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# Walker to meet TUC team on pit peace talks

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor

New moves to end the 40-week pit strike got under way last night after the Government agreed to meet a deputation of TUC leaders to talk about the dispute, but there will be no miners' union representative at the meeting.

Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, is to meet the seven-member TUC liaison group that has been monitoring developments in the strike, today or tomorrow. He will come under pressure to "facilitate a resumption of negotiations between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers."

Mr Norman Willis, general secretary of the TUC, was in touch with Mr Arthur Scargill, the miners' president, yesterday afternoon. He said afterwards: "There are a lot of ideas around, we shall be probing every good idea."

The board was unaware of the initiative until it was announced yesterday evening. Mr Michael Eaton, chief spokesman for the board, reacted cautiously, saying: "If the TUC has persuaded the NUM to recognize the fact that the cost of production is a factor in colliery closures, then we

have always expressed a willingness to talk.

Privately, the board's managers remain to be persuaded that the miners have shifted from their hard-line strategy.

However, the TUC team believes that there is scope for a resumption of negotiation, based on the miners' union's formula that the board should recognize that it cannot shut down four million tonnes of capacity in the current financial year.

Instead of withdrawing the pit closure programme, the miners argue that the board should "not proceed" with it, and should make future colliery shutdowns consistent with the provisions of the 1974 *Plan for Coal*.

At the end of their five-hour meeting yesterday the TUC group reaffirmed its determination to help in finding a negotiated settlement and, in line with that, had arranged an "urgent meeting" with Mr Walker "at which the TUC representatives will press the Government to do everything open to it to facilitate a resumption of negotiations between the National Coal

Board and the National Union of Mineworkers".

But if bilateral talks between the miners and the board do take place as a result of the latest initiative, the TUC will not supervise the detailed conduct of the talks.

The board was somewhat taken aback by the TUC's going over its head directly to Mr Walker, but if there is any serious prospect of the union making sufficient concessions to restart negotiations, the board will pocket its pride and go back into direct discussions.

The miners' union national executive meeting in Sheffield today will be given a report on the latest steps to restart the peace process. Mr Scargill is expected to be absent, appearing in court in Rotherham to answer a charge of obstruction remaining from the days of the mass pickets at Orgreave.

The executive will also consider the result among 30,000 union members in Nottinghamshire, who are voting overwhelmingly for a new area constitution that remove them from the authority of the national union leadership.

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*The Times* (London, England), Thursday, Dec 13, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 62011. (518 words)

**Category:** News

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**Gale Document Number:**CS17272717