Miners resubmit conditions for talks resumption

- **Miners' leaders agreed to attend peace talks provisionally arranged for Sunday but only if the coal board accepted union terms, including retention of loss-making pits**
- **The TUC signalled its willingness to end a six-month boycott of tripartite discussions with the Government and employers' leaders within Neddy**
- **Next week's threatened disruption on the railways seems certain to be called off after British Rail gave union leaders assurances about the industry's future**
- **The transport union attempted to step up the national dock strike by calling on all its members in the docks to withdraw their labour**

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By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

Miners' leaders agreed last night to go to fresh peace talks aimed at settling the six-month-old pit strike – but only on their own terms.

The National Union of Mineworkers has resubmitted its three-pronged demand for the retention of loss-making collieries as a basis for reopening negotiations with the National Coal Board, provisionally fixed for Sunday night.

A venue for the talks has been arranged in Scotland, but it was not clear last night whether the coal board would accept the terms laid down by the miners for the restart of the peace process.

An exchange of letters yesterday prepared the way for a resumption of negotiations. The coal board sent a hand-delivered message to Mr Peter Heathfield, the union's general secretary, at his hotel in Brighton, proposing the new round of peace talks.

The letter, signed by Mr Kevin Hunt, deputy industrial relations director, said: "Following the chairman's most recent offer I confirm that we will be at a mutually agreed location at 7 pm on Sunday, September 9.

"If the time or date would inconvenience the NUM, we will agree a mutually convenient arrangement.

"I hope you will attend so that the problem on which our talks broke down in July can be solved, and that the closure of uneconomic pits can be dealt with in accordance with the principles of the various reports on the Plan for Coal.

"I hope also that you will constructively discuss the manner in which the huge investment that we are willing to make in the industry can be applied and operated so as to create a successful and prosperous industry benefiting all miners, their families, and the nation.

"I expect to see you on Sunday, or at an early date that is mutually convenient."

The coal board's insistence in its letter on talking about "uneconomic" pits indicates that there has been no change in the approach of the coal board, and the reply, telexed back by union leaders, discloses that they have not shifted their ground either, and the prospect for a swift settlement emerging from the discussions is accordingly not thought to be good.

In his response to the board, Mr Heathfield said: "I am in receipt of your letter dated September 5, reiterating Mr MacGregor's offer to reopen negotiations with the NUM on Sunday at a mutually agreed location.

"I hope the board will attend this meeting so that the matter on which you broke off negotiations in July can be resolved, and that you will now drop your demands for the closure of so-called uneconomic pits which started off the dispute, and which is of course in violation of Plan for Coal.

"We hope therefore that when the two sides meet the coal board will be able to confirm its verbal undertaking to:

1: Withdraw the pit closure programme announced on March 6.

2: Keep open the five pits – Polmaise (Scotland), Herrington (Durham), Cortonwood and Bullcliffe Wood (Yorkshire), and Snowden (Kent), currently under closure threat.

3: Reach agreement with the NUM regarding the exhaustion of colliery reserves on the basis of Plan for Coal.

"As indicated previously, we want to see an expanding and developing industry in line with the Plan for Coal, and in the interests of British miners, their families, and the entire nation. We await your reply."

The coal board is considering the letter.

- The Prime Minister will interrupt her visit to Scotland for a special meeting tomorrow of the Cabinet committee on the pits and docks disputes.

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Deal likely to avert rail chaos

By Our Labour Correspondent

Next week's threatened rail disruption looks certain to be called off after day-long talks yesterday in which British Rail gave union leaders assurances about the industry's future and offered an appeals procedure for resolving closure problems.

The two main unions had called a work to rule to start next Monday in protest against job cuts and reductions in some services. They were also opposed to further changes to passenger timetables that involved a reduction in services.

Last night both sides agreed that the talks had been "positive". On Friday, the executives of the National Union of Railwaymen and the train drivers' union, Aslef, meet to decide whether they think they have won enough concessions from BR to warrant calling off the action.

BR refused to alter its target of losing 10,000 jobs over the next five years, but Mr Jimmy Knapp, the NUR general secretary, said he now believed the unions were reversing the trend of the last five or six years of cuts in services and employment.

TUC signals wish to return to Neddy

From David Felton, Labour Correspondent, Brighton

The TUC yesterday signalled its willingness to end a six-month boycott of tripartite discussions with the Government and employers leaders within the National Economic Development Council (Neddy).

The boycott, initiated in protest at the Government's decision to remove union rights at GCHQ, in Cheltenham, will probably end after a further meeting between the TUC and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which is due to be held a the end of the month.

Delegates to the Brighton congress yesterday rejected by a large majority, a motion from Tass, the white collar engineering union, which called for an indefinite boycott of the council, and instead followed the TUC general council argument that progress could be made by discussions in the tripartite field.

Mr David Basnett, chairman of the TUC economic committee, said that there were "clear, but marginal" advantages to participating in Neddy and added: "We need a very substantial campaign to expose our policies. We can make what we do at the NEDC the centre of our policies."

Until the boycott, the TUC was represented on the council by Mr Basnett, Mr Clive Jenkins, Mr Mostyn Evans, Mr Len Murray, Mr Rodney Bickerstaffe, and Mr Terry Duffy.

The pressure to return and reopen a dialogue with the Government on economic and employment matters has been increasingly recently as leaders of the labour movement believe that the protest over GCHQ had made its point.

But Mr Kenneth Gill, general secretary of Tass, referred to the TUC representatives as the "gold plated six" who were to be seen "loitering without intent in the corridors of power with the aim of inflating the egos of those who want to rub shoulders with the mighty".

He said that it had not been shown that Neddy "a rich man's monetarist club", had done anything to improve the trade union movement's standing or to change government economic policy.

The decision was welcomed by the CBI, which said that it expected to have the latest stage in a series of meetings with TUC leaders later this month.

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Miners resubmit conditions for talks resumption.
By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor.

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