

Scargill's union link with East gets closer

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ARTHUR SCARGILL, president of Britain's National Union of Mineworkers, is pressing ahead with plans to forge a new international organisation for miners which would include communist countries for the first time since 1949.

He has revealed to his national executive committee that this was why he went to Moscow last week as a guest of the Soviet miners' union.

Scargill's plan to form one international miners' union covering East and West is certain to be resisted by the main mineworkers' unions in the West. The official spokesman of the West German miners' union, Horst Niggemeyer, said: "Whatever Scargill may have been discussing in Moscow, we have not changed our position.

"We can see no reason for us, as free trade unions, to sit under the same roof with people who are enemies of democracy."

But it was apparent last week that the plans are well advanced, with the founding conference of the new organisation scheduled to be held in September either in London or in Paris.

Scargill's Russian trip - he flew to Moscow on a British Airways Club class ticket paid for by the Russians - has been mildly criticised by some members of his executive on the basis that in the aftermath of the miners' strike he should have stayed in Britain rebuild-

JON SWAIN, who was named last week as Reporter of the Year for his revelation about Arthur Scargill's links with Libya, reports on the NUM leader's latest international foray.

ing the unity of the union. It has also been suggested that Scargill wanted to be out of Britain when the result of the ballot on a levy for sacked miners, in which he was defeated, was announced.

His visit, however, is in keeping with his strong international outlook. He has campaigned for two years for the formation of the new body, arguing that it is a crucially



Scargill: two-year campaign

important step in bridging the gulf that has separated the world's mining unions into two ideological camps for the past 30 years. He wants the new group to replace the Western-dominated Miners International Federation, based in Brussels, and the Warsaw-based Trade Unions International of Miners and Workers in Energy (TUIM).

The MIF used to be based in London, but it moved to Brussels at the start of 1984. Scargill pulled the NUM out of the organisation soon after he became president in 1983. As a result of his decision, the MIF did not provide any help to British miners during the recent strike. But Scargill saw the withdrawal from the MIF as an essential preliminary to creating a new miners' international.

Many Western miners' unions belonging to the MIF view his venture with alarm. They fear Scargill's rival organisation, supposedly unaffiliated

with either the East or West blocs, will in practice be communist-dominated.

Niggemeyer said: "Scargill tried to break up the democratic miners' international federation and failed. So he walked out of the MIF, taking the Australians with him, and that was that. The other free miners' unions of the world who stayed in the MIF are united in opposition to any attempt by Scargill to set up an alternative organisation."

It was noticeable that many of the 23 countries involved in the preparatory conference, held in Paris in April 1983, were communist or Third World communist sympathisers. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the French communist CGT trade union, which has played a leading role in campaigning for the new organisation and in supporting the British miners' strike.

A key figure throughout has been Alain Simon, a senior CGT official and the secretary general of the TUIM, which belongs to the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). WFTU is based in Prague, having been kicked out of Paris in 1951, at the height of the Cold War, for subversive activities.

Simon's dominant role in the efforts to forge one East-West miners' international has aroused suspicion that the new miners' organisation is part of a general strategy masterminded by WFTU to break back into Western Europe.

The idea of one East-West international miners' union has long been talked about. Joe Gormley, Scargill's predecessor, was a lifelong enthusiast, but he realised that while in principle it was desirable, in practice it was impossible.

Peter Tait, the former general secretary of MIF, expresses doubts that the new international will actually get off the ground. He believes Scargill should have approached the idea with more caution and preparation.

"If the new organisation is dominated by the Soviet and east European unions it will be little different from the TUIM," Tait said. "All Scargill will have done is to reverse the situation. He wanted a worldwide international to replace a Western-dominated one. But that's not what he'll get."