

Miners' leaders call emergency talks

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Miners' leaders are to meet in emergency session tomorrow after the National Coal Board yesterday confirmed that "no negotiations are contemplated" in the wake of informal discussions with the conciliation service, Acas.

The 26-man executive of the National Union of Mineworkers has been summoned to Sheffield to determine the union's next step in the deadlock arising from the board's statement ruling out fresh talks. The strike looks certain to drag on.

National officials of the union were taken aback by the tough line adopted by the board in its rejection of negotiations after a "review of the situation" between Mr Pat Lowry, chairman of Acas and Mr Merrick Spanton, board member for personnel, yesterday.

A meeting of the union executive due tomorrow but postponed until February 14 was hurriedly reconvened last night. It will discuss the latest developments, and will hear a proposal from Durham miners' leaders for a recall of the union's national delegate conference.

Mr Peter Heathfield, NUM general secretary, said late last night: "We had called off the executive because we anticipated a meeting in London likely to involve the whole of the NEC during the course of this week.

"But statements emanating from the board indicate that this is not on, so we have to reconvene to review the situation.

The area councils of the union in Durham and Lancashire, traditionally regarded as "barometers" of coalfield opinion, yesterday reaffirmed their backing for the strike despite the continuing return to work which yesterday saw a further 664 men cross picket lines to abandon the coal conflict.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' president, is known to have expected more from the tentative moves by Acas, but in the event all the union got was this statement from the board's chief spokesman, Mr Michael Eaton: "No resumed negotiations are contemplated following the visit to NCB headquarters by the Acas chairman. The review that took place of the NUM dispute showed no indication of any change in the union's position."

● The NUM looks unlikely to receive any supporting industrial action on pit closures from the deputies' union, Nacods.

It was announced yesterday that Nacods members have voted 7,013 to 5,495 in favour of accepting a 5.2 per cent pay deal backdated to last November 1.

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