

Notts miners to defy NUM and form new union

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Working miners who control the leadership of the Nottingham pit union decided yesterday to defy the pro-strike national executive so the coalfield faces certain expulsion from the National Union of Mineworkers.

The ten-man lay area executive refused to meet the national executive and will not rescind a rule change that made the coalfield effectively an independent "union within a union" last month.

The union's national leadership has given an ultimatum that the whole 30,000 strong area, the second largest, will be expelled at a special delegate conference on January 29 unless the Nottinghamshire anti-strike "dissidents" bow to the national executive's authority.

By refusing to do so, the working pitmen have set a course for going it alone as the strike over colliery closures ends its 44 week. Only 1,369 miners are on strike in Nottinghamshire, according to the National Coal Board, though the union insists there are more.

The coalfield dissidents who have consistently opposed the strike will seek bargaining rights from the NCB and expect to retain control of the £2 million assets of the area union. They are also likely to hold on to subscriptions; the area has not paid any subscriptions to the national union since NUM funds were put in the hands of the sequestrators two months ago.

Two of the full-time NUM officials in Nottinghamshire, Mr Roy Lynk, aged 52, the financial secretary since 1979, and Mr David Prendergast, aged 37, the agent, are expected to run the "breakaway" union.

But diehard supporters of the

strike are preparing to organize an NUM division loyal to the national union, with an area office and branches at every pit. Mr Henry Richardson, left-wing secretary of the Nottinghamshire area, who has been at loggerheads with the working miners who took control of the coalfields in elections last summer, is expected to hold the same post in the reconstituted NUM division.

He said yesterday: "There will be a branch of the NUM set up at every pit and workshop in the Nottinghamshire area and we will recruit members into the NUM, from both striking and working miners, and it will be unconditional for working miners.

"We intend to fight this breakaway union like we fought Spencer, and I believe the outcome will be the same. We will be a minority for a long time but eventually we will get them back."

"Spencerism" is the derogatory term for breakaway, non-political trade unions of the kind set up in Nottinghamshire coalfield by a local MP, Mr George Spencer, after the disastrous 1926 miners' strike. Its members were all absorbed back into the NUM eventually.

Yesterday's executive decisions, which have to be confirmed by a special meeting of the 31-man area delegate council today, were taken after legal advice that the area leaders could not change the rules back to meet the national leadership's requirements.

At special branch meetings in November, pitmen in the area voted to delete national rule 30 from their rulebook so that the area would not have to accept

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decisions of the national executive. They did so because of fears that the national leaders would invoke a new disciplinary rule, the so-called "star chamber" provision, to punish miners who have worked through the strike.

But the pro-strike minority in Nottinghamshire argued that the moderates' intention all along has been to create a breakaway union and they predict that once the men

realize the gravity of the expulsion threat they will have second thoughts about defying the national executive.

About 300 men at Ollerton Colliery in the north of the county are said to have signed a petition calling for the rule change to be rescinded. However, it is unlikely that branches will be called to fresh meetings to reverse last month's vote, and the idea of an individual ballot also found little favour yesterday.

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