

# Miners set for big march-back next week

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

A massive return to work in the striking coalfields is forecast early next week, after votes yesterday in moderate and left-wing areas alike to stage a "march-back" without an agreement on the closure of uneconomic collieries.

Miners' executives and councils in Scotland, South Wales, Lancashire, Durham and Northumberland craftsmen in the North-east and the National Union of Mineworkers' white-collar section COSA all agreed to participate in an orderly return to work.

Only indecision in the huge Yorkshire coalfield, where 77 per cent of the men are still on strike despite the return of 1,100 yesterday, leaves in any doubt the outcome of a special delegate conference of the NUM in London tomorrow.

Union branches in the coalfield where the strike began at Cortonwood pit on March 6 last year will be asked to consider the next step at meetings today, before the Yorkshire area council reconvenes to take a final decision. The council was divided on what to do yesterday, and agreed not to make any recommendation. But once the Yorkshire branches become aware of what is happening in other coalfields, opinion there is expected to swing behind the "march-back" option.

The NUM's 26-man national executive gathers in emergency session early tomorrow to assess the views of the areas, and various proposals - including continuation of the strike - will be put to them. In the light of yesterday's votes, it seems inevitable that the miners' leaders will endorse the proposition from South Wales for a nationwide return to work. Most coalfields favour Monday as the return date though the Welsh miners are suggesting Tuesday.

Mr Emyln Williams, president of the South Wales pitmen, said: "We came out as one, and we will go in as one. We believe it is the answer to the problem. I believe that the yardstick adopted in South Wales of a return to leadership is better than a drift back where the leadership will have been destroyed by the numbers going back."

A similar line is being taken by Lancashire miners, whose

secretary, Mr Sid Vincent said: "I am convinced that this Government doesn't intend to negotiate with us or anybody else. The coal board was talking about shutting 20 pits and shedding 20,000 jobs. But not one pit has been closed. What they have done is ruin this industry, and industrial relations, which used to be as happy as any in the country."

Durham miners' leaders unanimously backed a move for "a co-ordinated, orderly return

**Working miners' advocate: strike casualties; Scargill defiant, page 2**

to work", recognizing the hardship and suffering bravely borne during the past 12 months. They said: "It is unreasonable on humanitarian grounds to call upon the membership to endure still further pain and sacrifice to themselves and families in their loyalty to the union."

The NUM called the conference tomorrow to forestall what was likely to be a disorganized flood back of the 90,000 men still on strike at the end of the fifty-first week of the dispute. Another 1,656 strikers crossed picket lines for the first time yesterday.

The coal board expected at least 10,000 to return on Monday if the strike is not called off, and on the assumption that it is, that figure is likely to rise to at least 30,000. There are still powerful pockets of resistance to ending the strike without any agreement, because the fate of 709 men dismissed by the coal board after being convicted of various offences is still undecided.

The NUM wants all the men reinstated as part of a general amnesty, and the militant Kent area will tomorrow urge that the strike goes on until they all get their jobs back.

The board's policy is that the question of amnesty is one for local management; 57 sacked pitmen have already been taken back and where the original offences are not grave there are good prospects of reinstatement after a period. However, the board insists that 430 men convicted of violence or vandalism on board property will never be re-employed.

## Edwardes tipped as next chairman

By Our Labour Editor

Fresh upheavals are taking place at the top levels of management of the National Coal Board as the year-old pit strike stumbles to an end.

Mr Michael Eaton, aged 51, the board's chief spokesman for the last four months on secondment from his main job as chairman of the North Yorkshire area, is tipped to take over as board member for personnel from Mr Merrick Spanton, aged 59, once the dust has settled on the conflict.

There is also renewed speculation within Hobart House that Sir Michael Edwardes, chairman of Dunlop and former head of BL could take over from Mr Ian MacGregor as chairman of the NCB. Sir Michael was a private guest at a board dinner at the headquarters two nights ago, at which a very senior civil servant is also understood to have been present.

Coal board spokesmen are playing down the significance of the dinner, in line with previous policy of refusing to air the industry's private business in the media. Hitherto-reliable

sources within Hobart House suggest, however, that the promotion of Mr Eaton is a certainty after his leading role in the closing stages of the dispute.

These same sources correctly predicted the early departure of Mr Ned Smith, the director of industrial relations, Mr Geoffrey Kirk, head of public relations, Mr Ralph Rawlinson, director of mining and Dr Paul Glover director-general (staff) in the past few months; after initial, formal denials, all these senior executives have now gone.

Attention has now been focused on the few men still at the top in the NCB, in particular the position of Mr MacGregor, aged 73, who has only 18 months to run before his term of office as chairman expires in the autumn of 1986. The Government has given a public undertaking that he will be able to complete his term, but the process of finding a successor often begins many months before the expiry date.

In that context, Sir Michael's appearance at the Hobart House dinner table prompted fresh rumours.

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