

NUM moderates push for ballot

By Paul Routledge and Craig Seton

Pressure for a national pit strike ballot is building up among moderates on the National Union of Mineworkers executive after a vote by men at a traditionally non-militant colliery in North Wales to continue the eight-month stoppage.

Striking miners at Bersham, Wrexham, voted 154 to 145 to stay out yesterday.

However, the poll was boycotted by 62 working miners, who said they would continue to cross picket lines. But the union claimed that 81 strikers had ignored the ballot because they intended to remain on strike whatever the outcome.

The lodge secretary, Mr Jim Williams, said: "The national executive committee should now ask the membership for its full backing, because we have proved here that it can be done. Sometimes we don't show enough confidence in our own membership."

The Bersham poll has revived efforts by moderates on the executive to put the proposal for a national ballot back on the agenda for a crucial meeting in Sheffield next Thursday. When it was last debated, eight days ago, the ballot campaign failed by the unexpectedly narrow margin of 11 votes to 9.

Confidential exchanges took place yesterday between union leaders in some moderate coalfields, and there will be further contacts early next week when the scale of the "drift back

to work" can be gauged more accurately. Another 232 strikers returned yesterday, bringing the number of returnees this week to about 2,000.

Mr Trevor Bell, secretary of the NUM white-collar section, disclosed to *The Times* last night that his members at Cortonwood, the South Yorkshire colliery where the strike began in March, had petitioned him to seek a national ballot at the earliest opportunity.

"If this drift back goes on for another week, then there is a danger that we will be on the brink of losing the unity which gave us the initiative. Had our

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attempt to get the ballot issue before the one-day conference earlier this week been successful, that unity might have been preserved."

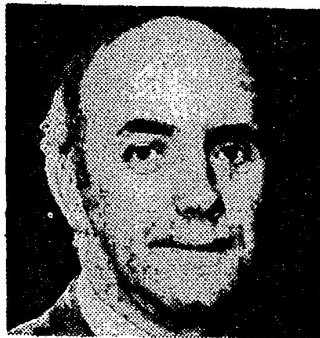
The centre-left majority on the executive is unlikely to be shifted easily from its previous hostility to a ballot.

Six more men returned yesterday, and the working miners said in a statement: "We reaffirm our intention to continue working. From the vote it is clear that we are in the clear majority and we look forward to our colleagues joining us at the earliest opportunity."

● The NUM general secretary, Mr Peter Heathfield, told a rally of striking miners in Sheffield last night: "There are some of our comrades who have broken ranks this week. I can tell you they will be treated like lepers

The rally was the second of five called by the NUM to gain support for the strike.

More than 2,500 miners crowded into the City Hall. The speakers included the Labour Party general secretary, Mr Jim Mortimer, the Labour's energy spokesman, Mr Stan Orme, and Mr Arthur Scargill, who received a rapturous welcome. Mr Scargill said that there would be no return until every miner dismissed during the dispute had been reinstated.



Mr Trevor Bell: "Unity is at risk"

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The Times (London, England), Friday, Nov 09, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61982. (530 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS17796969