

Walker challenges unions to refuse support for Scargill and strikers

By Anthony Bevins, Political Correspondent

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, yesterday challenged the TUC to refuse support for Mr Arthur Scargill and the striking miners.

He told a Young Conservative summer school in Manchester: "The coal board loses millions of pounds and coalface after coalface is destroyed by neglect.

"The country suffers from violence, loss of production, and loss of markets. The simple fact is that there would have been no trouble for the TUC, the NUM, the coal board or the country if the NUM had complied with its normal procedure and held a ballot before a strike took place.

"The rejection of that procedure has brought division and misery. The TUC this week has a duty to be the true voice of its members and not an expression of a minority political viewpoint."

Mr Walker, fresh from a holiday in Greece, said that opinion poll after opinion poll showed that most trade unionists wanted the miners to ballot, and were not willing to support Mr Scargill in any way.

It was time that the NUM joined with the coal board and the Government to agree an extension of the *Plan for Coal* which would make Britain "the greatest coal producing nation in western Europe".

Mr Walker said: "If instead of this the TUC wish to encourage the NUM executive, under the pressures of its president, to continue with the use of an army of mob pickets that has already been charged with more than 5,000 criminal offences, if the TUC is willing to encourage the continuance of conflict against the steel industry and power-using industries up and down the country, then

it will be damaging to the prospects of full employment and to the whole future of the coal industry."

The Minister's speech came after a scathing personal attack on Mr Scargill.

He said in an article in *The Sunday Times* that the NUM leader had "lied" in his efforts to bolster support for the strike, that he had a political preference for conflict rather than cooperation, that he had been leading the "mob" when picket line violence had peaked at Orgreave, and that he had "plotted" to deprive the miners of a ballot.

Mr Walker's comments were all the more remarkable in the light of the Prime Minister's view that commenting on the current disputes was "like treading on eggshells".

Mr Walker compared Mr Scargill's attitude to ballots to that of the Polish socialist state and said: "The TUC and the Labour Party have to decide whether they are going to appear as Mr Scargill's lackeys."

The Sunday Times print run was delayed after union leaders, in Brighton, objected to the article, and to another by Mr Frank Chapple.

A Whitehall source said yesterday that a majority of a 10-strong panel of stipendiary magistrates has to be specifically appointed, late last month to deal with the backlog of picketing cases in Rotherham and Chesterfield.

General council's ruling group to lose seats to left

By David Felton, Labour Correspondent

The centre-right group which controls the TUC general council is likely to see its influence diminish this week with the left picking up extra seats on the labour movement's governing body.

Election results for 11 of the 50 seats on the council will be announced in Brighton tomorrow and although it is possible that the left will lose one of the six seats it holds, it will make inroads in other areas.

The main changes, ironically, will flow from the principle of automatic representation for unions with more than 100,000 members, which this year will number 33 seats and to which the left has been strongly opposed.

The right-wing Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, which last year affiliated more than a million members to the TUC, giving it four seats on the general council, will this year have only three because its membership has fallen.

Mr Ray Alderson, a communist, will replace Mr Allstair Graham, the vociferous right-wing general secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association, because of a decision by the union's new left-wing executive earlier this year to withdraw its support for Mr Graham.

The left will also be able to call on Mr Raymond Buckton, general secretary of Aslef, the train drivers' union, who this year has been forced to adopt a less partisan role because of his position as TUC chairman. His replacement in the chair, Mr

Jack Eccles, Lancashire regional secretary of the General Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, should mean a further reduction of one in the right's voting strength.

On some issues the left may muster 24 votes compared with right's 26, although much will depend on the attitude of the four members representing Nalgo, the moderate town hall union.

Some criticism by the union's conference earlier this year of the general council members' voting record may persuade them to side with the left, particularly on issues such as opposing the employment legislation.

Another unknown quantity will be the voting pattern of Mr Norman Willis, who will take over from Mr Len Murray as TUC general secretary at the end of the week.

The general secretary votes only on important issues and in the controversial decision not to back the challenge to the labour laws by the National Graphic Association, Mr Murray voted against the left.

In the 11-seat section for unions with fewer than 100,000 members the right could gain a seat through Mr William McCall, leader of the professional civil servants' IPCS, who is said to be making strong showing in the lobbying for votes. The left-winger most vulnerable is thought to be Mr Alan Sapper, general secretary of the cine technicians' union.

The new general council will take over at the end of Congress on Friday

Murray predicts unity

This week's Congress would be a united one, Mr Len Murray, the TUC general secretary said yesterday.

"This will be a Congress of common purpose and a shared determination to resist assaults upon the livelihood and living standards of our members and to chart the way forward to the industrial and economic regeneration that Britain so urgently needs", Mr Murray said at a press conference.

Mr Murray said that by endorsing the general council's statement today the TUC would commit itself to full support for the miners' objectives - to protect their jobs and communities and to safeguard the nation's energy resources.

The Government's "obsessive attacks" on trade union rights would be equally strongly attacked by Congress, Mr Murray added.



At the front: Mr Arthur Scargill takes a stroll at Brighton yesterday. (Photograph: Peter Trevnor).

Pit debate today

By Barrie Clement

The most important motions will go before the TUC Congress today and tomorrow. This afternoon delegates will debate the miners' strike and the Government's ban on trade unions at the Government Communications Headquarters at Cheltenham.

Tomorrow, trade union legislation is on the agenda together with labour market policy, social insurance and industrial welfare.

On Wednesday there will be debates on education, economic policy, where unemployment will be the dominant issue, and the movement's campaign against privatization.

Motions on equal rights and international matters will be debated on Thursday. Friday, the final day, will be dominated by the election of a successor to Mr Len Murray.

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