

Scargill to control 'fight to the finish'

ARTHUR SCARGILL has now taken personal control of the lay-to-day running of the five-week-old miners' strike. Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Peter Heathfield, national secretary, and headquarters staff in Sheffield will for the first time be directly responsible for organising pickets and requests for "solidarity action" by other unions, under the terms of the resolution approved by the union's special conference in the city on Thursday.

The call to 45,000 miners still at work to join the strike marks the end of the first phase of what Scargill last week called a 'fight to the finish' against the government and the pit closure plans of Ian MacGregor, chairman of the coal board. The resolution was approved by 69 votes to 54.

The first real test of the NUM leadership's latest strategy will come this week when the pits reopen after the Easter holiday. Scargill is planning a barnstorming tour of coalfields in an attempt to bring miners in the east and west Midlands out with the rest of his 185,000 members.

Last week's conference has again exposed the weakness of moderate coalfields leaders in the face of shrewd tactics by the left; and in face of the continuing public displays of popularity - even adulation - for Scargill among militant young miners, like the 7,000 who took part in the noisy rally outside Sheffield memorial hall

by Donald Macintyre
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Inside the plush semi-circular auditorium of the memorial hall the atmosphere of the three-hour private session of the conference was contrastingly calm. Scargill proposed the crucial motion. It called for a change in the rule currently requiring a 55% vote in favour before a strike to one needing just 50%. He argued that it was a contradiction in terms to press for a ballot but not to be in favour of a simple majority.

Scargill has been in favour of reducing the required vote to 50% since he first joined the union.

He was opposed by Roy Link of Nottinghamshire, where most of the county's 34,000 miners were still working. Link pointed out that in his area leaders had been campaigning vigorously against pit closures for over a year, the county had been "100% solid" in the 1974 strike, and it would abide absolutely by the outcome of a national ballot. Link said that in the current climate of anti-union legislation and "media smears" the union needed "a clear and decisive majority in order to lead our members not merely out on strike but to lead them to victory". But in a card vote - in which the normally moderate Lancashire, Durham and Midland craftsmen's areas supported the left-led Yorkshire, Scotland and South Wales

coalfields - the rule change was carried by 187,000 to 59,000.

Then a debate opened on four motions calling for a ballot and one from Kent coalfield for national action without a ballot.

Peter Heathfield warned that MacGregor was attempting to "divide and conquer" the union with the argument that if the industry was made viable the miners would become among the highest paid in industry.

Jack Jones of Leicester pointed out that it had been last July's annual conference - the supreme body of the union - that had laid down that there should be a ballot at the appropriate time in the event of a dispute over pay and jobs.

Trevor Bell of the white-collar colliery staffs said that the TUC and the Labour party had held up the example of NUM ballots as a model of voluntary union democracy and that the union was embarrassing those two bodies by refusing to hold one.

Jack Collins, the communist Kent miners' leader, told the conference: "We have got to defeat the government and go on to victory." If the strike was defeated even the "safe areas" would be threatened.

Three of the motions calling for a ballot were defeated, by 69-51, 69-55 and 70-39. A compromise proposal by Durham mechanics for a ballot with the provision that areas in favour of a strike could stay out was defeated 100-48. And the Kent resolution calling for national action without a ballot was carried 69-54.