

Miners meet TUC after ordering mass NCB picket

● Miners' union leaders have met the TUC for the first time since the pits strike began in an attempt to avoid a damaging split at next week's Congress

● A proposal allowing limited coal supplies through Hunterston and to end the docks strike is likely to emerge at the TUC Congress

● Dockers at Grimsby and Immingham voted to continue working. At Tilbury there was confusion after both sides claimed to have won the vote

● A state of emergency might be considered if the docks strike began to bite, Mr Tom King, Secretary of State for Employment, said

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From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, Brighton

Pit union leaders last night met the TUC for the first time since their strike began six months ago to "discuss ways in which the dispute could be brought to a conclusion satisfactory to the National Union of Mineworkers".

The NUM Triumvirate of national officials - the president, Mr Arthur Scargill, general secretary, Mr Peter Heathfield, and Mr Michael McGahay, vice-president - met three leading TUC officials in a scaffolding hotel in an attempt to head off a damaging split in the ranks of the Labour movement.

The talks ended early this morning after nearly six hours and an official statement said that they had been constructive. The NUM said that the lobby of Congress on Monday, the opening day, would be orderly.

Before they travelled south for the Brighton summit, the miners' leaders ordered a mass picket of every pit, coke works, and maintenance depot next Monday when a concerted move for a return to work is expected to be mounted by NUM rebels opposed to the strike.

"We are aware of certain suggestions that the coal board may try to get some of our people into work, and we think

it essential that we have a mass picket at every place of work," Mr Scargill said after a meeting of his union's national executive in Sheffield. "We want to demonstrate how many people we can muster and show tremendous solidarity behind this dispute."

But the NUM faced a rather more difficult problem in mustering wider solidarity behind its strike last night, as centre-right union leaders, who dominate the TUC general council, voiced reservations

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about proposals for a pact on "no crossing of NUM picket lines".

The train drivers' union, Aslef, has proposed that all trade unionists should refuse to cross the miners' picket lines wherever they are placed, but Mr Alistair Graham, general secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association, said: "There is a very strong feeling that this step could bring British industry to a stop".

NUM leaders were being asked last night to confine their secondary picketing which is

unlawful under the 1980 Employment Act, to establishments that produce, import, or use coal and coke, and special dispensation is being sought for steel making plants

Miners' leaders have held the TUC at arm's length for many months, arguing that they will not bow to pressure from moderate unions to surrender their control of the dispute.

The TUC team - the general secretary, Mr Len Murray, chairman, Mr Ray Buckton, and Mr David Basnett, of the General Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union - was carrying out the mandate from its "inner cabinet" to discuss how the TUC might be of help to the union, in coordinating financial assistance from other unions, and giving practical effect to some of the proposals raised by the NUM and its allies in a policy motion and amendments to be debated at next week's Trades Union Congress.

Mr Murray voiced his hope that demonstrators from the NUM and their sympathizers, due to converge on Brighton on Monday morning, would be well behaved, and not seek to prevent conference delegates from going about their ordinary business.

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From Paul Routledge, Labour Editor.

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