Co Durham, for distribution. An NUM spokesman said officials at Dover considered the lorryloads to be overweight but clearance had now been given.

● A miners' support group is reporting a Conservative council to the ombudsman after the authority refused permission for door-to-door collections. Dover council refused the permission because it feared names and addresses of those not donating would be compiled.

● Ukrainian coal miners have given about £114,000 to a relief fund for striking miners, the Soviet news agency, Tass, said.

● Seven miners from Conisbrough, in South Yorkshire, have been charged in Lincoln with the theft of coal from the British Sugar Corporation factory in Barkby, Lincolnshire.

● More than two tonnes of toys for striking miners' children in Ayrshire were ferried from Northern Ireland on board a small fishing boat last night, together with large quantities of food given in Belfast.

● Police and working miners were greeted by pickets singing carols and wearing party hats at two South Wales pits yesterday.

NUM officials dressed up as Santa Claus and reindeer to serenade the 27 men going in to work at the Celynes South colliery in Gwent, scene of the worst picket line clashes in the coalfield. Toy plastic pigs were offered as presents to the 110 police on duty but none was accepted.

Photograph, page 3

BR's hard-line on moving coal trains

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

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tor of the freight business, has said that business lost so far would normally keep 120 train crews in employment, thus raising the prospect of redundancies running into several hundred.

BR's warning was sent out this week to all local managers, who were asked to bring it to the notice of rail staff and impress the need for the "blackening" of coal to end.

This week unions threatened retaliatory action after management successfully moved two coal trains out of Coalville depot in Leicestershire.

But their reaction to what they see as "strike breaking", which is to be discussed at a meeting of the National Union of Railwaymen and train drivers' union Aslef, probably on January 7, could be more muted in view of the BR's determination to reduce losses.

Management has made clear that action to halt losses has to be taken quickly. There is a danger that the annual pay negotiations will become embroiled in the dispute.

Rich and poor in Silicon Glen

By Paul Valleley

Just outside the Scottish new town of Glenrothes stand two large concrete blocks. Close to them resemble half-finished multi-storey car parks, but from a distance they stand like the gravestones for the region's declining coal industry.

They are the pit towers of Rothies colliery into which the National Coal Board poured £20 million during the late 1950s and early 1960s before this great white hope of the Fife coalfield turned into its great white elephant.

They are made of pre-tensored concrete. Like so many other coal industry institutions, their demolition could be highly dangerous.

The new town was built to house the workers of the colliery. But because of unforeseen geological problems it never produced an ounce of coal.

Today, Glenrothes lies at the heart of "Silicon Glen", the microtechnology industry which has brought 26 new companies and £18 million of multi-national investment to Fife in the past five years.

The region's 6,000 miners

compare with 9,000 men and women working in electronics.

The workers of the burgeoning and declining industries live side by side in towns and villages near by, such as Lochgelly. Christmas and new year offer very different prospects to the two groups.

Yesterday, the Lochgelly National Union of Mineworkers' strike centre served the final hot midday meal before the holiday. On Thursday, 200 strikers queued, silent and unsmiling, to collect a plastic carrier bag of groceries which, along with a Christmas chicken donated by a print union, will have to tide them over until the soup kitchen reopens.

"It will be a pretty dismal Christmas for most of the lads", said Mr Johnny Bell, an electrician from the Castlehill pit, who was doling out two tattered £1 notes to each striker fillet.

"It won't buy much, but I've already got some presents for my kids," Mrs Shonagh Corrigan said. "I cashed in my assurance policies and that gave me enough to buy some presents and pay some bills."

She lost more than £700 by their early surrender.

"There is a lot less food around than usual and no coal at all. Heating is going to be a real problem," Mr Bell said. "As for new year, there will not be much alcohol about. Many of the lads say they are going to go to bed before midnight this year."

His next door neighbour, however, will celebrate in style. "She is an electronics worker. We see her bringing in the presents, the food and the drink."

The NUM strike secretary, Mr George Erskine, is sanguine about such situations. "Jealousy is a human reaction, but the electronics industry offers no long-term employment alternatives to miners; its workforce is largely female and part-time.

"There is no doubt that people here are fed up with the strike. But their resolution to carry on with it is as strong as ever; perhaps stronger, for they have already lost too much to admit defeat now. They have gone through the pain barrier." Most of them are quite prepared to go on until next new year."

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, By David Felton, Labour Correspondent and By Paul Valleley.

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