

Coal board expects a mass return to pits on Monday

By **Barrie Clement and Rupert Morris**

A mass return to the pits is expected on Monday after the National Coal Board yesterday recorded the second highest Friday total for "new faces" since the coal strike began.

The movement back to work follows the rejection of a peace deal on Thursday worked out between the board, the Government and the seven-man team from the TUC who have been monitoring the conflict.

A total of 456 pitmen abandoned the 50-week-old strike yesterday compared with 171 last Friday. The previous highest total for a Friday was 948 - on November 23.

An attempt will be made on Monday to heal the rift between the National Union of Mineworkers and the TUC over the abortive attempt last week to achieve an agreement.

Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' president, Mr Peter Heathfield, general secretary, and Mr Mick McGahey, vice-president, are to meet the TUC's "inner cabinet", the finance and general purposes committee.

The union has declared that the peace proposals were worse than an original coal board document and professed themselves "shocked" that the liaison group agreed that it was non-negotiable and the best available.

An attempt to stem the flow of men returning to work will be made tomorrow, when Mr Scargill and other union leaders will be addressing a rally in Trafalgar Square. The demon-

stration will be preceded by a march from Hyde Park.

Mr Scargill will call on his members to stand firm and will appeal for support over the heads of the TUC to the rank and file of the labour movement.

The board feels, however, that the strike is in its final stages and that it could have more than 50 per cent of miners back at work within the first few days of next week.

It estimates that yesterday's figures brought the total number for the week of men returning to 2,303, compared with the previous week's 2,175. More than 87,000 of the 186,000 pitmen are now back at work, according to the board, but the figures are disputed by the union.

● The Government welcomed the return to work figures, saying that within hours of the union's rejection of the latest peace move the remaining miners had started to take the only sane decision (Our Political Reporter writes).

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, said that yesterday marked not only the biggest return to work on any Friday this year but the end of a week in which more coal had been delivered to the power stations than in any week since the dispute started.

"It is Britain's striking miners who can now bring a swift end to this dispute", he said. "The revival of the coal industry must begin and the desperate damage inflicted by this unnecessary industrial dispute must end."

But although the Government is expecting another big surge back to work on Monday morning, the prospect of a long period of "guerrilla warfare" in the mining industry is increasingly worrying senior ministers.

Those closely involved in the dispute believe that Mr Arthur Scargill and his executive may be determined not to have an agreement at any price.

**S Wales stands firm, page 2
Letters, page 9**

RETURN-TO-WORK FIGURES

Area	Attendance	New faces		Workforce
		Feb 22	Feb 15	
North East	8,300	123	31	22,133
Scotland	5,199	66	14	12,400
Yorkshire	7,650	92	12	49,500
N Derbys	6,794	86	20	10,000
Western	12,111	73	13	14,024
S Wales	509	15	2	19,600
S Midlands	9,352	1	0	9,742
Nottingham	25,746	0	1	27,000

Source: NCB

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