

NCB closes ranks on 'final offer' to miners

By Paul Routledge
Industrial Editor

The National Coal Board on the eve of critical negotiations with leaders of striking miners, yesterday gave unanimous backing to its chairman Mr Ian MacGregor for his "no surrender" policy.

In a move evidently designed to reassure the Cabinet there would be no management sell-out to the National Union of Mineworkers the 10-man NCB board closed ranks publicly in support of a final offer on pit closures.

Mr MacGregor was quick to point out at a press conference that he had the total backing of his board to require from the NUM an agreement for the shutdown of collieries where the cost of extraction had become "too high to justify continuing to mine them".

He said: "I hope we can concentrate on the issues we have been discussing, so that we are not forced to the conclusion that the NUM leadership want this strike to continue indefinitely."

"I cannot believe that the vast majority of miners would prefer a continuation of the present hardship and havoc to a quickly and sensibly negotiated settlement."

However, top-level management sources last night privately indicated an expectation that negotiations with the miners' leaders at a secret location in London would break down again. The board's "final offer" being put to NUM president Mr Arthur Scargill does not differ materially from proposals rejected by the union.

Mr MacGregor's unexpected intervention in the propaganda war, arranged at short notice to follow the board meeting, drew a sharp reply from Mr Scargill. He blamed the Government for "blatant and continuing interference" in the negotiations.

Today's talks between the two sides coincide with a decision in the High Court on the NUM's defiance of an order by the Vice-Chancellor Sir Robert Megarry not to discuss or vote on a union rule change setting up new disciplinary procedures.

Miners in Nottinghamshire who have worked throughout the strike yesterday asked the judge to outlaw the so-called "Star Chamber" which has powers to try rebel NUM members.

● Miners' leaders in South Wales have moved thousands of pounds of union funds into private bank accounts and transferred assets abroad to avoid seizure by the courts.

Senior officials at the union's Pontypridd headquarters in Mid-Glamorgan, and girl clerks, have been handed the equivalent of six months' salary each to "look after" during the dispute. Other funds have been switched to accounts in Geneva and Ireland.

● As 18 pickets were arrested yesterday trying to prevent coal reaching the Llanwern steelworks, water workers gave a warning that they might cut off supplies to the plant.

NCB closes ranks on 'final offer' to miners.

By Paul Routledge Industrial Editor.

The Times (London, England), Wednesday, Jul 18, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61886. (432 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS17927922