

Strike entering final stage, says Scargill

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By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, said yesterday that the pit strike, now in its tenth month, was about to enter a "final and decisive stage" which required miners to remain loyal to their union.

The first public indication by the miners' leader that the dispute could be approaching its close was being treated with some reserve by the National Coal Board which believed it was an attempt to stem the apparent tide of breakaway movements by areas from the national union.

Mr Scargill, who was addressing a rally in Northumberland, said: "I believe we are in crunch times. We have now entered into a phase which could be the final and decisive stage if our members remain solid.

"If we retain our solidarity we can create the conditions for bringing the coal board and the Government to a position

where they realize there has to be a negotiated settlement," Mr Scargill said. He again disputed the board's return-to-work figures which showed that a further 215 miners ended their strike, a high number for a Friday.

The board said that the total of "new faces" appearing at the pits this week was almost 2,900 and brought the number returning this year to just under 6,000.

Mr Michael Eaton, the board's spokesman, said last night that the return to work was "an inexorable process".

The board's figures show more than 39 per cent of the union membership is at work. Yesterday's figures were regarded as significant because of the bad weather.

● Mr Norman Woodhouse, deputy director since 1970, has been appointed the coal board's director of public relations. He succeeds Mr Geoffrey Kirk, who resigned in November.