

Miners expected to change the rules to get all-out strike

From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, Sheffield

The coal industry is sliding rapidly towards an all-out strike after a crushing defeat yesterday of moves by moderate leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers to call a national pithead ballot.

A special 240-delegate conference of the union is to be held next Thursday to determine the next step, and it is almost certain that union rules will be changed to reduce the 55 per cent majority required for an all-out stoppage when the miners are given the chance to vote.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the union's president, yesterday ruled out of order a proposal from the Leicestershire miners that there should be an immediate pithead poll, and his ruling was upheld by a surprisingly strong margin of 13 votes to 8 by the union's executive.

Despite the outcome of the vote, moderate leaders were attacked by militant pickets as they emerged from the meeting.

The decision to transfer the initiative for prolonging and extending the strike, which has closed two thirds of Britain's pits, to the delegate conference was approved by 21 votes to three.

The voices raised against it came from Mr Ken Toon, of South Derbyshire, Mr Roy Otley, of the Midlands craftsmen and Mr Jack Jones, of Leicestershire.

Mr Jones had proposed that there should be an early ballot, but his suggestion was ruled unconstitutional by Mr Scargill who, citing an earlier precedent

of Mr Joe Gormley, refused to permit the executive to overturn a decision it made on March 8 to back the "rolling strike".

The National Coal Board declined to comment on the miners' decision. Mr Ian MacGregor, its chairman, is to hold a press conference this morning outlining his views on the dispute which now threatens to take on the dimensions of a conflict between the labour movement and the Government.

The union meeting, which took place against a background of unprecedented picketing and

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police security to get miners' leaders into their office, resulted in a virtually clean sweep for the left.

Mr Scargill told the pickets: "We can win provided we show the same resolution as we showed in 1972 and 1974." He was greeted with great applause and chants of "easy, easy" from the striking miners.

The delegate conference next week will have before it a proposal from the national officials of the union that the rules should be changed to reduce the majority required in a secret ballot from 55 per cent to a simple majority.

A motion on these lines was due to be submitted to the union's annual conference in Tenby in July, but the 54 per

cent vote by colliery deputies to back a strike over pit closures - which falls short of their own union's requirements of a 66 per cent majority to permit strike action - has prompted the mineworkers to think again.

The NUM last changed its rules on this issue in 1971, when the majority for strike action was reduced from 66 per cent to 55 per cent, and later that year a pithead ballot yielded a 59 per cent majority for industrial action which led directly to the convulsive events of 1972.

Mr Scargill said yesterday that the latest move was designed to introduce greater democracy into the union.

He told the men massed outside his building: "Let us say to the wider trade union movement that whatever happens, the determination of the National Union of Mineworkers is more resolved. We intend to continue this fight until MacGregor and Thatcher withdraw their pit closures."

Mr Trevor Bell, secretary of the white-collar section, claimed that a majority of the executive had been unable to pursue it because of Mr Scargill's ruling.

But Mr Scargill had employed rule 43 to argue that the March 8 decision could not be overturned by demands for a national ballot.

This rule lays down that in the event of any national action being proposed by the union there shall be a secret pithead ballot of the men requiring a 55 per cent majority before such action is mounted.



Ministers resigned to decision

By Julian Haviland Political Editor

The miners decision yesterday to hold a delegate conference was expected by ministers, who received it with resignation. In the Commons the Prime Minister said that many miners would be greatly concerned that a national vote on strike action had been further delayed.

Mr Neil Kinnock, leader of the Opposition, welcomed the fact that a national ballot was now "a much clearer and closer prospect".

Mr Kinnock's preference for a ballot was therefore made plain, but not plain enough for Mrs Thatcher. Mr Kinnock does not believe that the miners will be more likely to show restraint if he lectures them. Mrs Thatcher misses few opportunities of lecturing them and of inviting Mr Kinnock to do the same. So she asked if he would make it clear that he would have preferred an immediate decision in favour of a ballot.

Mr Kinnock did not respond, but asked instead for the Government to tell Mr Ian MacGregor, chairman of the National Coal Board, to alter the pace and scale of the rundown of the coal industry.

The Prime Minister replied that there had been no compulsory redundancies so far.

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Moderate leaders manhandled

From Barrie Clement, Labour Reporter, Sheffield

Moderate miners' leaders were attacked by militant pickets as they emerged from yesterday's meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers executive.

Drink cans and fruit rained down on Mr Ray Chadburn, president of the right-wing Nottinghamshire miners. He was pushed and jostled and had to be escorted by the police.

After a day of mass demonstrations, Mr Chadburn, Mr Henry Richardson, secretary of the Nottinghamshire area, and Mr Trevor Bell, secretary of the union's white collar section, all received rough treatment from the hundred or so left-wing miners who stayed after more than 3,000 demonstrators dispersed.

They had arrived early yesterday from surrounding Yorkshire and from Scotland, Kent and South Wales. The mood of the crowd, which gathered in the sunshine to lobby the executive, varied from that of a miners' gala to an unruly football crowd. It might have been worse if the vote had gone against the militants.

There were 53 arrests, largely for assault, some for drunkenness, made by 1500 policemen from forces from Northumberland to Bedfordshire. More were in reserve, including those billeted at army camps in Nottinghamshire.

A shaken Mr Chadburn said

he was not worried by the decision against a ballot. "I am worried about what just happened. I know how they feel, but I just want to get away."

Earlier a dozen pickets entered the headquarters, took a lift to the eighth floor and confronted Mr Chadburn. They jostled him and accused him of selling them out. He argued forcibly that he had told his members not to cross picket lines.

Mr Scargill announced the decision of the executive with the help of a megaphone on the steps of the building.

Mr Chadburn said later that it was time his members "got off their knees and came out". The strike over pit closures was not just a fight on behalf of Scotland, South Wales and Yorkshire, but was also in the interests of Nottinghamshire miners.

● A lead-filled bottle cap with four screws sticking out was thrown at a police line, but fell short (the Press Association reports). A police spokesman said it was "purpose made to maim".

● Police promotion examinations have been postponed because of the miners' strike. Officers away from home policing the picket lines have been unable to complete their studies in time for the examinations which were to have been held next Tuesday.

Sharon in surprise comeback

From Christopher Walker Jerusalem

The dramatic bid by Israel's former Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon, to stage a political come-back succeeded last night beyond the expectations of even his own supporters. He secured 41 per cent of the vote in his effort to topple Mr Yitzhak Shamir as Likud's candidate for Prime Minister in the July general election.

Although Mr Shamir emerged as victor with 56 per cent of the votes cast by the Central Committee of the dominant right-wing Herut party, his triumph was eclipsed

Armed men hijack Israeli bus

From Our Correspondent Jerusalem

An Israeli bus believed to have more than 40 passengers on board was hijacked by a group of armed men last night and driven south from Tel Aviv towards the Egyptian border town of Rafah.

According to military sources, it was commandeered as it was driving south from Tel Aviv to the Mediterranean resort of Ashkelon. Five terrorists were reported to be on board. Last night the bus was surrounded by security forces. Its tyres had been shot out. Unofficial reports said a

Megaphone message: NUM President Arthur Scargill (top) addresses a mass demonstration of militant miners outside the union HQ in Sheffield with the Scottish leader, Mick McGahey, by his side. Below: Two policemen lead away one of the 3,000 protesters. In all, there were 53 arrests. More photographs, back page.

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