

# 1,330 miners go back to work says coal board

- Another 1,330 miners abandoned their strike, so that 73,000 pitmen are now working
- Mr Arthur Scargill has been accused in a High Court action of conspiring to intimidate working miners
- An NUM official accused of assault must live 110 miles from his home as a condition of bail

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The National Coal Board reported yesterday a fresh surge of miners abandoning the strike and, in Nottinghamshire, working pitmen's leaders intensified their moves to break with the National Union of Mineworkers.

By the time the afternoon shift had clocked on, another 1,330 "new faces" had returned to their jobs, bringing the number of men not on strike to about 73,000, or 38 per cent of the NUM labour force. The drift back to work was most marked in Yorkshire, Scotland and the North-east, key union bastions in the conflict.

Mr Michael Eaton, chief spokesman for the board, said: "The return is encouraging. It reflects the disenchantment that the miners feel with the leadership of the dispute."

Privately, the board hopes that the drift back will intensify the pressure on the NUM executive to shift its bargaining position and to allow fresh talks to take place on a formula for a return-to-work.

Now that the miners have agreed to bring their entire

executive of 26 men to any new negotiations, the board is looking to the executive's meeting on January 24 to start a move away from the concept of "no pit closures on economic grounds".

The board is taking legal advice about what to do with the breakaway pit union emerging in Nottinghamshire as a result of the NUM executive's vote last week to expel the 30,000-member coalfield union unless it rescinds recent rule changes and bows to the authority of the pro-strike national leadership.

The actions of the moderates in Nottinghamshire are being closely watched in other areas where most of the men are back at work. Area leaders in South Derbyshire and Leicestershire, representing about 5,000 working pitmen, are considering whether to make a similar stand against the executive.

Last night, the South Derbyshire leaders decided to back the Nottinghamshire area execu-

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tive; they will meet again today to decide on action and to consider whether to back Nottinghamshire further by changing their rules to make the area independent.

In taking legal advice, the board has in mind the fact that the Attlee Government legislation that nationalized the mines placed a statutory obligation on the board to consult with the industry's unions; but it is not clear from the legislation whether the board has a duty to recognize only one union.

Lay area leaders of the mineworkers in Nottinghamshire reaffirmed their dissident line yesterday and suspended their secretary, Mr Henry Richardson, from all full-time office with the union.

Mr Roy Lynk, the area financial secretary who has been appointed acting general secretary in his place, said that Mr Richardson had left the coalfield executive with no alternative but to suspend him after his refusal to give an undertaking not to handle official correspondence.

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*The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, Jan 15, 1985; pg. 1; Issue 62036. (539 words)

**Category:** News

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**Gale Document Number:**CS18190383