

Fight against closure of 'uneconomic' pits likely to continue

Strike ends but Scargill defiant

- The miners' strike has ended with a narrow vote for a return to work tomorrow. Union leaders pledged to continue the fight against pit closures
- The decision to end the strike was greeted with anger and tears by miners waiting in the rain outside TUC headquarters
- Mr Ian MacGregor, the coal board chairman, said the priority was to get the industry working normally. Mr Peter Walker, Energy Secretary, is expected to report to the Commons today

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The miners' strike is over, but left-wing pit leaders last night vowed to continue the dispute over the closure of "uneconomic" collieries.

A delegate conference of the National Union of Mineworkers yesterday voted narrowly in favour of a mass return to work tomorrow without any signed agreement on the issue that triggered the conflict a year ago.

There were scenes of near-hysteria outside TUC headquarters when Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the NUM, emerged to tell miners of the 98-91 card vote to abandon the strike.

The National Coal Board welcomed the decision, but said that there would be no general amnesty for the 700 men dismissed over the past 51 weeks. Some miners in Kent and Scotland threatened to remain on strike unless there was an amnesty.

The coal board chairman, Mr Ian MacGregor, said last night: "Now that the NUM leadership has accepted the decision of the majority of their members to call off the union's strike, the first priority is to return the

Mr Michael Eaton, chief spokesman for the board, doubted whether the militant miners' leaders could deliver their post-strike threats of guerrilla warfare.

"Our men are fed up with being in battle and would very much like to return to normal living", he added. "They are totally fed up with the acrimony they have had to face over the past year."

Speaking after the heated, three-hour conference, Mr Scargill promised: "The dispute goes on. We will continue to fight against pit closures or job losses, make no mistake. Don't underestimate this union's ability to oppose."

The decision to call off the strike was taken in support of a motion from South Wales miners, which recognized that there had been "a drift back to work of members in all areas" and argued that "it has now become clear the coal board have no intentions whatsoever with the union unless they sign the document presented by the TUC on February 17".

But the vote nearly went the other way. Initially, the national executive could not agree on what recommendation to put to the conference, and after protests from Yorkshire miners who wanted to continue the strike there was a half-hour recess for the leadership to come to a verdict.

When they returned they confessed that they were deadlocked 11-11, and advised that the "status quo" - continuation of the strike - should be endorsed.

The main point of difference between the two rival groups was the amnesty. The hard left argued that there could be no return to work until all the dismissed men had been reinstated; the Welsh miners, who still form the most solid strike area, and their allies on the soft left and the right insisted that there should be an immediate march back, with negotiations on an amnesty thereafter.

On the card vote, the militants were outnumbered. Those in favour of staying out were: Kent (three votes); Midlands (13); Scotland (12); Yorkshire (59) and Scottish craftsmen (four).

Those for an immediate return were: Cokemen (five); Colliery Officials and Staff (17); Durham (12); North West (eight); Northumberland (six);

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Mr Arthur Scargill, flanked by Mr Michael McGahey and Mr Peter Heathfield, after the vote yesterday. (Photograph: Suresh Karadia)

Yorkshire pitman's tears mark the end

By Barrie Clement, Labour Reporter

When the final scene arrived yesterday it came without ceremony in a grey, rainsoaked street in central London.

Mr Arthur Scargill, Mr Michael McGahey and Mr Peter Heathfield, the leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers, emerged from the delegates' meeting at the TUC headquarters in Great Russell Street, surrounded by the paraphernalia of the media.

They moved across the street towards the few members of the labour movement's crack regiment who had bothered to come back after the public houses had closed.

The demonstrators from the ultra-left and the sightseers had left before lunch, leaving little more than 100 miners to face their leaders.

Amid a small and unruly scrum, Mr Scargill addressed a knot of Scottish miners. "I want to say a few words..." he said, but they knew already.

The strike was over, there was an unrecognized victory in a seeming defeat and a trust fund for the strikers dismissed by the National Coal Board was to be set up.

"We are not going back," they chanted as their hero struggled to make himself heard.

The cries turned to "scum"

as Mr Scargill continued his brief speech.

"We've given our heart, we've given our blood, we've given our soul", a Yorkshire pitman shouted and was led away weeping as members of the executive left the building to cries of "scab".

"We will guarantee that the dispute is to go on", Mr Scargill said to cheers, but added: "The strike will be over on Tuesday."

They had been involved in the greatest industrial dispute in history, he told his supporters. He thanked them for their solidarity.

Then, carried in the media flood, he disappeared with his colleagues back into Congress House.

The strikers who remained railed against the police and the press, the only people left to hear them. The miners were on their own in the end - something they had suspected all along.

Some of them pledged to continue the strike until an amnesty for their dismissed colleagues is achieved; but they knew the strike was over.

A BBC camera crew who tried to film a news report hard by the pickets were forced to move. The strikers were not going to have the "enemy" gloating over their defeat within shouting distance.

Walker says 'no gloating'

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

There were no signs of ministers congratulating themselves on a victory over the leaders of the mineworkers' union last night, much less over the union rank and file.

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy interviewed on BBC television, said: "I don't want anyone saying there have been victories or defeats."

Earlier, he said that among his immediate priorities were "to unite the mining communities" and to unite the industry.

The Prime Minister returning to Downing Street from Chequers where she had heard of the decision to call off the strike said her feelings were of

overwhelming relief. She spoke with regret of the privation some miners' families had suffered and added that these would have ended earlier had not intimidation kept the strike going.

"We had to make certain that violence and intimidation and impossible demands could not win," Mrs Thatcher said.

"There would have been neither freedom nor order in Britain if we had given in to violence. There would have been no hope for any prosperous industry if people had gone on strike really

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Egyptian brothers bid for Harrods

By Kenneth Fleet

Three Egyptian brothers will announce today that they have made a takeover bid worth more than £600 million for House of Fraser, the group which owns Harrods, the Knightsbridge store.

The offer is believed to have won conditional backing from the House of Fraser board.

The brothers are Mohammed, Ali and Salah Al-Fayed, who in November last year paid Lonrho £138.3 million (300p a share) for its interest in Fraser.

Two of them, Mohammed and Ali, are members of the Fraser board, and all day yesterday they were locked in talks with the rest of the House of Fraser directors at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London.

A close associate of the Al-Fayeds confirmed that the two sides were discussing the terms of a takeover bid for the company.

A statement is expected to be made this morning before deals start on the stock market.

The Egyptians' bid is expected to be around 400p a share which would value the House of Fraser at about £620 million. The brothers have been keen to win the agreement of the board, partly in order to preempt rival bids.

A number of other com-

panies, including Lonrho and Sears Holdings, confirmed yesterday that they were interested in bidding for the House of Fraser.

Harrods is seen as a great international prize which, when it is knocked down at the forthcoming auction, is unlikely to come up for sale again.

Mr Roland "Tiny" Rowland, chief executive of Lonrho and owner of *The Observer* newspaper, has made no secret of his continuing interest.

Although Lonrho sold its original 29.9 per cent holding to the Al-Fayeds, it promptly bought 6.3 per cent from a small group of other shareholders, including Sir Hugh Fraser, whose father brought Harrods into the House of Fraser group.

Mr Paul Spicer, a Lonrho director, said yesterday that Lonrho could "afford a bigger offer than 400p but I cannot say what."

Lonrho and the Fraser board are waiting to be told the findings of the latest Monopolies Commission report on the relationships between Lonrho and House of Fraser, which went to Mr Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, last week. The central issue for the commission was whether Lonrho should now be free to bid for Fraser.

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industry to normal and safe working quickly. A safe return to work at the pits is essential.

"Every day many more miners have been returning to work. Demonstrating to their leaders that they want the dispute brought to an end. That is also a clear signal to them to call off the overtime ban that the union introduced in November 1983.

"We would be able to get down to the crucial task of ensuring the future success of the industry. We need to restore coal production to former levels, to regain coal markets we have lost and to plan ahead to ensure that Britain has the high volume, low cost coal industry which alone will guarantee a secure future."

Scargill defiant as pit strike ends

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Cumberland (one); North Derbyshire (11); North Wales (two); South Wales (22); Durham Mechanics (eight).

Pit delegates from Nottinghamshire, South Derbyshire and Leicestershire areas, where men have worked throughout the strike, boycotted the conference, although the two Nottinghamshire officials, Mr Ray Chadburn and Mr Henry Richardson, attended as members of the executive.

Mr Scargill, insisting that he felt "terrific, quite frankly", refused at a press conference to concede defeat. In spite of tremendous hardship, his members had remained on strike for a whole year, and the board did not have a signed agreement that pit closures could be made on economic grounds.

The board's plan to eliminate four million tonnes of high-cost capacity during 1984-85 had not been implemented and the threat to close five named pits immediately had been withdrawn, Mr Scargill said.

Government ministers and the board alike are not happy that the strike has ended without an agreement on the issue of uneconomic closures, and there is certain to be fresh pressure on the union to accept the principle contained in the document conveyed by the TUC general secretary, Mr Norman Willis, two weeks ago and subsequently thrown out by the union executive.

This document lays down that collieries "where there are no further reserves which can be

developed to provide the board, in line with their responsibilities, with a satisfactory basis for continuing operations" will be referred to a new review procedure

Mr Eaton said that this document was "reasonable and straightforward and should have provided the basis for a settlement. I find it absolutely astonishing that they can't agree to the terms of that document. The strike became political. It started as an exercise to match supply with demand."

The problems faced by the board last March, when it announced the plan to shut 20 pits with the loss of 20,000 jobs, were still there, but now they were worse, Mr Eaton said.

There had been a substantial loss of markets, while 35 million tonnes of coal remained "on the ground" - 15 million tonnes at the power stations and 20 million tonnes at the pithead.

These are the first official figure on coal stocks for many months. They demonstrate that the year-long strike has cut stocks by only 22 million tonnes.

The initiative for further talks now lay with the union, Mr Eaton went on, not with the board. "The initiative does rest with them, although perhaps that is not the most popular thing to say."

Mr Eaton made it clear that the board had already ruled out a general amnesty, though some of the men dismissed for acts such as stealing coal during the strike be might be reinstated.

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor.

The Times (London, England), Monday, Mar 04, 1985; pg. 1; Issue 62077. (1258 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS17141860