

# NUM moderates vote to force national meeting

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The biggest breakthrough in the five-month-old coal miners' dispute came yesterday when union moderates voted in secret to force a meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers' executive that could call a strike ballot.

After a week of indecision among the once dominant right-wing contingent on the union's executive nine area leaders met privately at a public house in Leicestershire to draw up a timetable to halt the growing strike in the industry.

Last night, they demanded immediate recall of the executive so that a national ballot could be held on pay and pit closures, and in the interim urged that coalfields where 60,000 men have voted to work normally should be freed from "flying pickets" and resume output.

A top-level row is certain to follow in the mineworkers' union, whose national officials were in London yesterday defending a High Court action brought by the coal board.

They were caught on the hop by the moderates' gathering at the Brant Inn, Groby, which could force Mr Arthur Scargill, left-wing president of the union, and Mr Peter Heathfield, its general secretary, to call the executive into emergency session.

Hitherto, the two national officials have declined to set in motion the machinery for a pithead ballot on the ground that the areas were divided about what step to take.

Leading left-wingers in the union, although taken aback by

yesterday's move, are resisting pressure for an early ballot. Mr Michael McGahey, the union's vice-president, accused the group of not being the democrats in the union.

"There is no overwhelming pressure for ballot votes from the members. There is a search by certain leaders for escape routes from facing the real struggle - and that is to defend pits and jobs and to protect the industry in the interests of the British people", he said.

The overwhelming majority of miners had already voted with their feet, he said. "They are out on strike. They are standing firm."

But Mr Jack Jones, secretary of the Leicestershire miners, said: "There is now a clear

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mandate for a national ballot. We are in a majority and the national executive should reconvene and call for a ballot."

Although only nine members of the executive attended yesterday's meeting, others sent their apologies and the moderates believe that they can muster a 14-10 majority to take the strike issue to a vote of the men.

The coal board welcomed the development, saying that a pithead ballot was the only way to end the present bitterness between the union areas.

The board has not sought to bring to the attention of the High Court flagrant breaches of its injunction against unlawful secondary picketing. A spokes-

man said last night: "We shall go back to the court if we judge that it is necessary. We are holding off to allow the union's democratic process to work."

The board's optimism was not supported by comments from Mr Heathfield. He said: "I am astonished that the Right have had a caucus meeting in the delicate situation we are facing. I am concerned about developing unity within our ranks and not exploiting differences."

The moderates are now clearly determined to force the drawn-out dispute to an issue. If they do compel a strike ballot, it will almost certainly be on a double question about whether the miners should accept a 5.2 per cent "final" pay offer and whether they want to strike against coal board plans to shut 20 pits and shed 20,000 jobs.

The vote is unlikely to take place for at least a week, and in the meantime there will be strong pressures within the traditionally moderate coalfields that have balloted against striking to resume normal working. About 20,000 men in the Midlands and Lancashire now subject to local strike instructions despite having voted against industrial action, would be free to defy pickets from Yorkshire and South Wales.

They are being told "we leave it to your conscience to return to work as soon as possible" pending the national pithead ballot in which a 55 per cent majority is required under union rules before an all-out strike may be mounted.



Departing moment: Police officers leading a picket away from the skirmishes outside the National Coal Board's area headquarters in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, yesterday.

## Cool Queen lifts British prestige in Jordan

From Christopher Walker Amman

Unruffled by blanket security of an intensity rare even by Middle Eastern standards, the Queen coolly fulfilled a punish-

## Trade surplus leaps to £819m as exports set record

By Frances Williams, Economics Correspondent

Britain turned in its best trade performance for more than a year last month, as exports soared to record levels.

The surplus on trade in goods of £569m, after a deficit of

three months. The bulk of the improvement was due to oil, but the deficit on trade in non-oil goods also shrank by £200m to £1.9 billion.

The volume of exports was

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*The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, Mar 28, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61793. (725 words)

**Category:** News

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**Gale Document Number:**CS17141372