

# Miners undeterred by fines on Scargill and union

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Miners' leaders last night set a fresh course of conflict with the law by reaffirming that their 31-week-old strike is official, despite High Court fines yesterday for contempt of £1,000 on Mr Arthur Scargill and £200,000 on the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr Scargill, the pitmen's president, read out on the steps of his union's office in Sheffield a statement expressing fresh defiance of court orders that the dispute is unofficial and demanding that his members should not cross picket lines.

The miners' renewed evidence of open hostility to the High Court is expected to precipitate further moves for alleged contempt, just as the pit union reopens peace talks with the National Coal Board.

Its national coordinating committee, an ad hoc body composed of national officials of the union and leaders from the main coalfields, which is conducting the day-to-day business of the strike, also reaffirmed the executive's October 1 decision as official union policy. "This means that the strike action in the British coalfields is official in accordance with national rule 41", it said.

"The union will continue to

do all in its power to win maximum support for the strike and reaffirms that there should be no crossing of official picket lines."

That statement is essentially a reiteration of the comments and decisions which yesterday prompted Mr Justice Nicholls to fine Mr Scargill and the union for contempt of orders made on September 28 that the strike in Yorkshire and elsewhere is unofficial, and that miners must not be discouraged from going to work under threat of union discipline.

The judge said: "A great and powerful union with large membership has decided to regard itself as above the law. The wilful disobedience has been committed with maximum publicity by a large and powerful body bent on saying to its members and the whole nation that it is untouchable.

"If orders of the court are seen to be set as nought in this way - openly and repeatedly defied by such a body with impunity - where is the rule of law?"

The union has 14 days to pay its fine, and Mr Scargill 28 days to pay his. Neither is likely to do so. The union's national executive is to meet soon, probably on Sunday, to deter-

mine its next step. Continuing refusal to pay the fine would involve the union in sequestration of its assets, put at £4.7m when the strike began but now very much depleted.

Mr Michael McGahey, vice-president of the union, said: "You can't take the breeks off a Highland man; we're skint." And Mr Sid Vincent, leader of the Lancashire pitmen, argued: "If we have to operate from the street, we will carry on the fight."

Yesterday's contempt action was brought by two "dissident" Yorkshire miners, Mr Ken Foulstone and Mr Robert Taylor, both from Manton colliery. Mr Foulstone said at a press conference later: "I feel very unhappy about having to take my own union to court to stop the misuse of its members. But I feel the law of the land has been upheld."

Even though Mr Scargill is not a rich man, he ought to be able to pay the £1,000 fine, earning £27,500 a year and living modestly. However, he has foregone his salary since the strike began.

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