

A **Socialist** ACTION

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National Demonstration for Amnesty
Saturday 30 March Sheffield

JOBS NOT JAIL

Speakers: Betty Heathfield, Jack Collins, Jo Reeder, Liz French

Re-instate sacked miners
Support the Prisoners
Stop the trials

Assemble 11am, Caborns Corner (junction of Spital Hill/Carlisle St)
March to a rally at City Hall

Called by the South Yorkshire Defence Campaign
more info from 73, West St, Sheffield S1

DEFEND PIT MILITANTS



Photo: GM COOKSON

'PEOPLE ARE discovering the price of insubordination and insurrection. And boy are we going to make it stick!' was Ian MacGregor's infamous boast in the *Sunday Telegraph* in justification of the NCB's victimisation of miners sacked during the strike. But, while management attacks on the miners and NUM are mounting, sharp struggles are taking place against the NCB's attacks.

•In Cannock, Staffordshire, at Littleton colliery, where 80 per cent were at work when the strike ended, production came to a halt on Tuesday 5 March when management tried to force a power group worker to work overtime. Management

backed down over threats to withdraw facilities from the power group secretary after they realised they had completely misjudged the mood of the NUM members.

•In South Wales miners at Betws pit came out on strike on 18 March against management's refusal to give work to underground workers. And at the Thurnacite plant at Abercwmboi super-scab Paul Watson won the sacking of five miners with his claim that they had spat at him. This provoked an immediate strike backed up by four pits in the Cynon Valley. But the South Wales area executive recommended calling off the action — and management refused to budge, referring the matter to an industrial tribunal.

•At Markham, near Chesterfield, Derbyshire, 1000 miners walked out over the introduction of new maintenance systems.

Alongside these victimisations NCB management is trying to carry through a severe attack on work practices.

In Doncaster, one of the most solid coalfields throughout the strike, management have introduced a four shift system and abolished safety committees. All local agreements have been abolished and miners arriving 10 minutes late are sent home the first time round and if they repeat the 'offence' they will be sacked. NUM facilities have been severely restricted.

Despite these attacks the elections held so far show militants who led the

strike are holding their support among the members.

•At Keresley, near Coventry, members of the branch committee who supported the strike have been re-elected by the 1100 workforce despite the fact that only 246 stayed out to the end.

•North Yorkshire panel elections showed an increased trend of support for the left. North Yorkshire is a traditional stronghold of the right, but the panel vote this time was split down the middle between left and right.

•At Selby, the biggest super-pit in the country, the strike committee received a unanimous vote of confidence despite two-

thirds of the workforce having gone back before the strike was called off.

The other pattern showing up in parts of the country is that significant numbers of miners and women from the mining community have joined the Labour Party during the dispute. In the North Yorkshire area more than 300 have joined in Leeds. Dennis Healey, MP for Leeds East, may have an interesting time with the 60 new members from the coalfield who have joined his constituency.

The most urgent task today is defending the 760-plus miners who have been sacked — and the 150 who have been imprisoned. There are still more than 2000 awaiting trial.

'Jobs not jail!', 'No victimisations!' must be the campaigning slogan for the entire movement.

Socialist ACTION

Thursday 7 March was to have been the end of the beginning for the campaign in defence of local jobs and services. Then the real battle was to start.

In the event, it looked more like the beginning of the end. The campaign begun in Sheffield last July amid stirring speeches about breaking the law if necessary to defend local government services, fell at the first hurdle. It also produced a notable differentiation in the Labour left.

The aim of the campaign was to prepare a united resistance to the Tories' rate-cap proposals. The nine months of preparation, which culminated in the massive demonstrations on Democracy Day 6 March, should have led to clear positions of defiance of the law on 7 March. The real battle would then have opened up.

There is no doubt that had the GLC and ILEA made a stand the prospects for uniting Labour local authorities would have been very good indeed, and Jenkin could have found his rate-cap proposals unworkable.

The responsibility for leading the fight lay with the GLC. It is the leading Labour authority in the country and in the person of Ken Livingstone had a leader of national stature and great authority on the left of the Party.

There was never any doubt that uniting the resistance from Labour councils was a difficult task. Councillors faced severe penalties — surcharge, disqualification, and bankruptcy. It was clear that many Labour councillors would vote with the Liberal, SDP and Conservative groups to avoid this risk. But those were the terms of battle.

Livingstone's moves to avoid not setting a rate aided those who had no intention of fighting. It is clear that Livingstone set out to secure a 'no cuts' budget above all — in effect conceding the ground to the Labour 'moderates' who would refuse to defy the law. John McDonnell and his supporters who made a clear stand on the 'no rate' position stood by Party policy.

The real issue was the legislation itself not the extent of the cuts. Jenkin had deliberately set the limits high this year in order to get the legislation into place. Livingstone's arguments for a 'no cuts' budget if the 'no rate' position fell, conceded the main point before the battle began.

The defence of local government is much the worse for this retreat. The lower-tier authorities have also postponed the question of going illegal by voting that it was not possible to set a rate at this point — rather than outright refusal to do so.

Thursday 7 March saw Labour local government groups engage in a game of 'you go first' on the very edge of the battlefield. Their performance, and particularly that of Livingstone, stands in stark contrast to the leadership given by Arthur Scargill in the NUM — and to the sacrifices of thousands of miners and miners' wives who were prepared to face fines and imprisonment, and loss of their jobs in defence of their communities.

The determined stand taken by Scargill, and the consistent clear position and active campaigning taken by Tony Benn in the miners' support has meant that they have emerged from the last 12 months with their reputations and, more importantly, with a clear lead for the militants of the NUM enhanced. It was an example of real leadership in the class struggle.

The same cannot be said for Ken Livingstone. Local government deserves better — and it will need to look to the public sector unions to achieve the class struggle leadership that is required to defend local government.

APOLOGIES TO POSTAL SUBSCRIBERS to *Socialist Action*, who haven't received their copy for a couple of weeks now. During our move to new premises the computer we use to process our subscribers' lists had to be disassembled. Now we're back in business readers will have the back issues sent on.

Scottish miners under attack

FOLLOWING Mick McGahey's support for Kinnock at the Scottish Labour Party conference, the Scottish coalfield has emerged as the most disorganised of all the non-scab areas. This is a tragedy with a real human cost.

The Scottish NCB announced on 16 March that 1700 Scottish miners had quit during the dispute, including 700 who had returned to work temporarily to qualify for redundancy.

The largest number of redundancies was at the Polkemmet colliery, where — due to deliberate flooding and the NCB's refusal to allow safety cover — 250 out of 1300 originally employed have been made redundant. Another 130 have been transferred to Bilston Glen.

The figure of 1700 out of a total of 13,000 miners in Scotland (13 per cent) contrasts with 9400 nationally (5 per cent) who have left the industry in the course of the strike.

Figures for victimisation tell the same story. There have been 583 convictions of miners in Scotland. In England and Wales 502 miners have been dismissed after 4318 convictions; in Scotland an astonishing 180 (NCB figures) or 240 (NUM figures) have been dismissed.

Of all dismissals in Britain, 25 per cent come from the relatively tiny Scottish coalfield. That means that 45 per cent of all miners convicted in Scotland have been dismissed.

The offensive against the NUM is not restricted to victimisation. At Bilston Glen colliery the union has been thrown out of its offices. Guard dogs are now kennelled there.

Union officials have had facilities to see members on other shifts withdrawn. Miners have been instructed to work overtime — a de facto compulsory end to the overtime ban.

In effect, the Scottish NCB is withdrawing recognition of the NUM.

The *Scotsman*, speak-

ing of Wheeler, the Scottish area director, put it this way: 'Like Scargill, he will proceed as he thinks is right almost regardless of the consequences.' Wheeler is made to look good in a Scottish context.

By Brian Heron

That context is a product of the early check to the Scottish strike due to the decision of the Scottish NUM executive not to close down production at the Ravenscraig steel plant and the sell-out deal at the Hunterston docks. The 'in-out line' of the Scottish executive on the amnesty campaign, and the latest deal with Kinnock and Willis to appear at the Scottish miners' gala, are symbols of that leadership.

But the NUM leadership and their friends in the CP, have been working hard among other social layers. More than 100 academics from five Scottish universities have signed a letter to the NCB urging it in: 'the name of good management, the interests of the industry and the good of the Scottish economy to reconsider its decision on the sacking, and help an orderly return to work by announcing the terms of an amnesty.'

Even the police joined the chorus. Chief Constable William Moody of Fife, and Ian Boliver of Central thought: 'tensions in the coalfield would be greatly reduced if each case were re-examined on its merits.'

More significantly, from the point of view of the 240 sacked miners, the



Scottish leader Mick McGahey

Scottish council of the Labour Party and the Scottish TUC called a demonstration on amnesty in Glasgow on 16 March. About 4000 joined the march which was led by the sacked miners and women's support groups.

Helen Hunter, from the national women's support groups, gave the most impressive speech. Donald Dewar, and Rev Hugh Ormston were less warmly received. Chairperson of the rally, Johnny Walker had to intervene twice against shouting from the crowd.

The Scottish party and trade union leaderships are trying to hold the line against a storm of criticism of their role in the strike. Even Peter Heathfield

who spoke for the NUM muted his comments. At first he stuck to the Scargill line: 'During this dispute we didn't see a redeeming of the pledges made by the trade unions at the TUC.'

'National leaders who supported us, but didn't get support in their own unions spoke with forked tongues.'

But on the Scottish trade union and labour leadership, he said he wanted to: 'express the NUM's gratitude to the broader trade union movement in Scotland which had helped the NUM in all possible ways.'

Helen Hunter lifted everybody's sights. 'I can assure you,' she said, 'that the return to work was not a defeat. The victory is 12

months of struggle by men and women struggling together.'

'We stood side by side with our men, where it counts, on the front line, on the picket line. Next time,' she joked, 'the men can go to the soup kitchens. Women will make more effective picket lines. We will fight and fight on.'

After that, Dewar's call for reinstatement of some of the miners in Scotland on the basis of 'standards of fair play so much a hallmark of Scotland' stirred nobody's soul.

Meanwhile, Wheeler's toll grows. Jackie Aitcheson, dismissed branch secretary at Bilston Glen, where two out of four officials and five committee members have been sacked, says others are still receiving notice.

Some had not even had outstanding court cases heard yet. 'These dismissals are creating an atmosphere of fear,' he said. 'The Board are hammering it into the men that if they can dismiss local branch officials, what is there to stop them from dismissing the ordinary miner?'

In Scotland, the labour movement leadership are peddling one big lesson of the miners' strike. It was summed up by the Scottish press after the Scottish Labour Party conference: 'The conference's main function was to act like a railway point switching the labour movement in Scotland away from overriding concern with the miners' strike on to a broader track leading to the next election.'

But thousands of Scottish miners and women's support groups are committed and militant — and continue to be supporters of the Scargill line. Many groups in towns and cities are still together and active.

Much of the base of the Scottish Labour Party wants to settle accounts with the sell-out leaders. But all this remains to be focussed. Its first task is to work for a serious amnesty campaign in the Scottish coalfield.



Scottish miners joined the recent LCDTU London demo to show their continued determination to fight

Photo: MARK SALMON

Photo: JOHN CHAPMAN

Why South Wales led return to work



Emlyn Williams

TWO LINES on the miners' strike are emerging in the labour movement. The first is that of Scargill and the Labour Party left, who point out that the battle was historic, and showed the potential that a sustained struggle by the trade union movement could have against the Tory government.

The key lesson of the strike was that it would have been won months ago except for the sabotage of the TUC and Labour Party leaders and their refusal to campaign for policies agreed over several years at the TUC congress.

The other line is one that reflects the pressure of the right wing trade union leaders like Sirs and Hammond who refused to lift one finger to help the miners. The Euro-communist wing of the Communist Party, *Tribune* and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee are all turning against the line of the NUM leadership in the strike and Arthur Scargill in particular.

An article in the Communist Party's weekly journal, *Focus*, claims that once the Nottinghamshire coalfield refused to join the strike it was obvious that a victory could not be achieved by industrial muscle alone. Sections of the NUM were consequently wrong to rely on industrial strength instead of trying to win over public opinion.

Peter Carter in *Marxism Today* argues that there should have been an early

condemnation of violence, and support from bishops and the churches: 'should have been worked for and welcomed, not met with derision as it was in some quarters.'

Tribune mainly suggests that there should have been a ballot in April or May, and this would have avoided the violence with flying pickets in the Nottingham coalfields. Because, it says: 'there would have been sufficient numbers abiding by the national strike decision to picket their own colleagues.'

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee agrees with *Tribune* on the ballot and backs Kinnock's condemnation of violence. 'The refusal of Scargill and the NUM to speak out against this behaviour appeared to legitimise such violence,' they say.

The debate about the miners' strike will go on for a long time in the British labour movement. Every labour leader was tested in this battle.

This week we look at the role of the South Wales executive, a majority of whom were sceptical about mass picketing from early on in the strike.

'WE WON'T go back until hell freezes over,' proclaimed Terry Thomas at last October's Labour Party conference. Five months later it was the South Wales NUM who proposed the return to work.

South Wales miners have been among the most militant and determined throughout the strike. Paradoxically, their leadership has acted to stifle this. GRAHAM ATWELL reports for Socialist Action.

SOUTH Wales has a strong tradition of militancy. Daughters and sons of scabs from 1926 are not allowed to forget their forebears. In Mountain Ash, an old woman still attends funerals of scabs to vocally mark the passing of another traitor.

In the Cynon Valley, dubbed Scargill Valley in the local press, supermarket assistants refuse to serve Joy Watson, a leader of the back-to-work movement and wife of the only scab in the Thurnacite smokeless fuel plant at Abercrombi. Bus drivers get off their vehicles when she gets on.

In the early stages of the strike, thousands of South Wales pickets, freed from the need to guard their own pits, travelled to North Wales, the Midlands and Nottinghamshire.

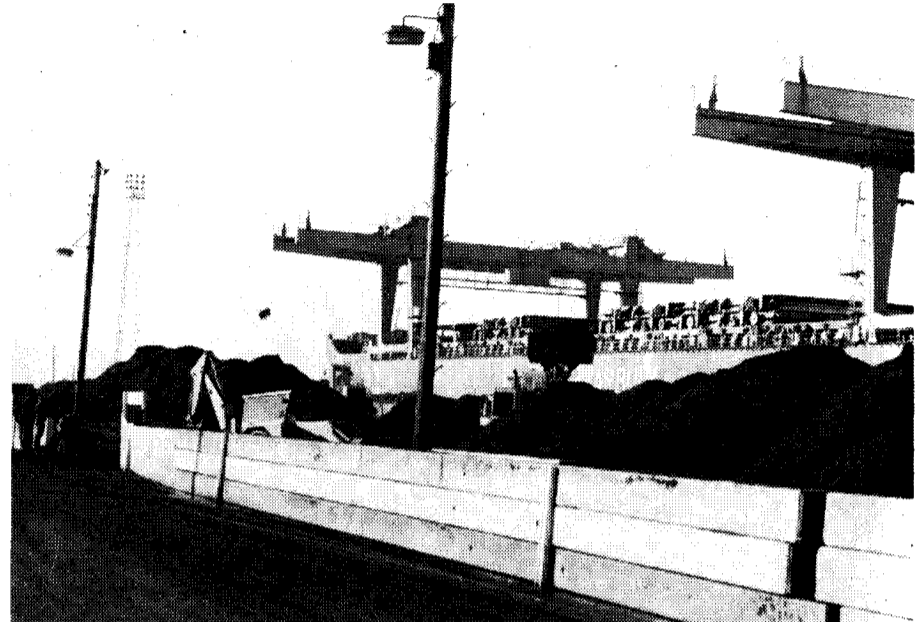
But divisions in South Wales were apparent at the start. It took a week of picketing before every pit came out. Fear of isolation was the main problem to overcome, because of the

failure of the national union to back the fight against the closure of the Merthyr colliery.

Rather than combatting these doubts about the union and linking up with the militant line of the Scargill leadership of the NUM, South Wales continually pursued a different line. Kim Howells, an unelected research officer with little experience of the industry, became the key spokesperson for the anti-Scargill line.

The first sign of this difference came over Orgreave. Howell argued this was a disaster for the union, that modern policing methods rendered mass picketing redundant. He also said the NUM should avoid tactics that would 'alienate' public opinion.

Emlyn Williams and Kim Howells were insistent that there should be 'no Orgreave in Wales'. After a week of growing pickets at the Port Talbot steel plant, Williams called them off



Newport docks

following an agreement with the police.

Whilst a minority of the executive, based on the central coalfields, argued for increased mass action against coal convoys, and docks importing coal, the majority preferred to sanction guerrilla actions, culminating in the occupation of cranes at Port Talbot and Newport transporter bridge, with over 101 arrests.

The Wales TUC and the Labour Party were equally of little assistance. Neil Kinnock, despite representing the mining constituency of Bedwelly, made only one visit to the picket lines during the entire dispute.

Faced by the failure of the TUC and the party to deliver on their conference policies, militant lodge leaders from the central coalfields argued the NUM should develop its links with rank and file workers in South Wales and, at the same time, intensify picketing.

They believed the flow of coal could be stopped.

Kim Howells had a different idea. Having recently switched his allegiance from the CP to the Labour Party, he used his old connections to launch the Wales Congress in November. Described by Hywel Francis in *Marxism Today* as a 'popular front', it brought together the CP, Kinnock's supporters in the Labour Party, the trades union bureaucracy and the South Wales executive. Plaid Cymru's new leader, the left winger Dafydd Elis Thomas, joined the Congress hoping to use it to defend the industrial communities and to promote the campaign for a Wales assembly.

The Congress succeeded in neither task. Ray Davies accurately dubbed it the 'non-event of the century'. The public meeting attracted little grass roots support. It simply acted as a forum for consolidating the rightward drift of the South Wales

executive.

There is no doubt that following the flurry of Christmas activity, morale was low across the coalfield. There was no sign of any initiative which would show the way forward for the union.

Whilst the strike was still 100 per cent solid, hardship was severe. Davies estimates that by then 95 per cent of finance for the strike was coming not from the TUC and the Labour Party, but from supporters abroad.

Tyrone O'Sullivan, secretary of Tower Lodge NUM, thought it inevitable that there would be some return to work in South Wales. Yet, he argued, the strike should continue to link up with the right against rate-capping and growing opposition to the government's refusal to negotiate with the NUM.

This was a scenario the majority of the South Wales executive was not prepared to entertain. Afraid of being isolated and afraid of any split among the miners of the area, they allowed Kim Howells to publicly speculate on a return to work with no settlement.

Speculation about the possibility of individual pits breaking the strike grew. Although the executive quickly publicly repudiated Howells' statements, the damage was done.

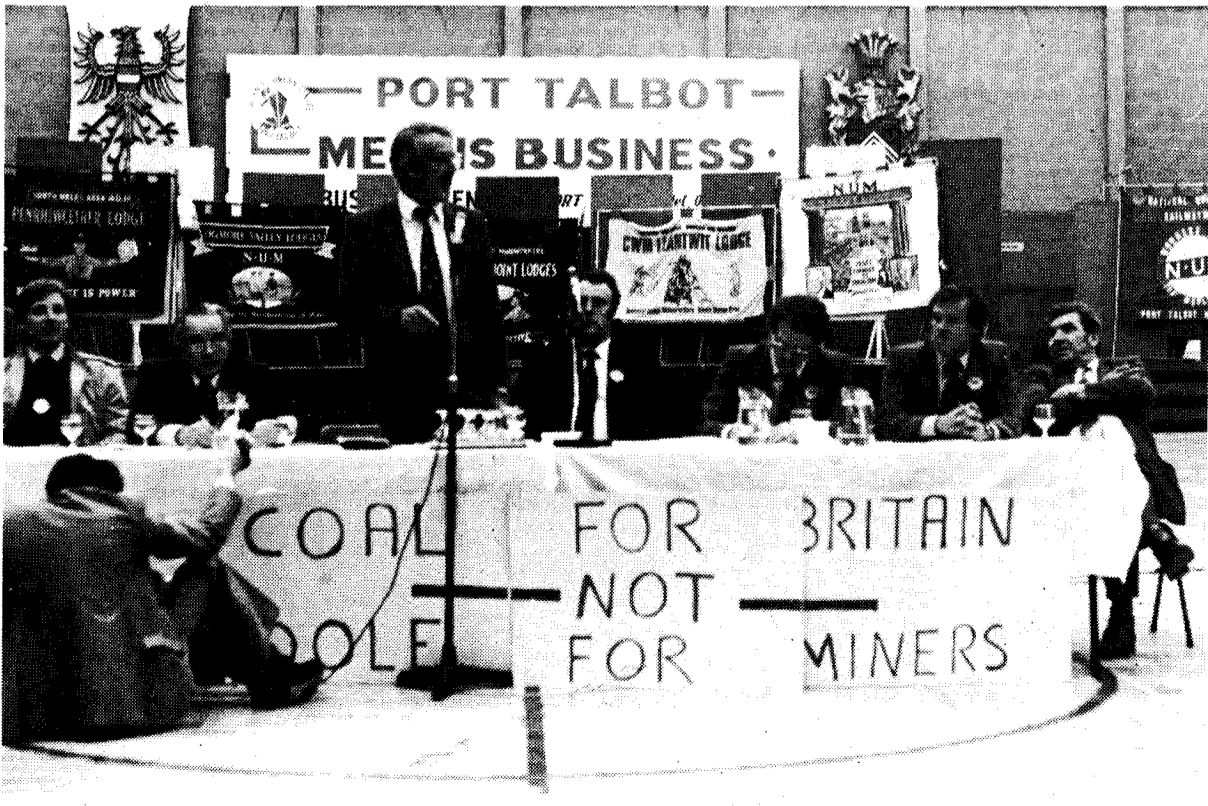
The return to work was rushed through the South Wales delegate conference with a total lack of consultation with the rank and file. Penrhawceiber Lodge abstained following the refusal of their demand for the convention of mass meetings to mandate delegates.

On Sunday 2 March, the national delegate conference narrowly voted to return to work.

The key lesson that has been learnt by South Wales miners is that a new area leadership will have to be built in the course of fighting the immediate threat of pit closures.



Dai Davies



South Wales executive members on the platform, Peter Heathfield speaking, at a 'Coal Not Dole' meeting early in the strike

Drop these charges!

THE CHARGES of unlawful assembly against the miners who occupied cranes at Port Talbot docks have been dropped, but replaced by a charge of riotous assembly. So Kinnock, Willis and the rest must be told to carry out their calls for unity against the Tories by campaigning for all charges to be dropped. Get this resolution through your party or union branch now.

This CLP/union branch considers the charges of riotous assembly taken against miners who occupied cranes at Port Talbot to be an attack on democratic rights. This organisation calls on the NEC/PLP/national executive of this union to publicly campaign for these charges and any other charges associated with the occupation to be dropped.

Sizewell B Power Plans

Part of the Tory plan for coal

IN THE LAST month the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) celebrated the end of two challenges: the miners' strike and the public enquiry into the Sizewell B nuclear power station. Sir Walter Marshall, head of the CEGB, gleefully connected the two. The case for the planned pressurised water reactor (PWR), he claimed, had been made by Arthur Scargill in the last 12 months.

Under Marshall the CEGB has had a clear policy of reducing its dependence on coal — and thereby reducing the leverage of the National Union of Mineworkers. It is a project shared by the government.

By Paul Aitkin

Sizewell B is intended to be the first of a family of five or six PWR nuclear power stations designed to meet the entire projected increase in energy demand beyond the end of the century. This would bump up the share of nuclear power in energy generation to 60 per cent at the end of the century and 70 per cent by 2030.

Imagine the effect on mining areas. In 1981, electricity production took 74 per cent of the NCB's production, concentrated on the seven big coal-fired stations that produce 40 per cent of the CEGB's power output. All these will be phased out between 2008 and 2014, to be replaced by PWRs at a cost of £1.2 billion a time.

If anyone thinks this is a long way ahead, so it is. But it shows that the ruling class thinks for the very long term. If we are to fight them, so must we.

On the face of it, the way the ruling class plans ahead provides clear evidence of their irresponsibility. Concerned as they are to reduce the power of the NUM — and having to deal with the power engineers and the EETPU has fewer terrors for them — they downplay the economic and technological dangers of choosing the PWR.

Sizewell B is another version of the kind of PWR station that broke down at Three Mile Island in the US in 1978. Only Sizewell will be twice as big!

Since the accident at

Three Mile Island very few PWRs have been built in the United States — which originated the technology. Indeed, some PWRs have been shut down, and less electricity is produced by nuclear power today than six years ago.

This is a disaster for companies like Babcock and Wilcox, and Westinghouse, which built the PWRs. They are therefore looking to dump their redundant technology on any mug who'll buy it — and who better than Sir Walter Marshall?

The CEGB claims that, on its figures, a serious accident could only happen once in a million years. Objectors like the Town and Country Planning Association (that well-known threat to civilisation as we know it!) have produced other possible figures that increase the danger factor a thousand fold.

When you divide the resulting ratio of one serious accident every thousand years by the number of new power stations, you have the prospect of something really nasty happening every 170 years or so. (For just how nasty such an event could be see 'The worst case'.)

Three Mile Island was, of course, a *small* accident, and so were all those *small* leaks from Windscale (sorry, Sellafield) which seem to occur much more often than once in a million years.

Even without 'accidents' like these, the area around Sizewell already has a leukaemia cluster, an area where blood cancer is significantly higher than the national average. The CEGB would have us believe that the presence of the Sizewell A Magnox nuclear power station has nothing to do with this.

They would also have



A model of Sizewell B

us believe that the PWR is cheap. But evidence produced at the enquiry shows that a new version of the Drax coal-fired station would be half the capital cost of Sizewell B.

Converting oil stations to coal, energy conservation and the development of combined heat and power projects would be cheaper and safer than going nuke. This is to leave aside the difficulties of long-distance advance forecasting in a

capitalist economy — and the CEGB itself has five different projections for economic development.

Furthermore even on the CEGB's figures the chances of Sizewell B being 'economic' in their own terms is dependent on it being constructed on time with no significant cost overruns. And it must operate more efficiently than similar US stations have been known to.

Nuclear power stations

in practice, however, are notorious for significant delays in construction time and heavy cost overruns.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Sizewell B will be an 'uneconomic unit'. It is equally difficult, however, to imagine this government rushing to have it closed with the same eagerness that they show to shut pits.

So a heavy responsibility falls on the Labour Party. However, unlike the

NUM, the GLC, and Tony Benn personally, the party *did not* put its position at the enquiry. It refused to state clearly that any future Labour government will scrap plans for Sizewell and its successor projects — as well as closing down permanently all existing nuclear power plants.

Any Labour government worth its salt — one prepared to struggle against the entrenched power of the ruling class — would

depend on the miners' and other workers' ability to 'hold the country to ransom'. As it is, nuclear power is losing popular support.

In 1980, 60 per cent supported it. Today that figure is down to 45 per cent. We need to campaign to cut that support still further.

•For further information see Martin Ince's Sizewell Report, Pluto, £3.95.

Notts attack the NUM

THE DECISION of the Notts area executive to prevent the NUM holding a ballot on the levy for victimised miners in the Notts area takes the attack on the national union by the scab leadership there a stage further.

The Notts executive has not only disenfranchised its members, it has even disenfranchised its tame area council. By the time the area council has the opportunity to discuss the decision, it will be too late to do anything about it.

By Pat Hickey

The Notts executive obviously expects that the national ballot will go overwhelmingly in favour of the levy, and they have no intention of abiding by national ballot decisions. That lesson should not be lost on those in the movement who are now saying that a national ballot was the decisive question in the strike.

Even if the ballot is massively in favour of the levy the Notts executive is determined to scab. The decision follows further moves by the area to attack the national union.

Notts has already withdrawn from the overtime ban, and is attempting to engage in separate negotiations with the NCB on the wage offer of 5.2 per cent outstanding since 1983 — again in defiance of national decisions.

The 'democratic' character of the new 'democratic group' in the NUM — made up of Notts, South Derbyshire and Leicestershire — is clearly limited. In fact it is hand in glove with the NCB in its plans to weaken the national union.

The Board is aiming at decentralising the coal industry to create individual profit centres. This

will mean widespread redundancies. Some estimates of the plans for the next financial year say up to 40,000 jobs will go in South Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire, and the North East.

The Notts area leadership is playing the Board's game, and scab leaders like Roy Lynk are well aware of it.

The refusal to hold a ballot in Notts shows that the scab leaders are not at all confident that they have the total support of the members in the area. Many miners who worked during the strike are not ready to break with the national union — and many would undoubtedly support the levy for victimised colleagues.

The call for a levy is one of the finest expressions of loyalty to its members made by any national trade union in Britain. It is a major issue on which to campaign in Notts against the scab leaders — and to rebuild the national union in the coalfield.

The worst case

A MAJOR accident involving a large release of radioactivity from Sizewell B, with the wind blowing towards London, could lead to:

- 24,000 fatal cancers
- evacuation of 500,000 people within two days
- restriction of access to 620 kilometers of London for 17 years (GLC figures)
- a ban on crops produced for 17,000 square kilometers around the plant
- a ban on all fishing in the North Sea
- damage to 22 per cent of UK crop area, 20 per cent of livestock, and 9 per cent of milk

(Figures produced by Oxford Political Ecology Research Group)



Photo: JOHN BIRDSALL

Digging deeper

DIGGING DEEPER, published by Verso, is the first comprehensive study of the miners' strike. JOHN ROSS assesses its strengths and weaknesses.

VERSO are to be congratulated for getting out so rapidly such a comprehensive collection of material on the miners' strike. It is a book which every socialist should buy and read.

Some of the individual chapters are truly excellent: David Howell's 'Where's Ramsay MacKinnock?', an absorbing study of the similarities between Neil Kinnock's role in the 1984 strike and Ramsay MacDonald's in 1926; John McIlroy's 'Police and Pickets', the best summary available on police attacks.

Huw Beynon's 'Decisive Power: The New Tory State against the Miners' traces how the Conservative Party prepared its confrontation with the NUM. A Labour Party TV broadcast based on that chapter would be a fitting reply to Kinnock's condemnations of 'miners' violence' and the supposed separation between industrial disputes and politics.

But, despite the mass of excellent material there's a slight feeling of 'might have been' about the book. The basic material is so good, it's a pity that the strike's real significance, as a turning point in British politics, is not brought out more clearly. All the elements are there for a real advance in political understanding. Unfortunately not all the 'i's are dotted or the 't's crossed.

One of the questions the book ought to have confronted is posed accurately at the beginning of the chapter 'Beyond the Coalfields', by Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright.

Expressing the view of much of the left, they write that: 'The miners' strike seems to epitomise those aspects of the labour movement and class politics that certain interpreters have found "old fashioned", sectional and, by implication, bankrupt.

'Male manual workers, the old working class with a vengeance, fighting to save jobs in what is officially described as a declining industry, state-owned and located in isolated declining

regions. And yet around this struggle a massive support movement has grown up — almost unreported — with as broad a social and geographical base as any post-war political movement.'

Other contributors put forward what they think to be the same paradox. For example, in 'We'll be here right to the end...and after' Loretta Loach puts forward the extraordinary idea that: 'It would be quite wrong to say that the movement of women in the miners' strike was a feminist one', and that: 'The movement of Women Against Pit Closures did not owe its existence to the women's liberation movement.'

Yet, as everyone knows, one of the most stunning effects of the miners' strike was the enormous range of social alliances that were created around the struggle. Blacks, women, Irish republicans, international solidarity organisations, as well as trade unionists and the entire left wing of the Labour Party, participated in the struggle.

In the words of the *Financial Times*, it was: 'the greatest civilian mobilisation since World War II.'

But more than just a solidarity movement was involved. It has transformed both some miners, and the position of the NUM within the labour movement. This was seen most dramatically at the 1984 Labour Party conference.

The NUM was the only major union to support black sections. An NUM delegate was the only man to speak in the debate on the Women's Action Committee resolutions, in favour. The NUM championed the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights.

It supported the fight of the cities, including unlawful action. It condemned the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland, and strip searches in the women's jail in Armagh. It led the fight against Neil Kinnock, in defence of mandatory reselection of MPs.

In short it played a leading role in every struggle at the conference.

How extraordinary for the *New Statesman-Marxism Today* view of the world! After all, don't we know the real situation? That male manual workers such as the miners are supposed to be the most 'backward', racist, sexist, and

anti-gay Tories.

No one earning a salary of less than £10,000 a year can possibly defend women's causes. Only those who don't get their hands dirty — and who read the *New Statesman*, *Marxism Today* and *City Limits* — could possibly support the demands of the oppressed. That is Beatrix Campbell's weekly-presented image of the world, and *Marxism Today's* monthly-presented one.

As it turned out though, it wasn't the fashionable white collar unions — the ASTMSs, the CPSAs, the NUTs — which supported black sections in the Labour Party. Nor could they, in fact. Many of them don't even fulfill the minimum condition of being affiliated to the party.

At least the manual unions are advanced enough to affiliate. And the most 'proletarian' of them all, the NUM, took the most progressive positions.

To anyone with a sense of history none of this should come as a surprise. Historically it has always been the core sections of the working class, and their closest allies, who have been the most consistent fighters for the demands of the oppressed. The 'intermediate strata' have usually backed off from the fight.

It was the Bolshevik Party in 1917, based on the industrial sections of the 'Russian' working class, that enacted the most advanced social legislation in the world — the most advanced on the question of women, on anti-racism, on national self-determination. The Mensheviks, based far more on privileged and white collar workers, refused to distribute land to the peasants, refused the programmes for the liberation of women, refused the right of nations within the Tsarist empire to self-determination.

In China a working class party, the Chinese Communist party, based on peasants' struggles, carried through the measures for breaking the virtual slavery of one eighth of the world's population: the women of China. Liberal capitalism achieved precisely nothing in that domain.

As far as national liberation is concerned Sandino, in Nicaragua, put it correctly when he said: 'Only the

workers and peasants will go all the way'.

What we saw in the miners' strike was not an exception or a 'paradox' — it was a phase of the normal process of social development. It will be the core sections of the working class — those in industry, in the mines, in transport, in communications, in the biggest concentrations of numbers — who will be the best allies of the oppressed in their fight for liberation.

It will be the intermediate layers of the working class — the most privileged, those in petty production, those white collar workers most closely tied to management — who will back off in the struggle for the demands of the oppressed.

Every oppressed section of society rallied to the miners in 1984, and the NUM began to transform itself, precisely because the oppressed understood that here was a force with the ability to rock society and which was an ally of theirs.

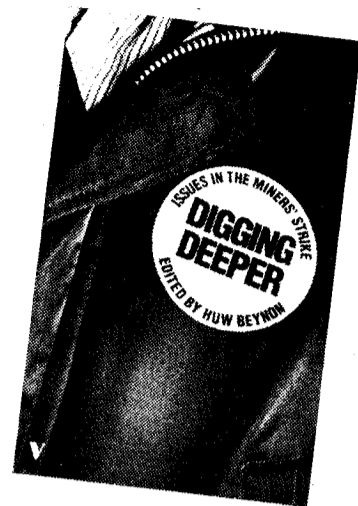
What began to emerge in the miners' strike was a section of the labour movement functioning as a true 'party of labour': that is, as a force which took up the demands of all those having nothing to sell but their labour power.

For the working class is not, by any socialist definition, those 'who get their hands dirty'. It is those who are forced to work for others, for capitalists — or, in four million cases, those who would like to work for someone else but are unable to get a job. In Britain today, it is around 20 million people.

That is a working class which is no longer even remotely 'white male' in its composition. In the first place well over 40 per cent is female; a large part is black; 10 per cent is gay.

That working class has major social allies. They are the millions of women who work in the home, who by every other objective criterion are working class.

To them, add four million unemployed on official figures (before Norman Tebbit doctored them!), and far more in reality; several million people in an education system which long ago ceased to be a vehicle for producing privileged lackeys of capitalism;



millions of pensioners whose rights are systematically abused by capitalism; key international allies in Ireland, in Central America, in Eastern and Western Europe.

The alliances which can tie together all these forces, and unite the working class in a fight for their common goals, however, cannot be achieved through a clever advertising campaign, or simply through organisational formulas (although some of the latter are vital). That unity can only be achieved through struggle — through years of massive struggle in which the white male section of the working class finds less and less space for the luxury of racism or sexism, in which the oppressed impose that reality on the working class as a whole.

It is a process of struggle in which women, or blacks, or gays, or the people of Ireland find out that their *only* reliable ally is the working class as a whole and its organisations. It is a time and struggle in which the Beatrix Campbells and *Marxism Today's* of this world will abandon the struggle for their sex or for the oppressed, because — finally — they are more closely tied to capital than to other groups in society.

That dynamic of struggle was what was vital, what was thrilling, and what was *historic* about the miners' strike.

For around 10 years now the labour movement has begun to discuss the key organisational changes that would begin to enable it to function as a 'party of labour' in practice and not just in a name. Demands for party democracy, the demands of the Women's Action Committee, for black sections, and for British withdrawal from Ireland are at the heart of that developing consciousness.

The miners' strike jerked the process onto a qualitatively higher level. In the strike that alliance, that potential alliance for socialism, knitted together in a common struggle against capital — in so doing the whole became far greater than the sum of its parts.

In the 1984 miners' strike a whole series of the key strategic ideas on how to fight for socialism — an alliance for socialism, a party of labour — changed from just words and became realities of the class struggle. They began to connect to an ideology — of socialist democracy, democratic socialism — that alone can give them coherence. For the first time for 60 years some classical positions of Marxism took a real grip on British reality.

That was why the miners' dispute was far more than a strike. It was, and will continue to be, an earthquake in British politics. One whose impact will deepen not lessen in the coming years.

All the elements needed to understand that reality are in *Digging Deeper*. But they aren't tied together with the historical perspective and concepts that would give them true cohesion.

Don't let that stop you reading the book though. It isn't perfect but it's going to be hard to beat in any 'best book of the strike' contest. For getting it out with such speed, Verso publishers deserve credit. Every *Socialist Action* reader should buy it.

For getting it out with such speed, Verso publishers deserve credit. Every *Socialist Action* reader should buy it.

•*Digging Deeper 2 issues in the miners' strike*, Verso, 1985, £3.95 paperback.



CHESTERFIELD, Derbyshire's second largest town, is described in the tourist guide as 'the gateway to the Peaks'. But it is better known as a place that was rock-solid in support of the miners' strike.

The local chamber of commerce reckons that retail trading has dropped 25 per cent in the last year, just one indication of how the strike has affected the town. But Chesterfield isn't simply a mining community. Its industrial base is chemicals, steel, and a lot of light

industry.

The miners union does have strong roots in the local labour movement though. During the past 12 months they have been tremendously strengthened,

especially with the Labour Party.

Chesterfield hit the headlines when the local Labour Party chose Tony Benn as its candidate in the now-famous by-election. This fight was used as a stepping stone to

transforming the local party — and not just around elections. The massive solidarity with the miners' strike has been the height of that change.

Now the party is attempting to

organise the forces that emerged during the miners' strike, to keep them together for the battles to come. The Women's Action Group, the Community Defence Campaign, and other structures se

A sleeping giant awakes

UNTIL THE beginning of 1984, Chesterfield's main claim to fame was a dramatically crooked church spire. Then, on 15 January, a delegate meeting of Chesterfield Labour Party chose Tony Benn to fight the forthcoming by-election. The media hit the town. By the time the official campaign started there were 25 film crews stationed in the town. The press spent over £1 million covering the month-long event.

Towards the end of the by-election, Chesterfield Labour Party member and Derbyshire NUM leader, Peter Heathfield, was elected general secretary of the miners' union. Less than a week after the by-election victory, the union had begun its historic year-long strike.

During that year Chesterfield has come alive politically. Everyone's agreed, the town will never be the same again.

For the previous 19 years, Labour's representative was Eric Varley. In a parliamentary career remarkably similar to Benn's, he spent 16 of those years on Labour's front bench. But government jobs — in technology, energy and industry — are where the likeness starts and ends.

Varley, an ex-branch secretary of Markham I colliery and an NUM-sponsored MP, was a confirmed right winger whom many feared would defeat the SDP. After a year of rumours that he would be offered the chair of the National Coal Board, Varley announced his intention to resign as MP, in November '83.



On taking office, Varley expressed his pleasure that: 'I can do a job connected with the coal trade, which is what I wanted. Coalite is a very valuable part of North Derbyshire life.'

Coalite owns 40 per cent of the Malvinas and made a handsome profit during Thatcher's adventure, charging £1.50 a night for every soldier billeted on company premises. It is claimed that the firm made another tidy penny from lucrative deals with the Argentine forces.

As his new job shows, Varley was out for himself from the start. Talking left to win the Labour Party nomination, he moved sharply right when he crossed the portals of Westminster. Party members around at the time remember his selection speech as one which 'would do Militant proud'.

But having a careerist as MP took its toll on the local party. Margaret Vallins, a member of Chesterfield party for over 15 years, recalls: 'I can never remember activity like this under Eric Varley. Chesterfield constituents have seen more of Tony in this year than they've seen of Mr Varley in the 20 years he was here.'

'There's more activity, more public meetings, more political discussion, since Tony took over. Supporting the miners' strike, and now launching the Community Defence Campaign, the Labour Party has become linked in with what's happening in the town.'

'Before it was a typical sort of Labour Party organisation. We weren't the go-ahead type of constituency that now we are, defending rank and file people.'

Margaret's husband Tom, now party secretary, agrees. 'When I came here four years ago and went to my first Labour Party meeting, to be honest I wasn't very impressed. There were only about 10 members and nothing political was ever discussed. We eventually built the ward up, with newsletters and such things. This is now happening throughout the constituency. Every ward is becoming more and more active.'

'The political awareness that's come from all that has happened in the last year is unbelievable. I don't think we can ever turn back.'

Tony Benn summed up that change. The by-election, he said, 'released from

CHESTERFIELD WOMEN have played a massive part in the miners' strike. Their Women's Action Group (WAG) was the first women's support group in the country. They encouraged women from nearby Barnsley and Doncaster to set up similar organisations, as well as spawning dozens of groups throughout Derbyshire before the strike was many months old.

Now there are women's support groups up and down the land. Out of the strike has been born a women's movement of a different kind — drawing in working class women who didn't consider 'politics' their province, but who will never return to being what Toni Bennett describes as 'a kitchen-sink sort of woman'.

This new movement began with the women of Chesterfield Labour Party.

On 21 November 1983, a local newspaper carried a report that 'Labour sends in the A-team'. Referring to Walworth Road's campaign strategy unit, the so-called 'crack team of national officials formed to fight the Chesterfield by-election', the *Star's* headline writer never dreamt how prophetic his words were.

At Labour Party conference last September, Chesterfield Labour Party president Johnny Burrows was part of the NUM delegation. When the Women's Action Committee approached the union to speak in support of their resolutions, Johnny volunteered. He was the only man to speak in the debate. It took him three nervous hours to compose his speech.

As he walked to the rostrum TV cameras scanned the hall. The view was of hostile-looking women and smug, besuited trade union men clapping enthusiastically. 'Don't cheer too loud lads, you may be making a mistake,' he said. He was right. At the end of his speech, TV viewers caught a glimpse of women applauding wildly amid the same trade unionists, this time grim.

Johnny had described Chesterfield's real A-team, the all-women canvassing team set up during the by-election to reach the wives and mothers of the town. The women earned their label, and it stuck, because they were the most active, enthusiastic and effective canvassing team of the whole election. At the end of the campaign they formed the Women's Action Group.

Toni Bennett of Dennis Skinner's Bolsover constituency was part of the A-team. She explained: 'When the election was over we wanted to stick together as women. We formed the Women's Action Group and were bandying about different ideas on what we were going to do. But

the labour movement in this town qualities, talents and abilities of a kind that had always been there but had not expressed themselves.'

When the miners' strike came, Chesterfield Labour Party was already geared up. 'For the last 12-14 months this Labour club where we're sitting has been a centre of the most concentrated trade union and political action and community involvement I've ever seen in my life,' says Benn. 'The support for Labour has increased. It must always have been there but these circumstances released it.'

'What we've been able to show after a year in Chesterfield is how this can be done. Not by electoral arrangements, not by toning things down, but by sharpening them up. The miners' strike and the by-election, coming together, began an advance into moral, ideological, democratic territory that Labour had evacuated.'



International Women's Day in Chesterfield: a small army of women worked hard to

Women: Labour

before we could start anything, the miners' strike was on us.

'We started taking soup round to the picket lines. Then came the need for food parcels. So a group was set up to coordinate the different areas. We went round Derbyshire setting up WAGs. This centre now distributes food parcels to 34 other centres throughout North Derbyshire.'

'Then it was a question of funds to buy the food. We had to go up and down the country telling people what we were doing and seeking their support. Apart from jumble sales and coffee mornings, you name it and we've done it. We've all been on picket lines, and some of us have been arrested.'

'We've organised many events. In February this year, we organised the Strike Alive in '85 march which went round all the pits in this area over a week, and ended up on the Saturday with a big rally in Chesterfield town. The women organised it, and lots of trade unionists and men from the pits joined us. Whilst we were marching workers came out from the factories and showed their support.'

We organised the march to let people know throughout the country that the strike was still on the go, we were alive in '85. It was a morale booster. Not that morale was low, but from time to time it did us good to march out and let people know we were still there.

'Then there was the International Women's Day demonstration. Our delegate to Women Against Pit Closures, Kate Whiteside, who's also the chair of WAG, came back to the group after the meeting and said, very calmly: "Guess what lassies? The International Women's Day rally is going to be held in Chesterfield." We had five weeks to set about organising it.'

'We were thrilled to bits really. It was the first time we've ever been involved in anything on so big a scale. Twelve months ago, before the strike started, if anyone had suggested it we'd have thought they

were crackers. But we've got fantastical women in this group, and we've had a awful lot of help from the Labour controlled borough council.'

This latest activity of the Chesterfield women has had a big impact on the party. More than a week later, it was still the main topic in the Labour club bar.

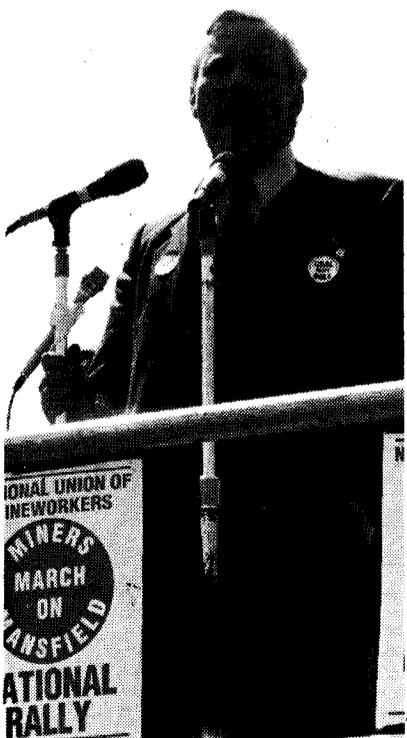
Win Barker, secretary of the party's women's council, has only recently joined WAG. 'I've become involved since International Women's Day,' she explained. Chesterfield Labour Party participated enthusiastically in the event called by Women Against Pit Closures.

Another member of the women's council, a nurse, described the popularity of the women's health stall, one of the many there. Jill Jones, a prospective candidate in Chesterfield's forthcoming county council elections, agreed. A small army of women had worked hard to make the day a success.

Women are determined to keep together the formidable force of WAG. Labour Party men are equally enthusiastic. Roy Cunningham described one woman he spoke to during the strike. There was only one way her husband would return to work, she said, and that was when Arthur Scargill told him to 'We are very proud of our women,' said Roy. 'They've achieved something, and it's this strike that's let them achieve it.'

More than anyone, women themselves realise how much the strike has taught them. Toni Bennett described it.

'Women have politicised themselves. For example, I've been talking to people for a long time about how blacks are treated by the police. I don't know whether they didn't believe me or just weren't interested. But the comments to me during the strike were: "Now we know how the blacks must feel. We feel ashamed to have ignored what's been happening to them." That's through their experiences on the picket line — the attitude and treatment by the police.'



He became deputy chairperson of Coalite, a fuel and chemical giant which produces, among other things, 245T — the same chemical responsible for the Seveso disaster in Italy, when poisonous Dioxin gas was released into the atmosphere with devastating and fatal effect.

y of Labour

up by the party are broad united fronts that welcome into their ranks anyone in the labour movement, party member or not, who is prepared to put their energies into mass campaigning.

Tony Benn often speaks of the 'refounding' of the Labour Party. But it took the mighty upheaval of the miners' dispute to begin to build the types of alliance that give that reality.

On a local level, that is the alliance Chesterfield is trying to maintain.

The lessons are well worth looking at. CAROL TURNER visited the constituency recently.

UNITY HOUSE, the headquarters of Chesterfield Labour Party, is just across the street from the Derbyshire NUM area offices. For the past 12 months the activity in both buildings has been for one and the same purpose: to win the miners' strike. Like many parties in mining areas, Chesterfield has turned itself over 100 per cent to supporting the NUM.

That has produced dramatic results. Since February 1984 the party has grown from less than 500 members to just under 1200. Tom Vallins, Chesterfield party secretary, says that well over half are from mining families. 'What I'm pleased about is that most of them are active and want to be involved. It's very good for the party.'

'When Varley announced he was going to resign, the time was right for a progressive member of parliament. As far as this constituency was concerned there was a wind of change blowing.'

That wind blew in Tony Benn as Chesterfield's new MP, followed only days later by the NUM strike. 'The main thing has been our support for the miners,' says Tom. 'We have given 100 per cent support physically, financially and in every way we can. I'm not saying it wouldn't have happened under Varley, but it wouldn't have been so enthusiastic.'

'We've been out on the pickets with the banner, and every single spare penny we've been able to find has gone to the miners. We've run soup kitchens and an advice centre for miners and their families. I don't think we'd have got that previously, the party was very dormant.'

Even before the strike the party had close links with the miners. Both previous Labour MPs have been NUM-sponsored. Of the 127 delegates who selected Benn, one seventh were from the NUM, representing 11,000 North Derbyshire miners.

Labour Party president, Johnny Burrows, is also area treasurer of the miners' union. He recalls: 'The GMC was cock-a-hoop when Tony Benn was finally selected. He wasn't the miners' candidate. That was a fella called Cliff Fox, who is the disgraced (because he broke the strike — ed) leader of North East Derbyshire. But it became evident that Cliff wasn't going to be successful, then the miners changed their vote to Tony Benn. It was that switch that clinched Tony's selection.'

The 12 months of strike has shown that NUM delegates made the right choice. Johnny explained the effect of the party during the strike: 'Large numbers of party members have joined



Peter Heathfield, elected NUM general secretary only days before the strike began

A fighting Labour Party

the picket lines with the local banner. They've been well-received. Lads who've perhaps never before thought of becoming members have been talking to the party on the picket lines. That's one of the reasons why party membership has increased more than 100 per cent.'

The majority of Chesterfield Labour Party members glow with pride at their party's achievements. The most repeated phrase is 'Now we're at the centre of things'. It's backed up with a string of examples.

National rallies and demonstrations have been held there, the most recent of which was the 9 March International Women's Day event. And Chesterfield's MP is one of the strongest and best known supporters of the strike.

The party has been active too in getting the message across locally, with regularly organised public meetings. They even commissioned an opinion poll at the beginning of this year, showing 58 per cent of Chesterfield's inhabitants thought the government had mishandled the dispute and 70 per cent opposed to the Tories' pit closure programme.

Now that the strike is over Chesterfield Labour Party doesn't intend to sit on its hands. The financial support for the miners will go on for many more months to come. Chesterfield is continuing to support miners and their families, especially the victims of bully-boy police tactics who have lost their jobs. Johnny Burrows is confident that Derbyshire will eventually win back every man's job, but that could be many months for those dismissed after conviction for more serious charges such as assault and arson.

The party is rightly angry at the response of Labour's leadership to the strike, especially the latest refusal to call for a general amnesty. Johnny explained: 'There's been a lot of criticism — and I'm part of that — of the Labour Party leader. Neil Kinnock has sat on the bloody fence so long he must have permanent marks. Now he's fallen on the wrong side.'

'The Derbyshire area NUM was one of the groups that supported his nomination and eventual election. But we shall have great problems in the Derby area, and I think in the Chesterfield constituency, in supporting him in the future. He's been too prepared to be critical of the miners.'

'It's no secret that Tony disagrees with a lot that Kinnock has said. But it's not Tony's attitude that has formed the opinions of the constituency. It's very much our involvement in the strike: seeing firsthand the attitude of the police on the picket lines, seeing firsthand the suffering inside the mining community and being involved in helping to relieve it.'

'Kinnock should look at Scargill's leadership. It might be abrasive, it might not be acceptable to everybody —

but he has pulled the support of thousands upon thousands of miners behind him. In a similar way, the activities of Chesterfield Labour Party — a direct involvement in the strike — have pulled in hundreds of new members.'

'I'm convinced that if Kinnock had taken a similar line that would have attracted thousands of new members into the party nationally. It certainly would have given the activists already in the party something to look up to, a leader they could respect. Neil Kinnock has missed the boat in the last 12 months.'

From the miners' strike Chesterfield Labour Party has learned the importance of retaining its links across the labour movement. It intends that the united front forged during the course of the strike should remain in existence to fight the many battles still to come. To do just that, the party has set up the Chesterfield Community Defence Campaign (CDC), taking in trade unions and the trades council, community groups, women's groups, the local Communist Party, and even some church leaders.

Set up at the end of January, the CDC is led by Chesterfield Labour Party. Tom Vallins explained how it got off the ground: 'It came about after Christmas, when there was a bit of a drift back to work. We thought that perhaps support for the miners was not as strong as it was in the early days. Tony brought up a discussion document on what we could be doing to help the miners and help the community.'

'We arranged a meeting with some of the trade unionists in the area and invited anybody else who might be interested. We've held meetings throughout the constituency, each one with a different theme. We had one with the Labour Campaign for Criminal Justice, one with the NCCL, one about privatisation. We're covering the whole broad spectrum of things that affect the community.'

Johnny Burrows summed up its aims: 'The activities of the CDC, quite simply, are to be involved in any struggle within the community, to take up the arguments from a socialist point of view and to demonstrate that the local party and the local unions can be of assistance to everybody. I'm very confident of the future in Chesterfield. The links that have been formed in the last 12 months can only be to the good for that future.'

The lesson of Chesterfield, says Tom Vallins, is: 'Don't be afraid to go out and talk to people about issues and about policies. We pride ourselves in the Chesterfield party that the majority of us believe in socialism. That's what's made Chesterfield the town it is. We can now talk about socialism, not as if it's a dirty word but in a meaningful way. The Labour Party is seen to be trying to practice it.'



make it a success

's A-team

'An awful lot of women have joined the Labour Party, and not just to become card-carrying members. They've joined to play an active role. They are quite determined they're not going back to be a kitchen-sink type of woman.'

'We're portrayed by the press as left wing, boots-and-braces type of women. We're not. We're very ordinary; we love our husbands and we love our children. It's just that the strike has awoken in us the knowledge that even the simple things we want in life we have to bloody well fight for. If that's what it means, then we're going to fight.'

'I understand how the Greenham Common women feel. I heard it time and time again from stupid little men, comments such as "I've read about these Greenham women, they're all lesbians."

'So what if they're all gay. What those women are there for is so important to everybody. The fact is that there are cruise missiles in this country and they have been through hell and water to try to stop them.'

'The Greenham women have endured a lot, and they're still sticking it out. They've even supported us. With the problems that they have, they've even found time to support us.'

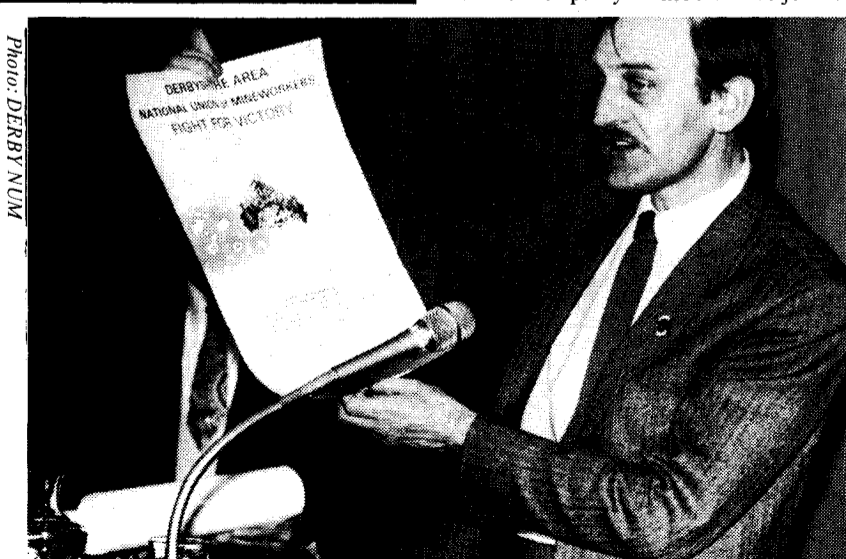
Margaret Vallins organised the A-team and became a founder-member of WAG. She too describes the same changes. 'The women's canvass team directed itself to trying to get past the men and talk to the women. Some of them stood there and just talked, about the school being closed down for example. Then they said: "We don't know anything about politics, we've got nothing to do with politics." They didn't know that what was happening to them and their children was politics.'

'At the beginning of the strike women were concerned that they couldn't pay their rent, that they had no money — not that in the future it was going to be that way for evermore.'

'Women now have got so involved, they've realised what politics is all about. They've realised that their little worry about their children's education, their children's jobs, their children's health, is all one thing: politics.'

'Not only has the strike awakened women, but it's awakened men in this area. The mining industry's very chauvinistic, always has been. Now they realise that their women have kept this strike alive. Now we will work together. But we shall still have the Women's Action Group meetings even though the strike is over.'

Women especially have travelled a long political road in the course of the miner's strike. The final word on the last historic 12 months must go to Toni, who said: 'If someone was to ask me what I'd seen out of this strike, that I'd wanted to see for a long time, quite simply I'd say I've seen socialism. It's what I've wanted, I've seen it, and it's great.'



Johnny Burrows, party president and Derby NUM treasurer

Crisis in the Philippines

THE POLITICAL crisis in the Philippines has been increasingly hitting world headlines. The greatest publicity has gone to the urban unrest against the Marcos Dictatorship.

But the most important political movement in the country is that led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). This party was created in 1968 through a split with the old pro-Moscow Communist Party. The CPP originally supported China in its polemics with the Soviet Union but with the turn of the Chinese party to a policy of detente with Washington the party has increasingly broken with Peking.

According to the figures given in the December 1983 issue of the CPP journal *Ang Bayan* this party, which in 1968 had only 100 members by 1981 had achieved a membership of 30,000. The CPP plays the leading role in a whole series of urban and peasant protest movements and, most importantly, leads the main armed opposition force against the Marcos regime — the New People's Army (NPA) which in 1981 organised around 20,000 fighters.

Australian socialist DEB SCHNOOKAL was able to interview in prison JOSE MARIA SISON, chairperson of the CPP. Sison has been imprisoned by the Marcos dictatorship since November 1977.

The Military Court at Fort Bonifacio was a large, light and airy room with three long tables and high-backed chairs arranged in a U shape, facing the rows of seats for the audience. The Military Commission No 25 was to hold yet another hearing of the 'subversion case' against several alleged leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) charged with seeking to overthrow the government by force in collusion with an unnamed foreign power, presumably the People's Republic of China.

Jose Maria Sison, who had admitted to being chairperson of the outlawed CPP, was chatting in a lively manner with journalists. When we were introduced, he shook my hand warmly and immediately started to talk. 'I never listen to the court proceedings,' he said. 'I prefer to talk with the people who come here.'

Sison was arrested with his wife, Juliet, in November 1977. For most of his detention he has been kept in solitary confinement. After his arrest he was beaten and tortured and then manacled to his bed for 24 hours a day so that he was unable to move.

For two years of his imprisonment, Sison was allowed to be together with his wife, who up until that time had also been in solitary confinement. Juliet Sison was released in March 1982 after she gave birth to their child; Sison was then placed in solitary again until July 1984.

Sison's case has gone to the Supreme Court five times with petitions for habeas corpus. The way Marcos 'openly flouts the law', Sison said, 'he has practically destroyed jurisprudence in this country.'

Two others accused along with Sison were also present at the 31 August hearing at Fort Bonifacio — journalist Satur Ocampo and teacher Mila Aguillar-Roque. Roque had only been arrested three weeks before. She was suspected of being the highest woman official of the CPP. Her husband, a CPP leader, had been killed in an armed conflict two years ago. Since then she is supposed to have said that she no longer wished to be politically active and wanted to bring up her child in peace. She is presently being held in solitary confinement at Camp Crame.

Sison was very cheerful, joking with his guards, who sat close behind him in order to make sure they heard every word spoken. 'I always talk with my guards,' he said. 'They are dissatisfied with their conditions, the bullying they suffer. They want a wage rise too, don't you?' he asked, turning to his prison guards, who looked sheepishly at the ground. 'All the funds Marcos gives the military never gets to these men,' Sison remarked.

I asked Sison what he considered the major problems the Philippines faced today. 'First,' he replied, 'we need to achieve national independence in the political, economic, cultural and other fields.'

'Secondly, we need to realise democracy; that means the elimination of the fascist dictatorship. And lastly, we need to solve the land problem. By national independence,' he continued, 'I mean the cutting off of the dependence on a superpower like the United States.'

'To develop democracy we have to eliminate feudalism, to liberate the peasant from feudal and semi-feudal bondage. Marcos has only carried out a bogus land reform. Only about 2,000 hectares have been transferred to the peasants while Marcos' cronies have grabbed hundreds of thousands of hectares.'

'We have to break up feudalism,' he said, 'so that the local forces of capitalism can be liberated, that is, the national entrepreneurs and smaller businessmen. The property owned by the multinationals and traitor elements will be taken over by the state. Our economy would be a combined one — of state and Filipino private ownership.'

'This involves a change of political power, of course,' he concluded. 'That is, a fundamental transformation of society. US imperialism, feudalism and a virulent form of fascism in the Philippines. The solution is a national democratic revolution of a new type. That is, with the class leadership of the proletariat. The revolutions of the old type were led by the liberal bourgeoisie.'

What role did he envisage for the liberal bourgeoisie, I asked: 'They



will still be progressive, but they will not have the political hegemony. They do not have the political, ideological or organisational leadership necessary to cope with US imperialism.

'There are four forces in the Philippines today. First, the workers, who represent about 15 percent. Then the peasants representing 75 percent. Thus the workers and peasants make up 90 percent of the population. This is the basic foundation of the united front necessary to win victory. Then there are additional forces in this united front — the urban pettybourgeoisie (the small property owners, the educated people) and lastly there is the middle bourgeoisie.'

'The class enemy is the comprador bourgeoisie — those who control the banks, the big landlords and so on. The old Filipino revolution was unable to liquidate this layer.'

I asked Sison what he thought the role of Australian imperialism is in the Philippines. 'I think the United States is pushing Australia to assume more counter-insurgency responsibility,' he said. 'The main projects are military oriented. On the surface the aid looks like simply economic aid. But in fact it is used to create a psychological effect — to discourage the revolutionary movement to create infrastructures, not just for the landlords, but also for the military, like roads for example.'

'The Philippine government is also receiving direct military aid from Australia,' Sison said.

If a revolutionary, popular government came to power in the Philippines, I asked, did he think the United States would respond the same way it did in Grenada with an invasion?

'Grenada was a small country,' replied Sison. 'If the 52 million people here decided to change the entire system, I think the United States would have great difficulty in overthrowing that power.'

'Because of the outrageous abuses of the Marcos dictatorship, the long hoped for united front has come about. Even within the military clique itself there is disunity. There is a scrambling for foreign exchange. Export earnings and foreign loans are dwindling. The United States wouldn't be able to intervene. It is a declining power as the battle in Central America has shown.'

'The fighting in Central America is a prologue to a bigger revolutionary upheaval in the whole of Latin America. There are several candidates for this revolutionary upheaval — Brazil, Chile, Argentina.'

'The Americans learned a lesson from Vietnam. It would be quite a change of policy for the United States to send troops overseas again,' he stated in answer to a question about the possibility of Washington sending troops to Central America.



I asked how he saw the development of the struggle in the Philippines.

'The maturation of the Filipino revolution will come about in five to ten years. I am considering the decline of the United States and its lack of military capability to counter the Filipino revolution,' Sison said. 'The American people will not permit Reagan to launch new adventures. I expect the Filipino revolution to win alongside several other revolutionary advances.'

'Today, the Marcos regime is much weaker. The 21 August rally (to commemorate the assassination of the assassin Benigno Aquino) was unprecedented in militance and magnitude. American policy-making bodies couldn't help but be impressed by this demonstration of Marcos' isolation from the people.'

Could this lead the United States to dump Marcos, I asked? 'On balance, it appeared that Reagan would prefer a slow process of phasing out Marcos, but I think this will be accelerated now. Of course, I'm not relying on the United States. The US Government will decide to dump Marcos, first if the legal, democratic mass movement continues to grow in strength and secondly, with the growth of the armed struggle. These two factors will decide Marcos' fate.'

'There is already a stalemate. The New People's Army (NPA) has reached the stage of wiping out larger units of the army. The NPA is now on its own counter-offensive — hitting smaller military detachments one by one. The military's blind attacks on larger communities and the bombing of peasant villages is only increasing support for the NPA.'

What were the chances of a further military crackdown in the future, I wanted to know?

'A military crackdown or takeover that continues Marcos' policy cannot last long,' Sison answered. 'There may be a liberal-minded group that would pave the way for a civilian government, as happened in Argentina. Or there

might be a transitional government with some support from the left. There are several possibilities.'

Finally, I asked Sison how he passed the time in prison. 'I read and write, and now I can talk to the two other detainees. By shouting I can communicate with two others over a wall. I can read anything that is legally available — for instance I read drafts of opposition documents and published materials of the National Democratic Front. But I am not allowed CPP material. I now have over 500 books in my library. I am reading slowly these days.'

When I asked Sison about the present state of his trial, he explained, 'We play for time, so that some day Marcos will weaken and so that the commission will not have a chance to convict us. If we were to be convicted, it would be quite a scandal, because China would be implicated. This would embarrass Marcos because the Philippines depends on China for 20 percent of its crude oil and also for rice imports.'

A new period in the Soviet Union

WITH THE burial of Constantin Chernenko, the seemingly endless death agony of Brezhnevism is finally over. The Soviet Union, whatever the intentions of the new general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, is entering a period of greater change and flux than at any time since the fall of Khrushchev 21 years ago.

Constantin Chernenko's seemingly eternal moment of power only reinforced the certainty of future turbulence inside the ruling elite, for the simple reason that Chernenko did not do anything, except halt Andropov's plans: not a single new policy initiative, not a single new appointment to the top leadership. This was to be expected

By Oliver MacDonald

from a man whose base within the apparatus didn't stretch much beyond the Brezhnevite mafia — the often very corrupt network of cronies brought into leading positions during Brezhnev's last years. Chernenko did what they required, toning down Andropov's anti-corruption drive and postponing a leadership purge.

As Chernenko sank into his final decline, this mafia seems to have sought to rally around the Moscow party boss, Grishin, a man who had himself been increasingly threatened by the drive against corruption in Andropov's time. But the move to draft Grishin was evidently a flop and Andropov's own protégé, Gorbachev, was elected by the central committee.

This ends a period of immobilisation within the Soviet leadership that stretches back to the end of the 1970s. At least for the last five years, the more alert and aware of the younger generation of the party elite have been daily witnesses to the general crisis of Brezhnev's policies: in both industry and agriculture, a picture of declining growth and stagnation; in foreign policy, the complete failure of the search for an agreement with the US; in Soviet society, growing demoralisation and disenchantment amongst workers and young people, and spreading cynicism and corruption within the middle classes and the bureaucracy; a catastrophic failure of Brezhnev's management of the East European satellite belt, demonstrated in Poland; growing centrifugal pressures throughout the region and no policy to halt the trend; a China policy that had disastrously backfired since it only made sense on the basis of good relations with the USA; a seemingly endless struggle in Afghanistan; the almost complete loss of genuine ideological authority within the world Communist movement, not off-set by the attempt to use a military build-up to enhance Soviet security.

With the exception of the Polish crisis, none of

these problems has posed a direct threat to the Soviet state and party bureaucracy. For the aging bureaucrats life could go on more or less undisturbed, and people coming forward with new and therefore dangerous ideas could be kept down by putting Chernenko into office. But the crisis of perspectives and strategy has had the effect of radicalising the thinking of some sectors of the elite, particularly within the intelligentsia.

Voices have been raised, declaring that the problems go beyond this or that field of policy and involve the entire structure of the Soviet administrative system as it was formed in the 1930s under Stalin. The idea has been put forward that the roots of the economic stagnation are not economic at all but political: the workers' lack of control over any part of the political system and their consequent demoralisation and alienation. It has even been suggested that the party and state elite has acquired a set of social interests different from, and potentially antagonistic to, the interests of the workers and that consequently any reform of the system will require more than some decrees from above: there must also be a movement from below.

It is, of course, impossible to know how far ideas such as these have penetrated within the middle ranks of the Communist Party. They were being voiced in party meetings under Andropov as intellectuals hoped he might turn out to be the sort of enlightened despot who could force through change. The likelihood is that Chernenko's tenure has further radicalised such thinking.

There is also, now, strong evidence of factional groups operating within the leadership, with some elements clearly aligned with the Andropov-Gorbachev circle over the last couple of years, and others lined up against them. The extent to which these factions are organised around elaborate sets of policies is much less clear, although in the field of external policy, Andropov and Gorbachev have evidently been associated with a drive towards major improvements in relations with China. When Chernenko became general secretary there was some sort of deal within the politburo to contain this factional struggle, but with Chernenko gone, the log-jam has been broken.

Gorbachev's recent speeches have indicated some of the immediate

ways in which he will respond to these conditions. First and foremost, he is stressing party discipline: in other words, warning the frustrated radicals lower down the apparatus not to step out of line by attempting any authentic movement from-below for reform. Gorbachev is anything but a radical seeking to undermine the power and privileges of the bureaucratic caste.

Secondly, the old

Andropov slogan of cracking down on corrupt elements has been revived and the purge of the Brezhnevite mafia by the police will be aimed both at satisfying the more radical elements and at ensuring that change in personnel is firmly controlled from above.

Gorbachev's background suggests that his horizons are limited to technocratic solutions that will alter nothing in the way of basic

structures of bureaucratic rule. He will have to move swiftly to prepare the renewal of both policy and personnel before the next party congress at the end of the year, and he can be expected then to be tested by those in the middle ranks hoping for some sort of Soviet revival. If this fails to materialise by the last years of the decade, the USSR will be plunged into its biggest crisis since the late 1920s.



Gorbachev

Bolivia on the brink

BOLIVIA'S miners are at the head of an indefinite general strike which has totally paralysed the country since Friday 8 March. Facing ferocious attacks on living standards and a near collapse of the economy, the workers, led by the Confederation of Bolivian Workers (COB), are demanding a minimum living wage with automatic wage increases to compensate for inflation, stable food supplies, and price controls.

The 'democratic' supposedly left wing UDP government says it can't deliver. Instead it makes noises about an imminent coup from the right.

By Stuart Piper

The economic chaos in Bolivia is hard to imagine. If the most recent rate of price rises was to be continued over the year it would come out at a 118,000 per cent annual inflation rate.

Speculation and hoarding have produced acute shortages of food, cooking gas and other basic necessities. Many factory workers have not been paid for five months or more, whilst long before the strike began most buses had been taken off the road for lack of spare parts.

The exact course of the new strike is hard to get clear as there are no normal lines of communication working between Bolivia and the outside world. Only sporadic news agency cables are coming out. However, a high point was reached last week when over 60,000 marched through Bolivia's capital, La Paz, demanding 'bread, work and freedom', led by 12,000 miners who had come into the capital from outlying pit villages early in the strike.

A rally in the capital's San Francisco Square rejected the government's offer of a 165 per cent rise in the minimum wage and a month's price freeze on four basic commodities. Instead it denounced the government as incompetent to deal with the country's problems and called for its immediate resignation.

At the same time, the Confederation of Peasant Unions, now affiliated to the COB, issued a statement making clear that the government could not rely on buying off the peasants to break the strike. Tens of thousands of peasants, it

and a series of measures against the interests of imperialist capital installed in Bolivia.

However, all is not simple. At last September's congress of the COB a left wing coalition, the United Revolutionary Leadership (DRU), ousted from the executive committee representatives of those parties who support the present UDP government, principally the Bolivian Communist Party and the official MIR (a rightward moving social democratic type formation). Both the latter parties had lost much credibility in the labour movement through their participation in a government which for two years has been applying unashamedly IMF policies.

The trouble is that the UDP government took power as the left alternative to the utterly corrupt and incompetent, cocaine-trafficking military dictatorship of General Garcia Meza. For very many the UDP's failure has caused demoralisation and disillusionment with the left as a whole. So whilst the DRU

may have gained a majority amongst militant workers and peasants, it certainly didn't have a majority amongst the population as a whole.

On the contrary, all signs suggest that disillusionment with the chaotic UDP administration has strengthened support for the far right, and that a coalition of right-wing nationalist (MNRH) and quasi-fascist military (ADN) parties was heading for a victory in elections due on 16 June. This is certainly what the US government has been banking on.

It is not clear how far the revolutionaries will have been able to shift this underlying balance of forces in the course of the strike. Worse still divisions are apparent within the DRU leadership of the COB. Such divisions seem to have been responsible for ending the previous general strike last November.

Early in the present strike Walter Delgadillo, general secretary and number two in the COB, said the workers would increase

their pressure on the government every day until their demands were met. On Thursday, he said the workers should fight to establish a socialist government in Bolivia.

On Friday, Juan Lechin, executive secretary and historic leader of the COB, as well as at least nominally a fellow member of the DRU, told a rally of 10,000 miners that, in effect, this was rubbish. He declared the workers could not take power without an armed vanguard, which they didn't have.

UDP President Siles Zuazo clearly aims to play on these divisions. On Friday evening he met a COB delegation and offered co-government with the unions to resist jointly imperialism and the threat of a fascist coup. No majority co-government, itself a tricky enough slogan, is incorporated in the COB's emergency programme which the DRU endorses — and as such it is something of a compromise between the programmes of different organisations in the leadership of the COB.

Siles Zuazo will certainly not willingly permit that. But he may negotiate minority co-government as a means of breaking the back of the strike and unloading partial responsibility for the country's mess onto the unions. Lechin, historically, has been associated with minority co-government.

The COB was due to discuss these proposals last week, and at the time of writing no news of their decision had come through. One thing, however is clear. This crisis is real. Neither side can go on in the old way, and the right is only waiting for a convenient moment to step in. It would rather wait and win the elections, but it is quite capable of trying to establish its rule by force if need be.

The coming days (perhaps hours, perhaps weeks) will be a supreme test for the maturity and initiative of Bolivian revolutionaries. Not least amongst them are the revolutionary Marxists of the POR-Unificado, who play a central role in the DRU and in the COB.



Bolivian miners are leading the general strike

Photo: SOCIALIST WORKER

Round the YS regions

FOR THE present leadership of the LPYS, the Southern Region has always been one of their strongest areas. But today the opposition journal *Activist* has supporters in 13 LPYS branches. It has a majority in East and West Sussex. In these areas, branches are growing and new ones being established.

In comparison there are less branches in Kent this year than last, despite it being a mining area and a priority for *Militant*. None of the YSs *Militant* set up in mining villages attended the 1985 regional conference. The only miners and women from the mining communities present were a miner based in Brighton who supported *Labour Briefing*, and who spoke to the conference, and those invited from Aylesham and Betteshanger to the *Activist* fringe meeting.

The LPYS's failure to respond adequately to the self-organisation of women and black people during the strike, to take up the debates on a strategy for victory, and to organise any national focus for youth, has meant it failed to grow. There were 57 delegates from 35 branches this year, compared with 72 delegates from 41 branches last year. *Militant* has also been

devastated by the political developments during the dispute. Tony Benn spoke to the conference emphasising the need to organise the left in the Labour Party in defence of the miners, to defend the YS against witch hunts, the importance of the self-organisation of the oppressed, and the importance of international struggles. These were the same questions the six-page *Activist* bulletin had taken up.

Activist supporters at the conference took up state violence in Ireland and the mining communities. *Militant* told conference that Sinn Fein were like the National Front, and opposed drug pushing only to keep their political monopoly.

Women's liberation and positive action were not mentioned. Conference's full support was pledged, however, for a regional 'jobs not bombs' demo

called by YCND.

Activist held a well attended fringe meeting with speakers from the NUM, YCND, Women Against Pit Closures, *Activist*, and a young Sandinista. It was impossible for *Militant* to marginalise us and present us as something 'outside the LPYS' — their usual trick.

The regional committee asked conference to drop an emergency resolution on the witch hunt in favour of a regional committee statement. Eventually the statement was amended to include the attacks on Vauxhall CLP's black section.

Chris Woolls, an *Activist* supporter from Worthing YS, was elected to the regional committee.

Since the conference we have been discussing the way forward. We recognise we need to continue working with the Labour left.

In many areas *Activist* supporters have been involved in initiating miners' support committees, demonstrations and meetings. We have made steps in linking up with further and higher education students.

In collaboration with *Labour Briefing*, we have organised 'Which Way Forward?' meetings in eight towns.

We see the urgent need that has been obvious throughout the strike for a national focus capable of organising all those forces who have been leading support for the miners. We are organising a daily bulletin for YS national conference and calling on other bulletins, black sections and Lesbian and Gay YS for support.

We want to build a YS that will actively defend the interests of the workers and the oppressed. This means a national conference of YS activists to launch a newspaper to organise these forces.

As Tony Benn told us at our conference: 'The YS has a key role to play in the left of the Party. We must put all our efforts into that fight if we are to build on the radicalisation of the last year.'

THIS YEAR's North West regional LPYS conference was a spirited, low key affair, visibly smaller than last year's. There was little indication that there was a miners' strike going on outside the Blackpool conference hall.

The region of course includes *Militant*'s power-base: Liverpool. Although there are several independent YSs, few bother coming to regional conference. The agenda and resolutions had been carefully doctored to stifle any real debate on the way forward for the LPYS.

By Bernard Gibbons, Gorton LPYS

Gorton YS had their resolution on lesbian and gay liberation manoeuvred off the agenda for the second year running. And the miners' strike was dealt with under the rubric of 'policing and the state'.

This meant that most of the debate was taken up by *Militant* supporters denouncing the bourgeois courts and calling for the police to join the TUC — rather than any discussion on why the Labour Party youth section hadn't grown in this region during the strike. Needless to say, no miners got anywhere near the platform!

The miners' strike disposed of, delegates proceeded to more pressing matters, such as glue sniffing and the need for more customs officers.

The conference lived up in the debate on 'oppressed minorities'. Supporters of *Youth Action*, a new bulletin of independent activists in youth sections in the North West, managed to get some real debate going on black sections, the Sam Bond affair in Liverpool, and lesbian and gay liberation.

After speaking to the latter, John Wilcock, a *Youth Action* supporter, and delegate from Gorton, was physically threatened by two observers at the conference. Eventually delegates voted to expel them from the hall, against the advice of the platform who had tried to minimise the incident. Probably the only time a platform recommendation has been de-

feated at a North West region LPYS conference.

The brightest spot of the weekend was *Youth Action*'s fringe meeting on the alliance of the oppressed built in the course of the miners' strike. It attracted about 25 people.

Speakers included Colin Lenton from Bold NUM, Lorraine Johnson, a miners' wife active in the women's support group, and Debbie Whithall from Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. Following up a suggestion from that meeting, a joint Bold NUM-*Youth Action* dayschool will be held in Bold on 30 March.

It will focus on the lessons for the LPYS from the miners' strike, and looks set to be a bigger event than regional conference itself. It will certainly be a lot more relevant politically.

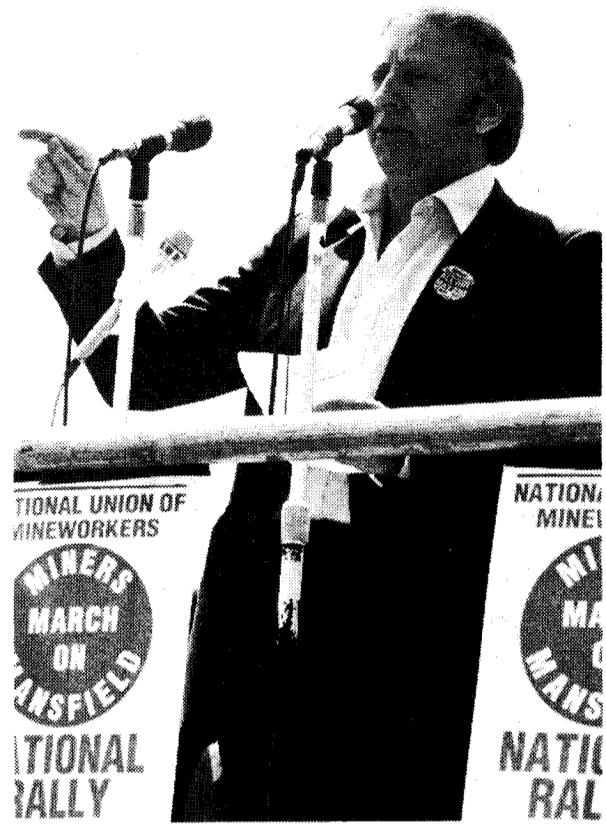


Photo: GM COOKSON

Gillick attack on young women

IF YOU are a woman, under 16, and live in England or Wales, you've got no rights. Your parents (if you have any) and the state have complete control over you. This is the result of Victoria Gillick's victory in the courts, depriving young women of any control over their most fundamental right, their sexuality.

The state has always had some control, so have parents. Now they have total control in law.

Anne McCuleary, Joint Coordinator, Scottish Abortion Campaign.

Since the Gillick case in December young women have committed suicide through despair, 15 year-olds have got pregnant, waited until they were 16 and then tried to get abortions, and books on teenage sex have been removed from sale.

These are the things we know about. But there must be thousands of cases of young women who have been having sex and risk getting pregnant. If and when they do, they won't all go to get help from doctors. It is inevitable that they end up in the backstreets again to try to get abortions.

The fightback has started. The case will be going to the House of Lords for the DHSS to appeal, and if the ruling is upheld then Jo Richardson MP is putting an early-motion to have it reversed.

In Scotland, where the law does not yet apply, Victoria Gillick came in February to do some lobbying. She spoke at Glasgow University but had to walk through a picket of 100 young people.

There is a growing list

petition, and a press statement has been released which has the backing of many youth organisations. It is essential that the fight against this and other recent attacks on women's rights to control their own bodies is taken up even more broadly.

• More information can be obtained from *The Children's Legal Centre* (who have produced a briefing on Gillick), 20 Crompton Terrace, London N1 2UN; or from NAC, Wesley House, 70 Great Queen St, London WC1V 5AX.

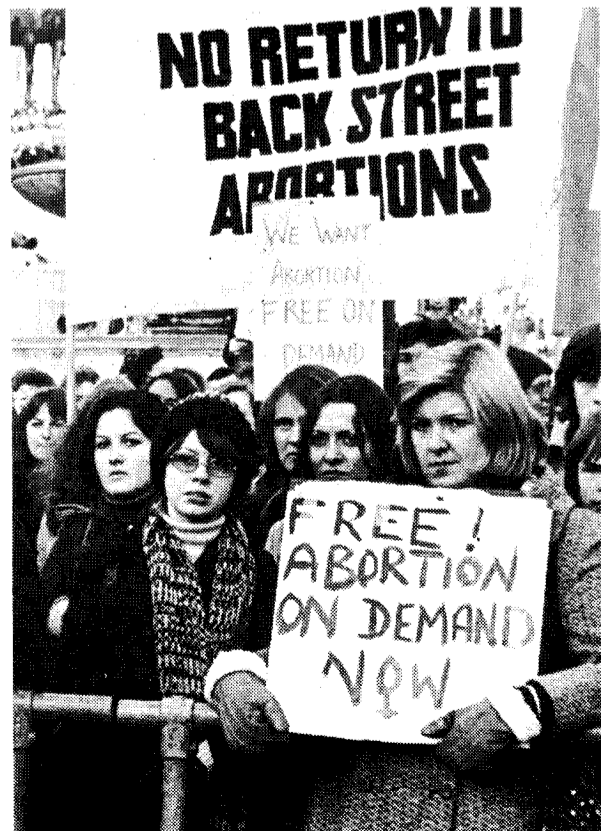


Photo: ANDREW WILD

Cops - strike breakers!

IN A survey from the Commission for Racial Equality last week, white youth were shown to have caught up with their black brothers and sisters in their attitude to the police.

Thirty per cent of 18 year old blacks and whites interviewed felt harassed by the police, disliked their attitude and thought they had too much power.

During the miners' strike, the role of the police — their outright violence on the picket line, their attempts to restrict movement from area to area, their baton and riot-shield

charges: all methods tested out in Ireland and on the black youth in Brixton and Toxteth — has brought home to many working people the violent nature of the state. Now they understand why black youth took to the streets in 1981.

The solidarity black people showed with the NUM, has laid a firm basis for fighting Tory attempts to bolster up the police still further. Next year's survey should show a much higher percentage of youth unhappy with police 'attitudes'. That's because they now understand that a policeman isn't just another working class lad in uniform, but a strike-breaker.



Photo: TRACY LITERICK

Rail pay battle

THE BRITISH Rail Board has come up with the grand sum of two per cent in the current wage round in the railway industry. The Board is out to make railworkers work harder in exchange for the shrinking value of our pay packets. That's nothing new. But the twist in this year's wage round is how the Board is tying its offer to the effects of the miners' strike.

The Board puts the price tag for solidarity action taken by railworkers at £230 million and insists it's up to railworkers to make this up. Accept two per cent, the Board is saying, or we'll lose coal traffic for good and that will involve enormous job losses.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the Board's most recent corporate plan for the industry had already slated an overall increase in jobs of 11 to 12

per cent by 1989 — about 21,000 jobs — even before the miners' strike!

The government is preparing for a battle with railworkers. The very day after the miners' union decided to return to work, Fleet Street confidently predicted that the rail unions were next in line for confrontation with the government. Media reports are claiming regularly that much coal traffic has left the railways for good.

By Doreen Wepler, NUR guard

The rationale behind this scheme? It is a pure and simple political decision to put a stop to the close links between railworkers and miners.

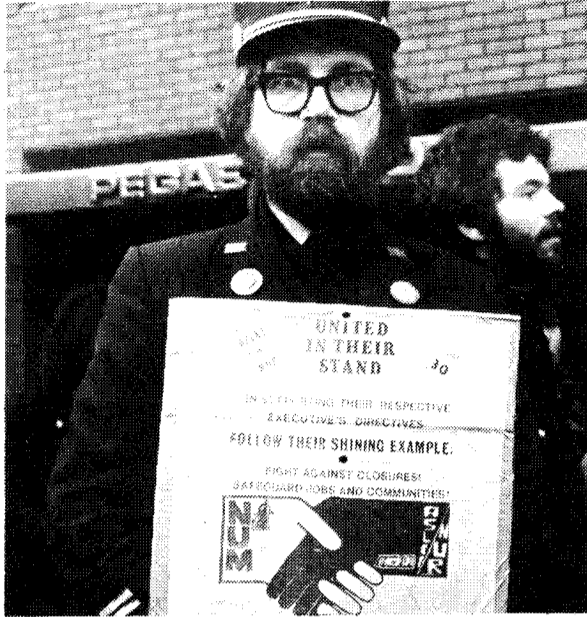
Behind this campaign to make railworkers think that any loss of traffic is their responsibility, there is a poorly paid workforce which puts in long hours of work. This year's pay claim tries to tackle these problems.

Submitted jointly by the Federation of ASLEF and the National Union of Railwaymen, it calls for a substantial increase to bring railworkers up to 1975 levels; for £100 basic wage; for a 35-hour week; and for five weeks' holiday.

Most grades in the industry would need 25 to 30 per cent increases if our 1975 purchasing power is to be restored. In fact, lower grades now find themselves £9 a week worse off than the notoriously low paid agricultural workers!

Overtime plagues the industry as a direct result of the low wages. Railworkers average 51.2 hours each week, with over 80 per cent of the workforce working overtime regularly.

Strong feeling exists in the industry that these conditions can't continue. Most railworkers are disgusted with the 4.9 per cent awarded last year. While it's true the Board backed down on tying pay to productivity then, we were



badly let down by our leadership who failed to hold out for a decent living wage.

This year British Rail is pushing forward on a range of productivity measures.

Railworkers have made

clear their opposition to any negotiations whatsoever on productivity at national union conferences for the past two years running. If the executive holds the line on these decisions, industrial action could well occur on the railways.

Local government unions in front line

IT IS OBVIOUS that the local government fightback, widely hailed by some on the left, is falling apart at the seams. Just what went wrong?

The tactics adopted were disastrous. The no-rate option developed by Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone was flawed in two major respects, which were exposed immediately in the absence of any leadership prepared to fight.

First it split the two tiers of local government in England, putting the GLC and the metropolitan counties in the firing line, while the rest looked on from the sidelines.

Second, they fell straight into Jenkin's trap by looking only at councils threatened with rate-capping, and ignoring other inner-city councils who were just as badly hit by financial penalties.

Basically, the no-rate tactic, by focussing only on rate-capped authorities, failed. It concentrated on a group of councils many of whom were not prepared to fight back.

The base line for the united front was being prepared to confront the government and face illegality. In terms of the Labour Party leadership, Kinnock wavered between sell-out and luke-warm support, with Cunningham his shadow environment secretary rolled out to explain the real leadership line of 'make cuts and stay in office'.

Among those Labour leaders associated with the campaign, none can have been so ruthlessly exposed as Ken Livingstone. He must shoulder a major share of the responsibility for the GLC debacle.

With most of the public sector trade union leaders strangely silent, it was left to Arthur Scargill to give the only clear political lead. At the Chesterfield rally on International

Women's Day he called on women from the mining communities to join the fight to save the cities.

Apart from isolated acts of defiance from Labour councillors, the trade unions must now step into the front line to defend jobs and services. The importance of joint union organisation, such as London Bridge and Liverpool joint shop stewards committee, will become ever more evident.

By Bill Hamilton, Newham NALGO

The call by these two bodies for a national combine of local government shop stewards should be supported by all public sector trade union activists. This will be launched at a conference on Saturday 30 March in Liverpool. We need to build such inter-union links at every level.

The reality is that there will not be any sackings or obvious large-scale service cuts this year. But that does not mean no cuts in jobs and services.

It will be the unions' job to expose the hidden cuts and the hypocrisy of Labour councillors to a wider audience. We must understand that those who want to fight the Tories all the way are a minority — but a bigger minority than Kinnock and Cunningham believe.

The priority over the next months must be strengthening and building

that minority. For a start, local government unions must develop strong organisation capable of exposing all cuts to union members and the wider community.

This campaign must be taken into the Labour Party, where there is a large core of party activists who want to fight back, but who find it difficult to develop the arguments against councillors who are backed up by senior management in attempting to confuse and distort the cuts taking place.

It is important to remember that in London every borough councillor is up for election in May '86. We need to develop new candidates for council elections who will be accountable on party policy.

Those councillors who will fight must be supported and brought into joint activity with party and trade union members. The role of the Campaign Group of MPs should be developed to bring pressure to bear on the party leadership.

We have less than a year to turn the minority into a majority to save the cities.

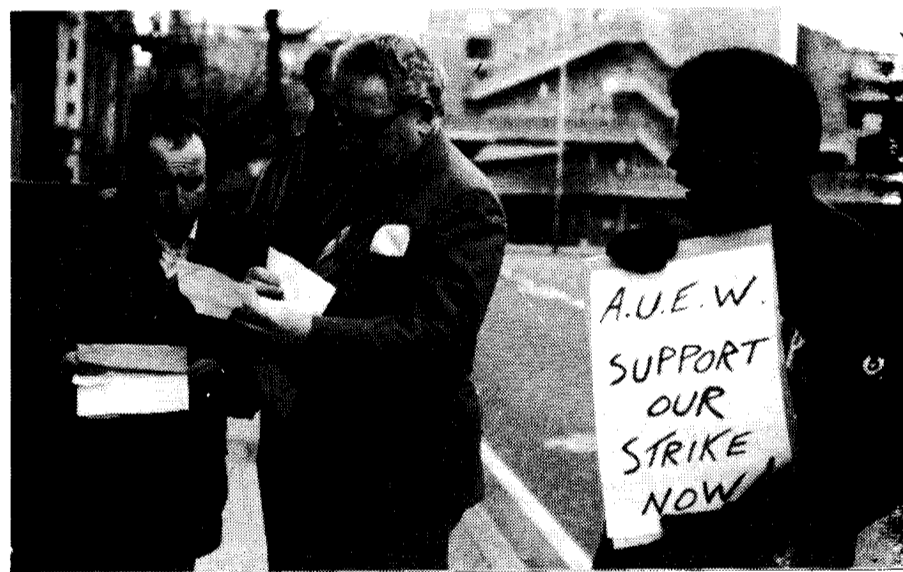
Colman Fastners — it's official!

THE PAY battle at the Manchester firm of Colman Fastners took a new turn last week.

One hundred and fifty engineering workers have now been on strike for two weeks in an attempt to improve appalling wage rates. Skilled engineers at the firm get £103.50 per week, while machine operators get just £88.60.

But when the company called for a meeting at the offices of the Engineering Employers' Association last Friday, it wasn't to improve on their miserable 5 per cent offer. Instead, the company talked in vague terms about the damage the strike was causing to the business and about the possible loss of jobs that could ensue, withdrew their original offer and made a thinly veiled threat to use the law against the strikers.

Under the Tory government's 1984 trade union legislation, unions lose their immunity from legal suits



for damages arising out of a dispute if the workforce fail to have a secret ballot. But the position of the TUC and of the strikers' union, the AUEW, is not to cooperate with this legislation.

The workforce at Col-

man's upheld this policy and voted to strike at a mass meeting. Their action was subsequently endorsed by the local district committee, and has now been made official by the national executive. So the possibility of legal action is a real one.

The employers have been encouraged by the record of the AUEW executive council when confronted by legal action during the strike at BL's Longbridge plant. Then, the union leadership refused to make the dispute official.

It's vital that this time round, the union leaders give full backing to their members in dispute.

Certainly, the strikers are getting tremendous backing from the local labour movement. Money is pouring in from factories like GEC Traction, Massey Ferguson, Mirrlees Blackstone. John Doherty, the convenor at Mirrlees, a member of the AUEW national committee and a candidate for regional officer in elections currently taking place, addressed a mass meeting to give his support to the strikers and

three women's seats on the executive to be elected by women's conference.

As a result, all the resolutions supported by WAC fell. *Militant's* resolution fell on a card vote of 450,000 to 607,000. The TGWU alone contributed 250,000 of those in favour.

Fringe meetings were definitely the highlights of the conference.

WAC spoke on a platform organised by the Campaign Group of MPs and CLPD. Eric Heffer made a fighting speech on behalf of the Campaign Group, but the meeting did not address itself to the task of organising the left in the region on an ongoing basis.

Manchester City Council's fringe meeting, entitled 'Which way forward for the Labour Party in the North West' brought together the left from across the region. Hardly surprising, since the council is involved in struggle against the government.

Speakers Bob Litherland MP, Graham Stringer (leader, Manchester city council), and John Nicholson (deputy leader) talked of the need to take conference more seriously and the need to bring together the left across the region.

If the left can successfully organise during this year, next year's conference could be more exciting.



TONY Benn joined Liverpool city councillors and Merseyside county council leader Keva Coombes on the 7 March democracy day demonstration in the town. Over 10,000 turned out to show their support for the city, which is standing firm and refusing to set a rate.

Correction

LAST week's issues carried an article on Manchester council entitled 'Manchester stands firm' (page 11). We were in error to report that the city council passed a budget. In fact only a resolution not to levy a rate was passed.

The resolution referred to policies the Labour Party is committed to implement. They include raising YTS pay to £40 and creating 2,243 new jobs.

Socialist ACTION

A poverty budget

ON QUESTION TIME immediately after the miners' strike Tony Benn said that the miners had lost the Tory Party the next election. It was a bit too optimistic but the truth of the incredible damage done to Thatcher's economic policies by the strike did begin to come out into the open with Nigel Lawson's budget on Tuesday.

For the first time, the increase in government borrowing to finance the strike was admitted to be £2.5 billion. The increase in government spending to finance the strike was £2.4 billion. The loss to the balance of payments £4 billion. The difference between the government's spending and its income overshoot from a planned £7 billion to £10½ billion.

In short, the strike shot to pieces the government's economic policy not only for the next year but far longer. The £7 billion cost of the strike claimed by Arthur Scargill, and the £5 billion admitted by City analysts, were shown to be far closer to the mark than the £3 billion claimed by the government.

So one of the first casualties was the giveaway tax cutting budget Nigel Lawson had planned last November to revive the government's sagging popularity. In the drive to smash the NUM the chancellor lost more than half the £1½ billion tax cuts he had projected last autumn. Without the tax cutting budget on the cake, the harsh realities of Thatcher's economic strategy stand out still more clearly.

In the Lawson budget there was not a hint even of the mild reformist meas-

ures which Tory 'wets' and the SDP had been advocating. There were no serious measures of public spending on investment in the 'infrastructure' — roads, railways, rebuilding the cities and so on — which would at least temporarily reduce unemployment.

The real emphasis of the budget was wage cutting. Above all wage cutting aimed against the low paid and against young people.

Chris Pond of the Low Pay Unit rightly described it as a 'disaster' for the low paid. The YTS scheme is to be extended to two years for 16 year olds, and the government is increasing the drive to make it compulsory.

Lawson announced a continuing drive against wage councils. It will now take two years for workers to qualify for even the meagre protection of the 'unfair dismissal' laws.

At the other end of the age scale the average old age pensioner will actually be worse off after the budget.

The goal of the budget was yet another turn of the screw in Thatcher's basic domestic economic policies. Her aim is to segment and fragment the working class by increasing every

type of differential within it.

Some workers are to be encouraged to become self-employed by £55 million of further tax concessions — and the numbers of self-employed, at over two million, are today higher than at any time since 1921.

Those in work and paying tax will gain something from the increasing of income tax thresholds. But the unemployed, the low paid, the young, women workers, and pensioners will all be hit by the budget.

The aim, once more, is to try to concentrate resources on maintaining Tory Party support from the white, male, skilled workers, buying their own house, who Thatcher successfully attracted in 1979 — and who have had wage increases of almost 10 per cent under her government. The rest of the working class will suffer further blows.

But, to return to the beginning, *this* time Thatcher's economic policy has been drastically upset by the miners' strike. The tax concessions, after the economic impact of the strike, we judge are too low to buy Thatcher the type of popularity she was seeking. The opinion polls, and any by-elections, are going to be very interesting in the next months.

The miners have not necessarily lost the Tories the next election. But they have done them formidable economic damage.



Photo: JOHN HARRIS

Lebanon

Iron fist smashed

THREE WEEKS ago, in a typical display of savagery, the Israeli army announced its 'iron fist' policy in southern Lebanon. But the result has been a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Lebanese Shi'a militia.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Peres announced that Israel was speeding up the withdrawal of its army from all but a small part of Lebanese territory.

The events in Lebanon, however, once more show just how much the survival of the racist Israeli state depends on the reactionary nature of the Arab regimes that surround it. While the Israeli army has almost continuously defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, it has twice suffered severe military setbacks in Lebanon.

The first was in the fighting with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) around Beirut. Despite its advance to the

Lebanese capital, the Israeli army suffered severe casualties. It never succeeded militarily in taking the city and only entered it after Yasser Arafat negotiated a PLO withdrawal.

Now, in its occupation of southern Lebanon, the Israeli army has suffered completely unacceptable levels of casualties in its struggle with the Shi'a militias. The 640 Israelis killed in Lebanon are the equivalent of over 11,000 deaths in a country with the population of Britain. The invasion of Lebanon has turned into the biggest military disaster in Israeli history.

The effect of the fighting in the south has split over into Beirut with

the kidnapping in the last week of British and American business representatives and journalists. Meanwhile, the Christian Phalange forces to the north of Beirut have split — with mutineers led by Samir Geagea opposing the regime of President Gemayel.

The Syrian regime has moved to surround the rebel forces and support Gemayel's government. Clashes between the Phalange forces and the Shi'a militias were reported in Beirut on Monday.

Syria has accused Israel of being behind Geagea's revolt, which is certainly to Israel's advantage. The Israeli government has announced it is to establish a new 'buffer zone' on its northern border from which it will expel a considerable part of the 60-100,000 Shi'a inhabitants of the area.

Behind the manoeuvring, however, the real short-term victor in Lebanon is the Syrian regime. It has split the PLO and established the Gemayel regime as virtually a client government.

While Syria is prepared to use for its own ends the successes of the Shi'a forces in the south, it has no intention whatever of allowing a real struggle to spill over the border into prolonged confrontation with Israel itself. In the event of a showdown between the Shi'a forces and the Gemayel regime, Syria would undoubtedly back its right wing Christian client.

However, the military humiliation of Israel in southern Lebanon is greatly to be welcomed. It is a bloody lesson for a regime which more and more bases itself on sheer barbarity.

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