

Total blockade call as miners move against steel plants

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By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

Miners leaders have sent out the call to transport unions for a total blockade of coke and coal supplies to five integrated steel works from midnight last night after the steel workers' union failed to respond to an ultimatum from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) for an agreement on the level of future supplies.

The start of the blockade, which Mr Arthur Scargill, the union president, predicted would begin to bite immediately, came at the end of a day, when the national coal board won a High Court order to evict miners staging an occupation at Betteshanger colliery, in Kent.

Mr Scargill called the blockade of the five steel plants at Ravenscraig, Redcar, Scunthorpe, Llanwern and Port Talbot after hearing that the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) had put off until Thursday a decision on whether to hold talks with the NUM. The miners are insisting that supplies to the steel plants should be sufficient only to protect the fabric of the blast furnaces and should not allow scope for any production.

The miners' leader placed the blame for the blockade firmly at the door of the steel union for refusing to respond to NUM overtures. "We have sought to reach a deal but unfortunately so far the ISTC has not

supported that view", Mr Scargill said.

Earlier Mr William Sirs, ISTC general secretary, told Yorkshire miners lobbying the confederation's annual conference at Scarborough that his union would discuss calls for help but had still not received a written request from the miners.

Mr Scargill also added that his union and the transport union's will disregard any legal action that the British Steel Corporation may take to get the blockade lifted.

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The effectiveness of the ban on supplies will rely heavily on the willingness of railway workers to follow instructions from their unions not to cross miners' picket lines. There were signs of unease last night among rank and file steelmen who feared a threat to their jobs.

An appeal from ISTC members at Llanwern to the miners' union that the Welsh plant should be excluded from the blockade was rejected by local miners' leaders while at Ravenscraig steelmen voted to carry on working using supplies brought in by lorry if necessary.

The prospect of the British Steel Corporation using convoys of lorries to deliver

coke and coal to the five plants would be likely to lead to mass picketing there by miners and the consequent scenes of violence witnessed in recent weeks at Orgreave and Ravenscraig.

Coal board officials were meeting last night to plan their next moves at Betteshanger in the face of likely resistance from the miners, who were said to have put up barricades.

The coal board's decision to go to the High Court to evict the protesters was taken, according to the board, because it had a legal responsibility for maintenance of the pit and it was unable to discharge that responsibility with miners occupying the control room.

Meanwhile, the search for a new development plan for the coal industry was officially launched yesterday.

Mr Ian MacGregor, coal board chairman, yesterday met the two other unions in the industry, the British Association of Colliery Management and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (Nacods) to discuss the strike by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the future of the industry. It was agreed that the board would draw up new proposals to put to the unions in the form of a revised *Plan for Coal*.