

# Drift back at Bilston Glen heartens NCB

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

The ending of the holiday break for many pits yesterday failed to produce a large-scale return to work although the National Coal Board was heartened by the "significant" numbers of miners reporting for work in the militant Scottish coalfield.

A chief focus for the drift back to work was the showpiece Bilston Glen colliery, near Edinburgh, where almost 100 miners braved a picket line that included several senior officials of the miners' union. The previous best attendance at the pit during the strike was 47.

Elsewhere the move back to work was on a much-reduced scale with handfuls of former strikers going in to the pits. In total the number of "new faces", as they are described by the National Coal Board, appearing in pits yesterday was about 150.

Any doubts that the miner's strike, now into its twenty-third week, would cause a deep split at the Trades Union Congress in Britain next month were dispelled last night when the right wing electricians' union tabled an amendment strongly critical of the National Union of Mineworkers' handling of the dispute.

A meeting of the executive of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union, which drew up the amendment, issued a statement saying it was "appalled" by the intimidation and violence by trade unionists against other union members which flouted the TUC's code on peaceful picketing.

The EETPU amendment to a motion from the constructional section of the engineering union, that defined policing of the picket lines as a threat to democracy, says that the real threat comes from violence on the picket lines. It also "calls on congress to recognize the harm

done to the trade union movement and the Labour Party by acts of violence" by pickets.

A union statement said it "deeply resented" the calls by NUM officials for power station workers not to cross miners' picket lines and indicated that its advice to members to continue defying the pickets would not change.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the NUM president, went to South Wales yesterday to meet leaders of the main transport unions to discuss threats of legal action by haulage companies and also to plan action to tighten the impact of the strike in the principality.

More than £3m of equipment was lost at the Fryston colliery near Castleford in West Yorkshire when millions of gallons of water were pumped into the pit in an attempt to extinguish a sudden fire. An entire face was lost in the fire, which NCB officials said started through spontaneous combustion and was "directly attributable" to the strike.

● Dozens of colliery supervisors, members of the union Nacods, were staging a sit-in last night with pit management at a South Wales colliery in a protest over miners' pickets. The men reported for duty early yesterday to carry out safety work at St John's Colliery, Maesteg, mid-Glamorgan. But when they tried to leave they were confronted by 150 angry NUM pickets

● Fire in a storage bunker is posing serious problems at a complex of Durham pits involving 3,000 jobs an NCB spokesman said. But NUM leaders at the strikebound Hawthorn combined mine have rejected an NCB plea to provide workers to help management tackle the surface blaze.

£4m pit fire, page 2

Philip Whitehead, page 12

## Coal strike 'threat to railmen's jobs'

By Michael Bailly, Transport Editor

The miners' strike has already cost British Rail over £100m and is beginning to pose a long-term threat to railmen's jobs, Mr Bob Reid, British Rail's chairman said yesterday.

The consequences of the strike for British Rail if it continues are "grave in the extreme" he writes in the staff magazine *Railnews*.

British Rail's big fear is that customers - for coal, iron ore and steel products - are being forced to use lorries and will be so happy with the results that they will not return to rail. Already many are baulking at renewing their long-term contracts with British Rail's Railfreight subsidiary.

"Our customers have made alternative arrangements to

safeguard their businesses until the dispute is over" Mr Reid writes. "Worse still, the state of a number of contract negotiations with customers has made it clear to me that they are not prepared at present to entrust the whole of their business to BR.

"There is no doubt we can expect a reduction in the level of BR's business to and from steelworks, affecting the number of locomotives, wagons and depots," Mr Reid states. "Without some compensating economic recovery that will involve jobs."

About one million of BR's regular 86m tonnes of coal traffic has already been lost permanently, a British Rail spokesman said later.

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*The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, Aug 14, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61909. (780 words)

**Category:** News

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**Gale Document Number:**CS17927950