

Scargill to TUC: don't betray me

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by Kim Fletcher
and Martin Kettle

ARTHUR SCARGILL, the miners' leader, yesterday increased the pressure on the TUC when he warned that if it failed to support the miners at its annual conference in Brighton on September 3 it would be seen forever as an act of betrayal.

He said the miners would be asking that no trade unionists crossed their picket lines and that nobody handled coal moved by "scab" labour. The call came in a speech at a rally of 3,000 miners and supporters at Dalkeith, near Edinburgh.

He said: "I believe that the trade union movement was established in order that we could support each other in our hour of need. In a week's time the TUC has an opportunity to either support the miners' union in its historic struggle to maintain an industry, our pits and our communities, as well as carrying out TUC policy; or it can turn away: and in doing so it would be stained for all time with what would be described as an act of betrayal."

The TUC general council is anxious to discover exactly what the miners are looking for at Brighton with the movement facing splits over the level of support that should be given to the miners' union fight.

Large and moderate unions such as the general and municipal and the engineering workers are inclined to support the NUM's own motion calling for "total support" from congress, but will wish to know exactly what is meant by "total".

More contentious are the three amendments put forward by the railwaymen, the engine drivers and the seamen, which call respectively for a 10p weekly levy, no crossing of NUM picket lines and no use of fuel supplied by non-union labour.

The NUM has already accepted the three amendments but it is not yet clear whether they will be put into the substantive NUM motion or left as amendments. If the second course is taken, the conference is likely to see a near-unanimous vote of support for the miners' motion while the amendments which would actually give physical and financial support scrape through or fail.

The miners have made it clear they believe they are entitled to something more than rhetorical support but a number of large unions have made it equally clear that they cannot afford to promise something they cannot deliver.

Last week, sources in the general and municipal, the engineers', the local government and the shopkeepers' unions made it clear they would be dubious about supporting mo-

continued on page 2

Miners

S. Tms 2 6 AUG 1984
continued from page 1

tions committing them to paying out large amounts of money.

Inter-union negotiations will continue this week and moderate union leaders are still hopeful that the TUC general council will hammer out some understanding with the NUM to reduce the impact of splits at Brighton.

Concern is growing among ministers that moves to get striking miners to return to work have failed to gain the support expected. The cabinet committee which has been meeting throughout the summer to monitor developments in the six-month pit strike has been surprised at the poor response from strikers, especially at those pits which voted in March against strike action.

A senior cabinet minister said yesterday: "The drift back to work is incredibly small. I never thought it would be as slow as this."

But, with return-to-work groups apparently gathering support - and certainly publicity - neither the coal board nor ministers believe the return-

to-work strategy has necessarily failed.

A board spokesman said: "Our strategy remains to encourage as many as possible to get back to work. We shall continue with local bussing arrangements and help miners who want to return in whatever way we can."

He said another 210 ex-strikers went back to work last week, making a total of 1,110 since the beginning of July when the board started to collect figures for the return to work. About 140,000 miners remain on strike.

Ministers believe pressure to end the strike will grow provided that the dock strike fails to bite. They remain confident that the strike will end only with the capitulation of the miners and took comfort last week from a very small burn of coal at power stations. Ministers believe less than 100,000 tonnes of coal will have been used at power stations in the month of August.

The board's figures for returning miners and working pits were again disputed yesterday by Arthur Scargill. At the Dalkeith rally he said the union had sought permission to inspect the board's figures after Ian MacGregor offered to show them to the public but had been refused.