

Murray told to head off TUC clash on miners

- Acas has held private talks with both sides in the miners' dispute, but suggestions of a peace initiative were dismissed
- Mr Len Murray, the TUC general secretary, is to make his most vigorous appeal for the NUM to discuss strategy
- The National Dock Labour Board has ruled in favour of dockers refusing to unload coal destined for the Ravenscraig steelworks
- About 170 more miners reported for work yesterday, with the biggest increase being in Lancashire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and north Wales

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

Fresh attempts are to be made to head off a damaging clash over the miners' strike at next month's Trades Union Congress. It also became clear yesterday that the conciliation service Acas has been holding private talks with both sides.

Mr Len Murray, general secretary of the TUC, will make the most vigorous appeal so far to the National Union of Mineworkers to enter into discussions with the TUC on how Congress House can help the union to fight pit closures.

The political developments in the strike, which yesterday entered its sixth month, came as a special meeting of the National Dock Labour Board found in favour of dockers at the British Steel Corporation's Hunterston terminal on the Clyde who are refusing to unload a ship with urgently needed coking coal for the Ravenscraig steel plant. That decision greatly reduced the possibility of a national docks strike over the issue.

Officials of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service confirmed that there had been talks last week with senior officials of the NUM and the National Coal Board, although they were described as the service trying to keep abreast of the dispute and not

an Acas "initiative" to end the strike.

Suggestions that peace moves could result from the Acas talks or the TUC developments were firmly discounted although views expressed at the TUC's "inner cabinet", the finance and general purposes committee, indicated the concern among centre and right-wing union leaders that the miners' strike would take over the Brighton congress, which starts in two weeks.

Mr Murray was charged by the committee with seeking the views of the NUM leadership urgently on coordinating TUC support for the miners and the general secretary will report back to tomorrow's meeting of the general council on the response.

The miners' call for "total support" for their dispute from the Brighton congress could lead to divisions within the labour movement widening unless an accommodation can be reached with the NUM.

Mr David Basnett, general secretary of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, said afterwards, that the movement generally was prepared to give support to the miners when it was known what the NUM was asking for. He believed there

was no alternative to the miners agreeing to discuss the dispute with the general council.

Progress in the drift back to work was slow yesterday with, according to the board's figures, about 170 "new" miners reporting for work. Lone "rebels" went to work in south Yorkshire, south Wales and Kent. Seven reported for work in Northumberland.

The biggest increase was in the western area, covering Lancashire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and north Wales, where it was said 128 men who had not worked during the strike went into pits.

● Eleven striking miners and a retired colleague in Nottinghamshire issued writs yesterday against the chief constables of Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire, claiming damages for treatment during the strike. The writs, sent by post, allege assault, wrongful arrest and false imprisonment.

● Police found two petrol bombs while clearing barricades outside Brodsworth Colliery at Doncaster, yesterday. Pickets put up the barricades to prevent a television team going down to film serious deterioration

Pit rebel, page 2
Scargill's betrayal, page 10
Output fall, page 15

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