

# Pit strike 'talks about talks' likely this week

● There is "every prospect" of talks about talks with the coal board this week, Mr Peter Heathfield, general secretary of the mineworkers' union, told Yorkshire miners

● Mr Neil Kinnock warned left-wing Labour rebels seeking a Commons debate on the pit strike they deserved suspension if they refused to play by the rules

● Rail union leaders will be warned that their action in support of the miners puts in jeopardy their pay claim and several hundred freight train jobs

● Three senior churchmen are to see Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, tomorrow to put their proposals for ending the pit strike. Page 2

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The peace process in the pit strike is expected to get under way over the next few days as the conflict over colliery closures goes into its forty-sixth week.

Mr Peter Heathfield, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, told a meeting of striking miners last night in South Elmsall, in the heart of the militant Yorkshire coalfield, that there was every prospect of informal talks with the National Coal Board during the week.

It is likely that the contacts will be talks about talks and that they will take place before the NUM national executive meets in Sheffield on Thursday to determine its next step.

Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the mineworkers, confirmed in a television interview yesterday that the union is ready for talks at any time, and he hinted that the board might find the miners more flexible.

"This union is perfectly willing to have negotiations and we are not arguing that there should be preconditions or a set agenda", he said on BBC television's *This Week, Next Week*.

Some coalfield leaders in the dominant centre-left coalition on the executive are arguing privately that the NUM may

have to make some move towards the coal board's position of insisting on discussing the economic basis for pit closures in order to restart the peace process.

The three-month gap in negotiations is blamed for the loss of morale that has sent nearly 6,000 strikers back to their jobs since January 1, and certain key figures in the union leadership who decline to state their views publicly feel that the miners will have to make some concessions, but only when talks are under way.

Mr Michael Eaton, chief spokesman for the board, restated last night the board's insistence that the NUM must make the first move, and signal its readiness to concede on pit closures. "Before we begin discussions it has to be clearly understood by the NUM that on any agenda would be the economics of colliery closures."

TUC leaders are also seeking to bring the warring parties back to negotiations. The trade union movement's seven-man team charged with monitoring the progress of the dispute has been called into session today and will meet soon after union leaders have had talks with the Shadow Cabinet under the

auspices of the TUC-Labour Party liaison committee.

The "seven wise men" will then report to the TUC's finance and general purposes committee, from which any initiative in the strike will emerge later in the day.

The board expects another 2,000 to 3,000 men to abandon the strike this week, lifting the proportion of NUM members at work above 40 per cent. The NUM general secretary, however, said: "The overwhelming majority of miners are still on strike and even if there is further erosion based on the past six weeks' figures, in six weeks' time the vast majority of the miners will still be on strike".

The Government also intensified the pressure on the miners. Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, said that even if the cold weather continued until April there would be no power cuts this year because of coal shortages.

He told his Worcester constituents that miners must insist that "the absurd demand of Mr Scargill that every pit, no matter how uneconomic, must be kept going until the last tonne of coal is exhausted is dropped".

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