

# Secret ballot hope doomed if Scargill plays it by the book

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

The miners could be deprived of a secret pithead ballot on the "rolling strike" in their industry by senior level manoeuvring within their union rule book, it was disclosed last night.

Moderate pit leaders who will demand a national poll at next week's meeting of the executive committee of the National Union of Mineworkers fear that the left-wing president, Mr Arthur Scargill, will rule the proposal out of order.

A step of that sort would require a two-thirds majority to overturn, which the pro-ballot camp on the 24-member executive could not muster at the gathering in Sheffield on Thursday. The stoppage, which has closed down 122 of the industry's 176 pits, would then continue indefinitely without a ballot.

A leading moderate who declined to be named said: "I think Arthur Scargill will rule out of order a national ballot because it is not national action we are involved in. He knows that if he accepts a resolution for a national ballot there is a majority on the executive in favour."

Coalfield union leaders mandated or ready to vote for an early poll of the men on industrial action are understood

to be in a 14 to 10 majority. But if the nature of the argument is shifted to a vote for or against the president's ruling, some would be released from their area mandate and would back Mr Scargill.

The miners' president has consistently quoted rule 41 of the union rulebook. The rule gives the national executive power to sanction "a stoppage of work or any other industrial action short of a strike" in any of the union's constituent areas as the authority to back the strike.

The strike, now in its fourth week, has engulfed Yorkshire, Scotland, South Wales, Kent, Durham, Northumberland, most of Lancashire and parts of the Midlands.

The *Times* source said last night: "A national ballot will be called for. His (Mr Scargill's) answer to that will be that it is not in order, it is not national action. It is the Scottish area and Yorkshire, and under rule 41 we agreed that if any other area also encouraged members to take strike action we would make that action official in those areas. I think that is what he will do."

The miners' president was attending a local authority dinner in South Yorkshire and was not available for comment.

Such a move would be constitutional but it would "bring the wrath of the public down on his head," the moderate union executive member added. An alternative move gathering support among the centre-right group on the executive is to go hard for a national ballot with an appeal for strike action.

The union's rule book is clear on that point. It would require a 55 per cent majority of those voting to sanction a stoppage. An opinion poll last weekend suggested that 51 per cent of the men would opt for all-out industrial action.

A second signatory of the six-union declaration to blockade coal movements yesterday opted out of the agreement. The Transport Salaried Staffs Association, the white-collar rail workers' union, decided not to take sympathetic industrial action.

The 29-member executive of the association voted unanimously to instruct its 40,000 members to work normally. Mr Bert Lyons, general secretary, said support had been refused because there had been no official request from the miners' union executive.