

Workers Power

25p/10p strikers

Paper of the Workers Power group

SPECIAL

LESSONS OF The Great Strike



STAND FIRM AGAINST TORY OFFENSIVE

THATCHER'S VICTORY CELEBRATIONS have been muted. She has been urged from all sides to be 'magnanimous'. The pressure was so constant that at one point she snapped back 'I'm fed up with people telling me not to gloat.' Thatcher wants to gloat — but she has been told not to. Why?

Britain's bosses realise that, while miners have been defeated in a great battle, the war against them and the rest of the working class is far from over. They are worried about the costs of that war. Not so much the £3 billion to beat the NUM but the future costs. They know that they did not succeed in destroying the miners' forces and morale.

True the mining communities are weighed down with debt, poverty and exhaustion after twelve months of constant struggle. True also that they failed to decisively halt Thatcher and MacGregor in their plans to cut jobs and destroy communities, that they were forced to leave hundreds of the best militants outside the colliery gates.

However, the NUM and the wives' groups marched back to work defiant and in good order. More, the pits who stayed out in Kent, South Yorkshire and Scotland performed a vital service. They acted as a fighting rearguard — 10% of strikers — who showed management that there was fight left in the ranks of the NUM.

WOUNDED LION

The great German theorist of war, von Clausewitz, recommended just this when he defined the best tactics in an enforced retreat, "Do not yield one inch more than pressure of circumstances demands, above all keep morale up to as advantageous a point as possible by a slow retreat, offering incessant resistance and bold, courageous counterstrokes whenever the enemy seeks excessive advantages. The retreats of great generals and of armies injured to war have always resembled the retreat of a wounded lion and this is undoubtedly the best theory."

The ruling class is worried because the NUM achieved such a retreat. Now they are unsure how best to profit from their victory. To win anything substantial the Tories need to press home their advantage, not only against the miners, but other key sections of workers as well. They plan offensives on the railways and on the docks. In Fleet Street there are signs that the publishers are preparing an onslaught on SOGAT and the NGA. The bosses need to get a move on with their anti-working class measures. Their economic policy shows no sign of real success. The bosses' journals are now

openly debating the whole Thatcher strategy. The growth rates of British capitalism lag pitifully behind its main rivals and so does its profitability.

The US-led boom has passed Britain by, as far as any substantial improvement is concerned. Six years of collapse and stagnation have not produced a 'leaner and fitter' British capitalism. Leaner, indeed, but not fitter! The critical voices get louder as the framework of British manufacturing industry crashes to the ground and nothing of any substance replaces it.

Privatisation has not gone beyond asset-stripping. Inflation is now set to increase over the next year. The most bitter pill for the Tories to swallow is that, as a result of the miners strike, they cannot make the massive tax hand-out to the rich that they had intended.

"PEOPLES FRONT"

Growing discontent within the ruling class can also be seen in the moves towards a parliamentary 'People's Front' on economic policy. The idea of a four or five billion pound expansion of government expenditure to 'stimulate industry' was first pioneered by Heathite Tories and the Alliance parties. Now Roy Hattersley has swung the Labour Party behind it. No doubt the 'New Realist' TUC and the 'New Alliances' Communist Party will soon join the bandwagon. Even if its goals could be achieved, they offer very little to workers. It is so 'realistic' that it only offers to reduce unemployment by one million within three years! In fact even this promise is worthless since in three years we will be in the midst of yet another slump.

A political and economic crisis is breaking for the Tories and they realise they have only one major factor on their side; the wretchedness and cowardice of the leaders of the Labour Movement.

Kinnock and Willis will be branded with infamy for what they did to the miners. History will class them with the MacDonalds and the Thomases. But we cannot wait for the verdict of history. While there is life in these reptiles their bite is still deadly.

Four times in two years they have sabotaged and broken the front of resistance. They have scattered the growing forces that could have dealt Thatcher such a blow that her government would not have recovered from it.

In the NGA dispute, at GCHQ, most importantly in the miners' strike, and now over rate-capping, they have pushed through a surrender to the forces of bosses' law and order. Both



Mark Risher (IFL)

the TUC and Kinnock's 'spokesman' Stan Orme played messenger boys for Thatcher. The message they carried was, "Surrender!" They added a snarled threat of their own - "agree or we will actively and openly sabotage your struggle!"

Now they are hanging around Thatcher and Tebbit whining for their thirty pieces of silver. The Tory wets, the Liberals and the Labour Party think that this neutered and house-trained animal could be useful to Britain's bosses. How? Why, they could peacefully negotiate betrayals on a regular basis — without all the expense of strikes! They alone can isolate the militants, crush Scargillism.

TAMED T.U.C.

This recipe is advocated persuasively by John Lloyd, the *Financial Times*' prize winning Industrial Correspondent. He claims that none other than Norman Tebbit is making a bid to become, "protector of the unions" within the Cabinet on the basis of a "new relationship between the government and the TUC - not one of equals - but of one interest group among others to be heard and consulted." Lloyd believes that, "If

this view prevails we could be in for a new steady state of deferential but dignified industrial relations."

Alas for the dreams of the Willis and the Basnett's, the Tories' relentless attacks undermine these bureaucrats' hold on the unions. Lloyd sees this clearly, "The right wing union leaders will not be able to control the militants because the Government deprives them of firm ground on which to stand — there is nothing to be got from tripartism; nothing but cuts in public services and exhortations to cut wages if employment is to be increased."

So, for that policy to work the government would have to rein in its aggression and go for the sweet music of social peace and compromise. But John Lloyd is more than half aware that enormous problems face this perspective, "Behind Mr Tebbit and perhaps within him too, is a rougher tune. It goes like this. The miners and the far left tried to sink us and we sunk them. The soft left and the inside left and the wet Liberals and the preachers all helped them in that endeavour, wittingly or witlessly. We won, they had better know it. Now in particular is the time to crack on with getting rid of the obstacles, especially the human obstacles, to a more flexible and richer

society amongst the workers, but they can be misled. Now is the time to make sure that the unions lose their grip; otherwise what would 12 months of agony have been for?" (*Financial Times* March 8th 1985)

What indeed! The Thatcherite "class warriors" will sooner rather than later take up the 'rough tune'. Indeed, the battle song has already been heard from MacGregor. When he says the miners must now pay the price of "insubordination and insurrection" he reveals another element that spurs them on. They did indeed glimpse - at Orgrave, in the docks strike and the railway strikes - the spectre of "insurrection".

SPECTRE STILL HAUNTS

They wish to lay that spectre and they know they have not done it yet. Any easing off, any talk of peace, will enable the battle-hardened militants to regroup and recover their losses. Yet, a vicious offensive will undermine the TUC and Labour traitors' hold over a Labour Movement which has been aroused by the Great Strike. Millions of trade unionists feel guilty, about their failure fully to mobilise alongside the miners. When they come under attack the situation could be explosive. This is a very possible alternative perspective to one which sees nothing but defeat and retreat ahead. Neither perspective will take place independently of the will and the actions of the hundreds of thousands of militants who lead the various battalions of the Labour Movement at workplace level.

STOP THE RETREAT

The key tasks of the coming month are to prevent any headlong retreat; to stand our ground and rally our forces; to continue to give and, indeed, to step up, support for the miners; to break the hold and the influence of the trade union and Labour leaders who are strangling the workers' organisations. We must mercilessly bring Kinnock, Willis and co to account.

To do this we must organise the militant forces in the unions and the Labour Party. If we start from those who supported the miners - in deeds not just in words - then the possibility of a mass movement for class struggle, across all unions, exists. We will be able to seize the first revival of mass struggle, even of the most defensive kind, to rally our forces and turn the tide. The miners' self-sacrifice and courage have taught the whole Labour Movement invaluable lessons. We must not waste them.



John Harris (IFL)

FIGHTING



Photo John Harris (IFL)

Defeated but unbowed, Cortonwood

FACING THE MANAGEMENT onslaught is the NUM. Though defeated in the last battle this army is far from being broken. Its leader Arthur Scargill remains committed to fighting the NCB and has not hidden his opposition to the delegate conference's climb down. Thousands of miners are expecting major struggles ahead and remain prepared to do battle with the NCB.

The problem is, however, that the union's NEC proved incapable of leading the miners to victory or even holding the line until the victimised militants were reinstated. Its majority is made up of right wingers and flabby "lefts" like Williams and Taylor who blocked and obstructed rank and file initiatives to spread the strike and strengthen the pickets. Yet while Arthur Scargill has made it clear to the thousands of militants that he still wants to fight he has not been prepared to call for those militants to organise themselves to fight the capitulators and back sliders. The militants' dependence on, and respect, nay, adulation, for Arthur Scargill, has served to deter them from organising as a conscious force against the waverers. Whether or not the NUM's

forces can regroup and repulse MacGregor's offensive depends, to a large extent on rectifying this situation. What needs to be done?

HOLD THE LINE IN EACH COLLIERY

Against management's drive to stamp on the union and traditional practices, the union must organise to defend its rights and gains. Elected representatives for every shift, every face and every part of the pit should lead the defence of those rights. They should meet and organise to monitor management's strategy and regularly a concerted response. Regular mass meetings of the members in work time, if this can be won, must be held to hear grievances, plan the union's campaigns and maintain the union as the voice and expression of the men. A regular pit bulletin must be produced to explain the union's case and actively involve the members. The new activists thrown up by the dispute must immediately be drawn in to this work. Management are in a hurry to start production once again. Pit level organisation can use that fact to assert the union's bargaining power against the NCB.

CAMPAIGN FOR REINSTATEMENT

The victimised must never be forgotten. All strikers sacked during and since the end of the strike must be taken back on. To win this demand we need to turn pledges of guerrilla action into deeds. Every branch must adopt a policy of continuing the overtime ban and operating a work to rule in the terms of the Mines and Quarries Act, until sacked members are reinstated. While that demand is spurned by the management, we must ensure that coal production is kept to a minimum. We must also ensure that no member is left to carry the burden of fighting for reinstatement (by refusing to work with scabs for example) in an isolated way. This would only produce more victimisations. United action in each pit is vital for success.

Until the demand for reinstatement is met all sacked strikers must be maintained on full pay, financed by a levy. They must also be allowed to remain full members of the NUM with full rights.

DEFEND THE NATIONAL UNION

The NUM must maintain itself as a national force. Only with national unity can sufficient strength be maintained to resist closures, reinstate the sacked workers and defend and improve living standards. Miners need one national union with one national rule book if MacGregor and co are to be foiled in their bid to set area against area and further divide the NUM. There must be no local deals on pay.

Instead the NUM should organise to fight for a national pay claim for all miners sufficient to break the productivity deal and end overtime working forever. Such a national pay claim would reaffirm the relevance and resilience of the union in the face of MacGregor's decentralising drive.

There will be enormous pressure from some quarters to break the overtime ban. It is not necessary to agree with Scargill's inflated rhetorical claim that the continuing overtime ban is the road to "total victory" to realise that the national overtime ban weakens the bosses at a time when they are anxious to replenish their depleted coalstocks. It maintains the coordinated national pressure of the Union on the NCB.

PURGE THE SCABS

It is impossible to avoid a showdown with the scabs who run the Nottingham, South Derbyshire and Leicester areas. It is impossible to co-

WHAT SORT OF DEFEAT?

ARTHUR SCARGILL HAS stated that the 1984/1985 strike has not ended in defeat for the miners. Opinion polls taken by the bosses' press show that a majority of striking miners believe this is true.

This is wonderful testimony to the indomitable courage of the miners and their communities. It shows that the spirit that mounted and sustained the longest national strike in British working class history is still here. Certainly the Tories know they have been in a bruising fight. They have been forced to spend at least £3 billion to defeat the miners - as much as the cost of the "Falklands War". They will now have to postpone the big tax cuts for the middle classes. Nor have they reaped any glory or applause for their war on "the enemy within". Opinion polls show that their popularity has slumped. They also show that a sizeable minority of the population supported the miners despite the ceaseless propaganda campaign against them and the treacherous refusal of the official leadership of the Labour Party and the unions to come out openly and completely on the miners' side.

The Tories were forced to rip off the democratic camouflage from their police force, their judiciary and their "free press". Millions of workers saw the judges making up the law to rob the NUM of its funds. They saw a heavily armed para-military police force riding down lightly-clad miners. Everyday they saw a gutter press and a servile television retelling Thatcher's vicious propaganda against the miners.

Despite the return to work the Tories have failed to force the NUM to agree to a massive pit-closure programme. The situation at the end of this strike is different to that at the end of another vital battle - the steel strike of 1980. Then the steel workers were stabbed in the back by their own leadership. The ISTC agreed to and policed a process which halved the workforce of the industry.

HONEST ANSWER

But did the strike nevertheless end in a defeat? We believe that the only honest answer to this question must be yes. The aims of the strike were not realised. The Coal Board has not abandoned its closure programme. Neither the NACODS deal or that union's threat to "stop closures" should be relied upon by miners. NACODS backed off from a fight twice whilst the NUM was still out. MacGregor's sacking plans remain intact. When told 10,000 miners were still out at the end of the first week he told journalists, "Oh, is that all? I'd hoped there'd be more, then we could have let them off the payroll."

The closure plans are still there too. NCB area director Weeks rewarded South Wales NUM for beating the retreat by announcing at least 6 pit closures in the next two years. South Celynen has already been singled out for closure since the strike. In Yorkshire the NCB has announced that Ackton Hall is being put into the review procedure for closure.

MacGregor's strategy has been made abundantly clear. He wants to break the strength of the NUM in individual pits. He wants to destroy the national cohesion of the union so as to push through a 70,000 job closure programme in the interests of profit. Investment and resources are to be concentrated in a few high-tech low labour collieries like Selby. Other pits will be closed or left to dilapidate and prove themselves 'uneconomic'.

Management's ruthless drive to assert its right to manage was made all too evident in the first days after the return. Notices were posted pointing out that verbal insults to scabs would now be treated as acts of violence and therefore sacking offences. Arbitrary new shift times were imposed at Easington and men were sent home

at Ashington and Bates. In Warsop North Derbyshire returning strikers found themselves on new jobs and new shift times.

Particularly savage treatment has been handed out in the Midlands area to that brave minority of fighters who stood firm behind the union against the scabs. In Birch Coppice the strikers have been split up and dispersed amongst scab teams. In order to divide the strikers, face workers have been put on haulage work. At Holditch surface workers have been sent underground. At Keresley colliery management has demanded a "public retraction" from a militant who denounced scabs in a TV interview.

The wave of victimisation is being used to weed out the best militants and cow the rest. The failure to fight on until amnesty was granted for all those sacked during the strike has emboldened the bosses to press their attack. MacGregor wants to drive out those most able to lead a fight against him - that is why he told the *Sunday Telegraph*, "people are now discovering the price of insubordination and insurrection - and boy are we going to make it stick."

In Fife alone forty miners were sacked in the first days after the return. It will be union militancy rather than the supposed 'severity' of alleged crimes that will determine whether management takes men back on. The *Financial Times* made this clear when it reported that managers "were clearly hoping to take advantage of the discretion available to them to refuse to re-engage militants, even if they have been convicted of minor offences."

All these results flow from the strike being defeated. There is no need for miners to be afraid to admit this. The vital question is what sort of defeat was it? Was it a tactical or a strategic defeat? It is in the hands of the miners to organise to prevent this defeat leading to a long term strategic decline in their strength and organisation. They have to organise to ensure that this was a short term tactical set back that the union can reverse on the road of renewed strategic advance.

As well as imposing a tight managerial grip in every colliery and thus undermining the power of individual lodges the NCB also wants to break up the NUM as a national fighting force. To start with it wants to go far further than even the present productivity deal does to decentralise negotiations on pay and conditions in the industry. Labour's productivity deal served to break the mobilising power of the NUM's national pay

claim. It did this by linking pay to output in conditions which varied dramatically between and within coalfields. The fruits of it have been all too clear to see in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire over the last year.

Now MacGregor is trying to tie a national pay rise to 'normal working'. By this he means the lifting of the NUM's overtime ban. Nottinghamshire has already obliged. South Derbyshire has signalled that they will follow suit. There is a very real danger of MacGregor further dividing the NUM's regions by 'awarding' them pay rises if they toe his line.

Throughout the strike the NCB were able to work hand in glove with pockets of hardened scabs as well as with right wing officials like Bell, Toon and Jones. They will press ahead to positively support scab unions and the breakaway of the backward areas. Hem Heath and Lea Hall strikers walked out after their return after they discovered that not only had their jobs been changed but also that management was refusing to recognise the NUM.

The inner core of the scabs is working openly with the NCB and the Tories. The weekend after the strike a Notts scab school held at an NUT conference centre at Stoke Rockford was attended by a Tory junior energy minister and an NCB official. At the time of the return many pit managers were working in tandem with scab 'working miners committees' in screening militants and allocating work. In South Derbyshire and Leicestershire scab NUM officials informed returning members of the union because they paid no dues during the strike.

The spectre of scab unionism does not only haunt the traditionally backward coalfields. In Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland a hard core of scabs are ready to do the bosses' work against the NUM. If the bosses are able to press home their advantage then non-unionism as well as scab unionism can grow in those areas too.

The success of MacGregor's offensive depends on the fragmentation of the NUM. Its federal traditions and federal structures will aid him in this. Bitter recriminations between the area officials over responsibility for the return to work and plans by area executives to fight closure plans on an area basis and with their own district area or regional methods could sap the fighting strength of the union. These divisions have to be fought.



Bernie Malone

Police invade pit village, South Yorkshire.

BACK

exist with the pockets of organised hardened scabs which exist in the other areas. They will repay any softness on the part of the NUM by continuing to play the NCB's game inside the NUM. Nottinghamshire has broken ranks on the overtime ban. They have changed their rules to give themselves even more federal autonomy. This is exactly what MacGregor and Thatcher want. It is far better to break with these scab officials now by expelling the Notts area and hold the line for a national fighting union. The alternative is to let them dictate the policies of the NUM, on behalf of Thatcher and the NCB!

We know all too well that there is a world of difference between the weak willed, soft scabs who have been driven back to work and the hardened bosses' narks and the right wing leaders who have given them cover. That is why we should say now that all officials who scabbed on the strike and those most closely associated with the scab working miners committees must be barred from membership for life with no reservations or exceptions.

It is the task of the NUM to prove the value of a class struggle union as against a scab union to thousands of miners who scabbed or were beaten back in the strike. In the scab areas the union should be reconstituted around committees of those who struck. Their tenacity and determination will stand in stark contrast to the spineless cringing scab officials. Entry into the union and the right to hold positions in it should be at the discretion of pit based disciplinary committees in every area. We need a union that is purged of scabs - one that is fit and healthy - ready to face the struggles ahead.

FOR WORKERS DEMOCRACY

If the best militants are not to be isolated and if the officials are to be held to account it is necessary to build on the experience of this strike to democratise the life of the NUM. We stress again that regular mass meetings must become the means by which the members are involved and decisions are made. There must be no return to the days when a few men in surface offices made up "the union" and when weekend lodge meetings were empty. The militants must campaign to maintain the involvement of a larger section of the rank and file brought on by the strike. But they must also reach out to that large number of strikers - a majority in many areas, who sat the strike out at home. Only by involving the membership can a vigilant and effective fighting rank and file be built.

Militants are justly hostile to the NUM's secret ballot rule which allows the press and media to intervene in the NUM's decision making. But the strike was weakened from the start both by the NUM leadership's failure to call a national strike and take the fight for it into the scab officials' own territory and by the absence of any means by which the great majority could show the waverers that the scabs were in a minority. A national strike vote by a show of hands at pit head meetings is the alternative to the ballot. If it had been used at the beginning of the dispute then the strike would have been firmer in the more backward areas. Militants must organise to end the ballot rule and replace it by mass meetings and open voting as the means of deciding on action.

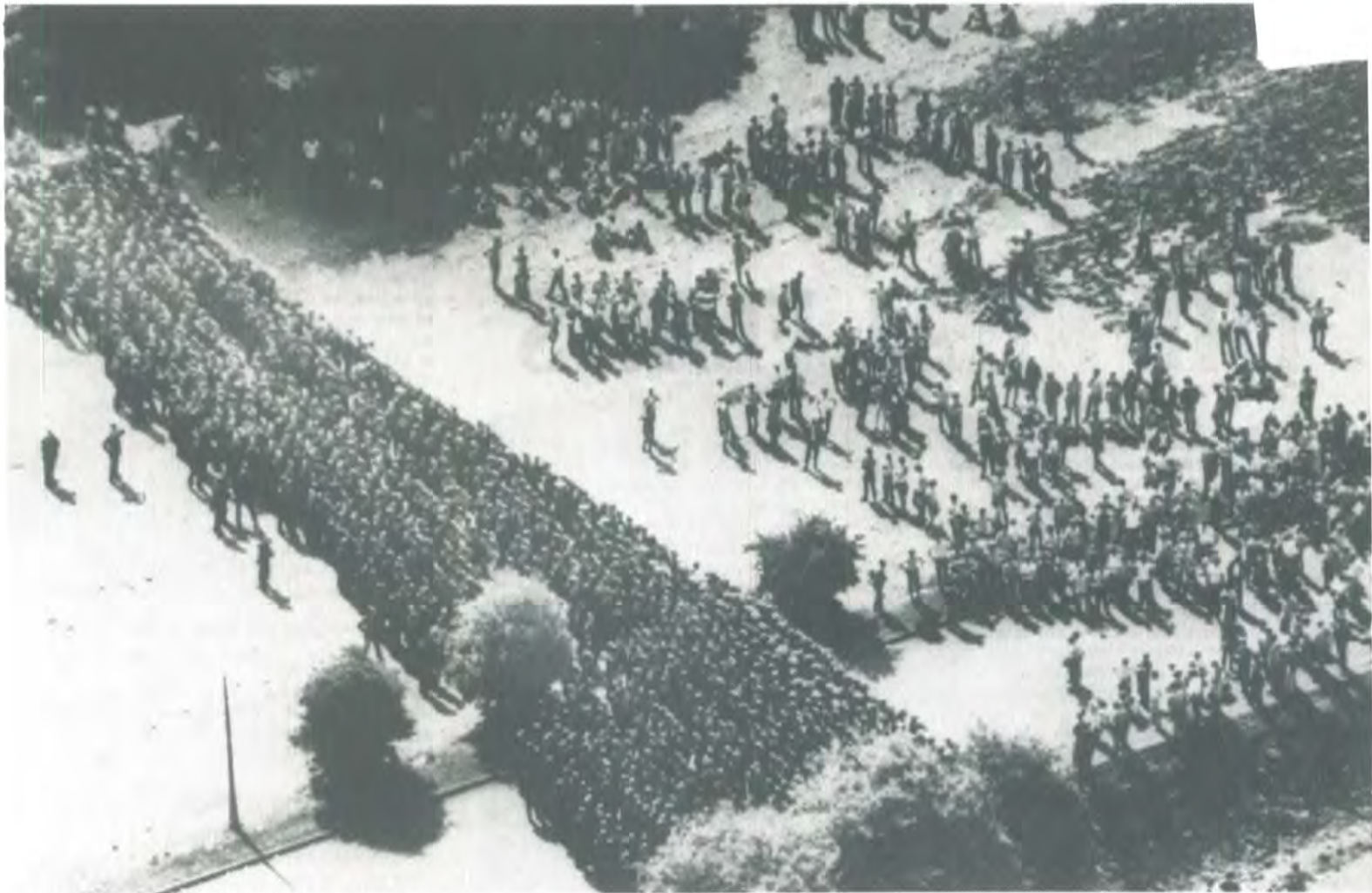
FIGHTING CLOSURES

The MacGregor plan for closures is a national plan. It might affect different areas at different times but it will affect all areas. We need to rebuild union strength back to the point where we can fight this national plan with another national strike. This cannot be done overnight. It can be done a lot quicker than the smug commen-

For the parliamentarians of the Labour Party they were verbal threats to the Tories "you call off the judges or we will start calling for a general strike". Scargill called for mass industrial action in defence of the miners, but again the miners were not organised to take that message to the ranks of their fellow workers. It remained a verbal demand on other trade unions, an alibi for the future rather than a call to action for his members. Instead they were being turned into an army of money collectors set on seeing the miners through Christmas and into the New Year's 'power cuts'.

■ GROWING DEMORALISATION ■

Although more militant, more left and far more fiery than his trade union peers, Arthur Scargill had led the miners' strike on their terms throughout the strike. The result was the tragic isolation of the strike which need never have happened. And the result was a drift of demoralisation from the executive's ranks downwards as it became increasingly difficult for the union's officials to see how their isolated strike and their traditional methods could defeat Thatcher and MacGregor. By February the executive was 'unanimously' calling on the TUC to do precisely what it had rejected in the first



Massed police ranks confront pickets at Orgreave.

tators in the press and on TV are saying. The key will be building any fight upwards from pit to area level and from area to national level.

Every branch/lodge should adopt the policy of striking as soon as the closure of their pit is announced. They must win, in advance of this, official backing for any such action from their respective area councils and official backing for any pickets they dispatch. Any pit striking must launch pickets immediately to bring out their whole area. Area strikes must, in turn seek, to win support from other areas.

If picketing in the event of future strikes is to be effective we must learn the lessons of this strike. In the end NUM pickets were unable to defeat the huge police operation. The reason for this was that the police were better organised and disciplined than us. We can rectify this by training miners now into effective picket defence teams. Each branch should set into motion training programmes involving all the most active and fittest members aimed at preparing for future battles with the police.

By building up from the bottom we can renew the possibilities for a national fightback. Once again federalism must be fought. Areas must pledge active support for other areas taking action. As a first step the areas that had solid majorities on strike - Yorkshire, Kent, South Wales and Scotland - must pledge mutual aid, mutual action in the event of strikes in any one of these areas. It is worth remembering that the NUM's strength in the late 1960s and early 1970s was built up by strikes of these areas.

In March of last year these areas were able to carry the argument for action into other areas. The key to re-building that strength in the future will be their ability to do it again.

If they can, then area action against closures can be a springboard to national action. And national action remains the key to beating MacGregor. In the meantime co-ordinated work-to-rules and overtime ban should be maintained not only to force reinstatement but also to register firm opposition to the closure plans.

MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN THE LINKS WITH OTHER WORKERS

The miners' struggle was sustained by enormous support and sympathy from other workers. Only the trade union leaders stopped that sympathy being transformed into solidarity action against the Tories. Each branch or minority group must maintain the links it has built with other workers through twinning, regular visits and delegations. It must activate links with any group of workers in struggle against the Tories.

This is vital as a means of sustaining support in the struggles against victimisation, the deterioration of conditions and closures that the miners will confront in the immediate period ahead. Miners Support Committees should continue to monitor and defend the miners they fought alongside in the strike. But it is also vital that the miners do not once again retreat into the relative isolation of their communities but instead take their place alongside all groups of workers in struggle. A major struggle on the railways, in the docks, or in the print must be a springboard for a renewed struggle in the mines.

PRISONERS AID

The NUM and the entire workers movement has a responsibility to its class struggle political

prisoners languishing in Thatcher's jails. NUM branches, Trade Union branches and Miners Support Committees must form Prisoners Aid Committees to campaign for their release. They must provide for them and their families, accommodate visiting relatives and ensure these heroes of the strike are not forgotten.

FOR A MINERS RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

The miners strike was held together by the energy and fighting spirit of thousands of rank and file militants. For one whole year they refused to lie down and accept defeat at the hands of Thatcher and the NCB. At the same time in numerous ways and on numerous occasions they also had to organise to stop back-sliding officials from sabotaging their pickets, blocking attempts to win solidarity and winding down the strike.

Despite this they were not sufficiently well organised within the individual coalfields or, more importantly, across the coalfields, to stop the leadership taking the miners back to work without destroying Thatcher and MacGregor's plans to butcher thousands of jobs. The minority in Wales that opposed the South Wales climb-down were not organised to resist it. There existed no means of openly linking the militants nationally to prevent the retreat. The militants of the stronger areas were not able to co-ordinate their struggles with those in the weaker areas.

In the face of MacGregor's renewed attack it

is the thousands of militants who have been developed by the strike who will have to hold the line against the NCB. And they will have to resist all NUM officials who concede to the NCB and the scab right wing officials.

If this is to be done effectively militants must organise immediately to build a fighting rank and file movement in the NUM. The strike showed up the great weaknesses of the NUM as well as many of its great strengths. A rank and file movement must set itself the task of thoroughly transforming the NUM into a class struggle union that fights the bosses every inch of the way.

A new rank and file movement can be built from amongst the activists who have resisted Williams' and Taylor's attempts to sell the miners short, and from amongst the Midlands militants who have fought their scab officials from the outset. Unlike the old Broad Lefts that organised simply to secure the election of 'left' officials it would maintain the organisation of the thousands of new class fighters to control those officials. It would organise those militants as an independent force that would fight alongside the officials when possible, against them when necessary and be ever prepared to replace them should they waver or sell out.

Militants must not allow their efforts and organisation to be frittered away. Now is the time to organise a national rank and file organisation so as to guarantee that the NUM can meet the enormous challenges of the future. The lessons of the last battle must be learnt, the better to ensure victory in those yet to be waged.

Hosiery workers join day of action in support of the miners



BACK

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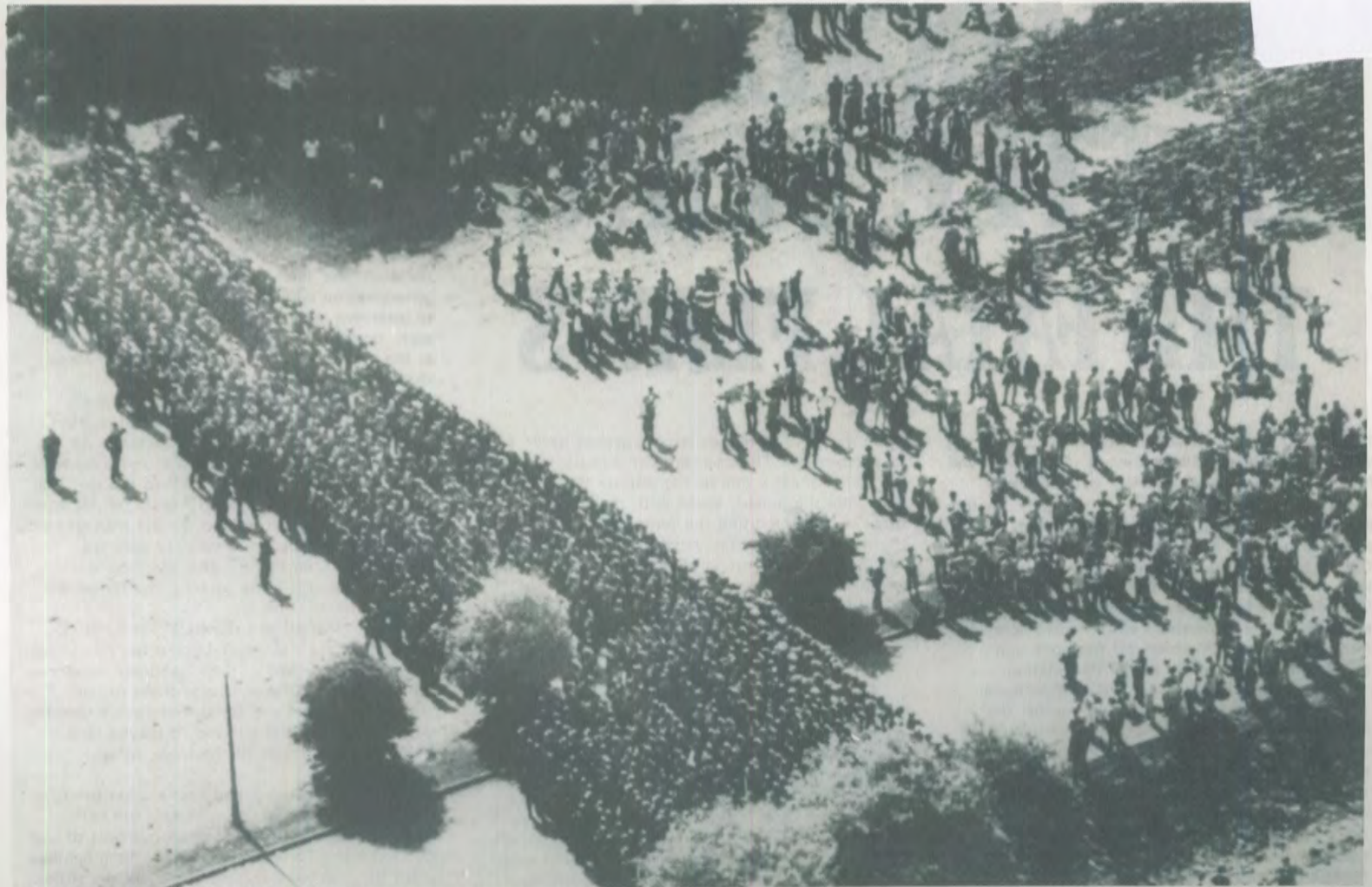
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In March of last year these areas were able to carry the argument for action into other areas. The key to re-building that strength in the future will be their ability to do it again.

If they can, then area action against closures can be a springboard to national action. And national action remains the key to beating MacGregor. In the meantime co-ordinated work-to-rules and overtime ban should be maintained not only to force reinstatement but also to register firm opposition to the closure plans.

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A new rank and file movement can be built from amongst the activists who have resisted Williams' and Taylor's attempts to sell the miners short, and from amongst the Midlands militants who have fought their scab officials from the outset. Unlike the old Broad Lefts that organised simply to secure the election of 'left' officials it would maintain the organisation of the thousands of new class fighters to control those officials. It would organise those militants as an independent force that would fight alongside the officials when possible, against them when necessary and be ever prepared to replace them should they waver or sell out.

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BACK

exist with the pockets of organised hardened scabs which exist in the other areas. They will repay any softness on the part of the NUM by continuing to play the NCB's game inside the NUM. Nottinghamshire has broken ranks on the overtime ban. They have changed their rules to give themselves even more federal autonomy. This is exactly what MacGregor and Thatcher want. It is far better to break with these scab officials now by expelling the Notts area and hold the line for a national fighting union. The alternative is to let them dictate the policies of the NUM, on behalf of Thatcher and the NCB!

We know all too well that there is a world of difference between the weak willed, soft scabs who have been driven back to work and the hardened bosses' narks and the right wing leaders who have given them cover. That is why we should say now that all officials who scabbed on the strike and those most closely associated with the scab working miners committees must be barred from membership for life with no reservations or exceptions.

It is the task of the NUM to prove the value of a class struggle union as against a scab union to thousands of miners who scabbed or were beaten back in the strike. In the scab areas the union should be reconstituted around committees of those who struck. Their tenacity and determination will stand in stark contrast to the spineless cringing scab officials. Entry into the union and the right to hold positions in it should be at the discretion of pit based disciplinary committees in every area. We need a union that is purged of scabs - one that is fit and healthy - ready to face the struggles ahead.

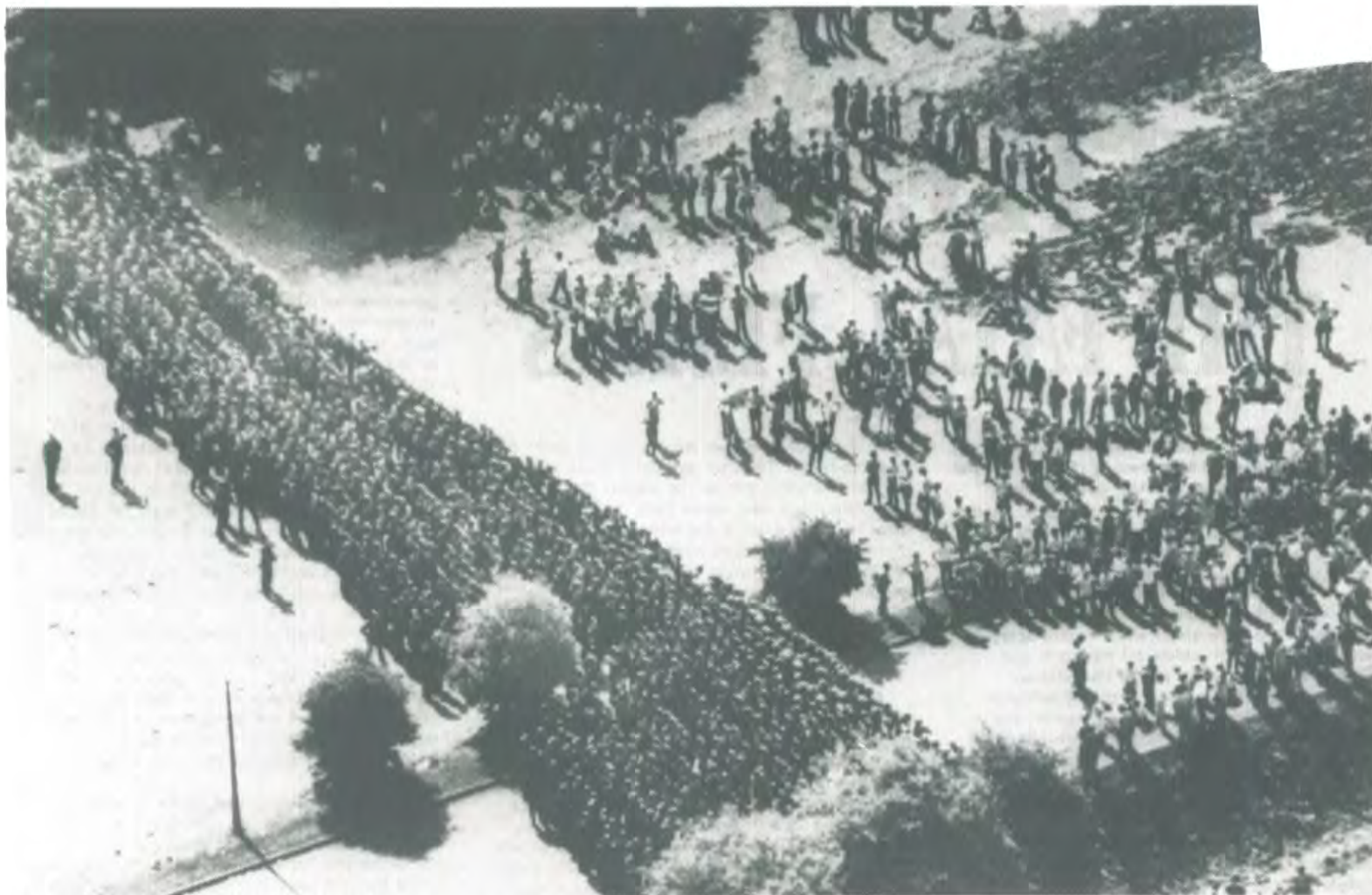
FOR WORKERS DEMOCRACY

If the best militants are not to be isolated and if the officials are to be held to account it is necessary to build on the experience of this strike to democratise the life of the NUM. We stress again that regular mass meetings must become the means by which the members are involved and decisions are made. There must be no return to the days when a few men in surface offices made up "the union" and when weekend lodge meetings were empty. The militants must campaign to maintain the involvement of a larger section of the rank and file brought on by the strike. But they must also reach out to that large number of strikers - a majority in many areas, who sat the strike out at home. Only by involving the membership can a vigilant and effective fighting rank and file be built.

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SCARGILL'S BATTLE PLAN; THE FATAL FLAWS

IN THE AFTERMATH of the miners' return to work there is justified bitterness at the role played by the TUC in leaving the NUM isolated and, eventually, stabbing the miners in the back. Arthur Scargill has criticised the part played by the TUC chiefs, with a few 'honourable' exceptions. Jack Collins blamed the strike's breakdown on the lack of 'physical support' from the working class. The bitter truth however is that throughout the strike the NUM leadership - and Arthur Scargill himself - let the TUC chiefs off the hook and failed to break the strike out of its isolation.

The miners' strike was no ordinary sectional trades dispute. The miners were up against the entire might of the bosses' state. Against them were set the police, the media, the courts and a battery of anti-union laws. The Tories had chosen their ground for a decisive battle to break the organised power of Britain's strongest group of workers. Victory for the Tories was intended to not only hit the miners but the entire organised trade union movement.

In the face of that enemy the key to victory lay in generalising the miners' strike into a working class offensive to break the Tory government. It lay in linking the miners' struggle with those of all workers who were under attack. It meant forcing the entire labour movement to stand up and fight with the miners and for the working class. As we put it early in the strike "The tactics of 1972 and 1974 alone will not win this strike. The key to victory lies in



Buckton

organised mass picketing, in winning mass strike action alongside the miners and a general strike." (*Workers Power* 56)

There has been no shortage of workers who have found themselves in the firing line alongside the miners during their heroic year of struggle. Railworkers, seafarers, car workers and dockers have all had their own battles with the bosses. Neither has there been any absence of real sympathy from rank and file trade unionists for the miners' case.

The problem was that the Trade Union leadership was absolutely set on preventing the miners' battle triggering a generalised fight. Trade union officials constitute a clearly defined caste of bureaucrats whose salaries, expense accounts and job security depend on negotiating and bargaining between the bosses and the working class. A generalised onslaught on the Tory government would, of necessity, have disturbed the cosy feathered nest of these gentlemen.

■ PHONEY SOLIDARITY ■

It's no wonder then that the TUC first of all offered its services to mediate so as to explore the possibilities of calling the strike off. Neither is it any wonder that they eventually wrote the miners a dud cheque of phoney solidarity at the TUC Congress nor that they ended up gratefully playing the role of errand boys for Thatcher and MacGregor, laying down the NCB's terms as the 'best' they could do for the miners.

However the funds, machinery and leadership of the trade union movement are in the hands of these men. The Trade Union Congress had the power to overwhelm the Tory government through the concerted industrial action of its members. It

had the power to deliver what it would have taken to smash Thatcher and win victory for the miners. From day one of the dispute the key lay in linking the miners' strike with the struggles of other workers, igniting the smouldering hatred that millions of workers have for Thatcher and forcing the trade union movement to deliver the goods.

■ MEMORIES OF 1926 ■

For the first six months of the strike Arthur Scargill and the NUM studiously fought the dispute as a sectional trades dispute. When the TUC offered to 'mediate' they were, correctly, told that their mediation was not wanted. Memories of the 1926 betrayal refreshed by the TUC's more recent betrayals of the railworkers, the NGA and GCHQ led most militants to accept Arthur Scargill's view that the NUM should keep the TUC out of its dispute. This argument may have seemed a strong one until it is looked at in more depth. Behind the call to 'keep out' lay an implicit request to 'do nothing'. The TUC were asked to do nothing in support of the miners except make financial donations should they so wish.

This immeasurably weakened the hand of the miners' supporters in the other unions. To those who urged active solidarity the reply came back "but the NUM have not asked for it". This is precisely what Buckton was saying on the TUC's behalf in July, "We have not been asked to become involved" and "as far as the TUC are concerned, when the miners ask us for help, their request will be seriously considered... We are waiting for the miners to tell us."

The other side of fighting the miners' battle as an isolated trade union struggle was the attempt to line up particular allies for the NUM from those trade unions that directly handled coal. The means of doing this was a projected series of deals between the NUM's own tops and the chiefs of the coal-using unions. This attempt to organise solidarity blacking through inter-bureaucratic deals floundered in two directions.

■ ISTC TREACHERY ■

Firstly it foundered on the craven treachery of the ISTC leaders who refused point blank to give any backing to the miners. Here was a prime case of where the NUM should have come out openly against Bill Sirs and the ISTC leaders and gone directly to the rank and file steelworkers with a programme of struggle to defend all steel jobs and all mining jobs in a joint battle against Thatcher. Instead the regional chiefs of the NUM to a man made their own local deals with the ISTC officials to keep moving coal into Scunthorpe, Ravenscraig and Llanwern.

Secondly the plan foundered on the treachery of the 'left' officials within coal handling industries. As 'left' officials themselves, Scargill and the NUM leaders placed particular trust in other 'left' leaders like Knapp, Buckton and Todd to hold the line for the miners. Rank and file miners were told by Scargill that these men could

be trusted and that blacking and solidarity had been secured through deals behind closed doors with the left officials. The truth was starkly different.

The struggles of these unions posed a series of very real possibilities to generalise the miners' strike into a common front of workers. On each occasion the 'left' leaders actively prevented that generalisation while Scargill and the NUM refused to intervene actively against their treachery. On each occasion the bosses were thrown into panic at the prospect of the development of a force that had the power to beat them.

British Rail offered the railworkers a 4% productivity deal which ASLEF and the NUR rejected. Here was a perfect opportunity to broaden the front of struggle and put Buckton's claim that "we are now at war" to the test. But miners' friends Buckton and Knapp ran for cover. The Tories quickly prodded the BR management to discover the means to up their offer to between 4.9% and 5.6% - still less than the inflation rate. Claiming 'victory' the rail leaders took the money and ran.

Arthur Scargill and the NUM ventured no criticism of their allies. Rank and file miners had not been dispatched in their hundreds to address rank and file railworkers, urge them to reject their leaders' deal and stand four square together with the miners. Scargill and co played scrupulously by the code of the trade union bureaucracy.

The TGWU leaders had ample opportunity to prove their treachery. As rank and file railworkers severely disrupted the movement of coal by rail so the Tories activated their long hatched plans for scab lorry convoys to break the strike. But the TGWU leadership was not prepared to put the weight of the union behind stopping TGWU members moving scab coal. Thousands of TGWU members were allowed to scab with impunity and keep their membership cards.

■ DOCKERS ACTION ■

It was on the docks that very real possibilities were posed of breaking the miners' strike out of its isolation by linking it with two major struggles to defend union organisation against the employers. In July the Immingham bosses used scab labour to move iron ore. In August the Hunterston employers attempted to use scab labour to move blacked coal. On both occasions TGWU docks officers insisted that the strikes were simply a pure "docks dispute" and disavowed any intended link-up with the miners.

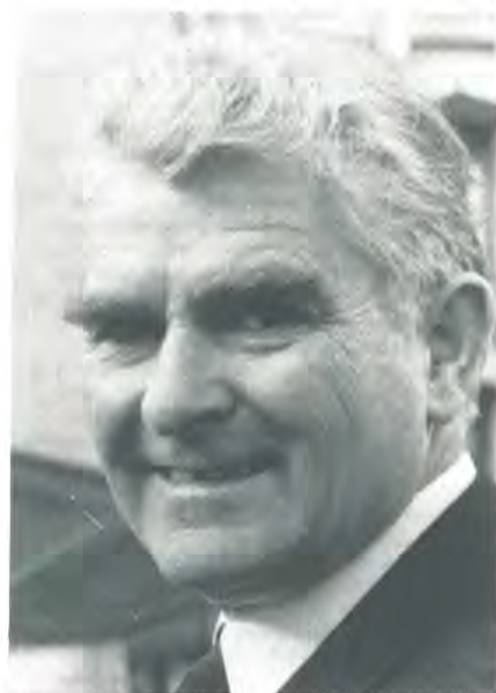
That point was made most brutally and treacherously in August when the TGWU agreed to move the blacked coal themselves rather than see it handled by scabs! Again the possibility of strengthening the dockers' resolve through the dispatch of mass NUM pickets to Dover and Felixstowe was passed by. The NUM leaders would not 'interfere' in another union's strike for fear of alienating the 'left' bureaucrats.

The flashpoints certainly existed to transform the miners' strike into the spearhead of a generalised fight against Thatcher. The possibilities existed to break the bureaucratic rules of traditional trade unionism and actively link rank and file workers in struggle. In its turn this could have welded together a force to fight the treachery of the trade union leaders and mobilise the labour movement for battle.

■ TUC STRANGLEHOLD ■

If the TUC had its hands off the strike for the first six months it had its hands round its neck in the last six months. Once again it was Arthur Scargill and the NUM leadership who let this happen.

By August it was becoming abundantly clear



Sirs.

that the strategy of relying on a few bureaucratic lefts to back an isolated miners' strike was not paying off. The deals were in tatters. The occasional rhetorical appeal from Arthur Scargill - as for example at the time of the first major sequestration of NUM assets - for 'total physical support' were never actively taken up and fought for amongst the rank and file of the other bureaucrats' unions. It was at this time that Arthur Scargill did an about-turn on his previous position of keeping the TUC out of the dispute. The NUM now made a deal with the TUC general council to secure a vote of support for the miners at the Brighton Congress.

Scargill and the NUM dropped their initial demands for specific actions (including an instruction not to cross picket lines) in favour of a mutually agreed appeal for the stepping up of action. The affiliated unions were committed to no specific action. The Power Union leaders made it perfectly plain that they intended to scab on regardless. The TUC chiefs made it equally clear that they had no intention whatsoever of disciplining affiliated unions that defied the Congress appeal. As it is now all too clear to see the bosses' paper which said, "The General Council gave the NUM a blank cheque and prudently 'forgot' to sign it" was spot on.

■ FALSE PROPAGANDA ■

Yet Arthur Scargill and the NUM leadership went out of their way to hail their new-found chums in the TUC. And the NUM's propaganda machine lauded the agreement that made victory yet even more 'inevitable' for the miners. *The Miner* declared "the unions who make up the TUC are walking tall and gearing up to the job on hand, defending and advancing the interests of millions". Arthur Scargill told the *Sunday Times* that "In supporting the NUM with physical and financial solidarity, Congress placed itself squarely behind our campaign to secure a speedy and victorious end to the dispute".

The truth was different. The TUC only wanted an end to the dispute. They wanted it speedily. But they had no interest in unleashing the forces that could have secured victory. And Arthur Scargill was not prepared to break out of the bureaucratic charmed circle to go direct to Congress and appeal for the 'total physical support' the miners needed - mass industrial action and a general strike. True this would have divided Congress. It would have set those who wanted to fight against those who did not. It



Scargill at Orgreave.

'WE'RE NOT GOING BACK' -TAKING THE MOVEMENT FORWARD

THATCHER STARTED THE miners' strike hoping that she could use the wives to beat the miners. The gutter press heaped enormous praise on a tiny number of scab 'petticoat' pickets at Ollerton. They hoped that women's domestic isolation, lack of political experience and traditional lack of involvement in the labour movement would set them against the NUM. The truth was quite the reverse. Wives, girlfriends and women workers rallied around the strike. It could not have been maintained without them.

Most of these women have no intention of going back to the life they knew before the strike. And no wonder. They opened up a whole new world for themselves. They discovered new skills and a new confidence. They discovered solidarity. For that reason wives' groups are rightly determined to stay together.

Now is the time to take stock of the experience of the last year, learning from the strength as well as the weakness in order to go forward. As Durham support group co-ordinator Anne Luddick told a left paper "Now we must look back over the strike and see what has been created and achieved. When we find that perspective we will be a new mobile force." From the very start of the dispute there was a tension between the work of the wives in sustaining the strike - using women's traditional skills in the co-operative work of the strike canteen kitchens - and those who wanted to go beyond that traditional role through actively going out to spread the strike. In the first weeks food parcel centres and kitchens were set up. On the other hand 200 Kent women took to the streets of Coalville in a bid to spread the strike by going direct to the wives of Leicester scab miners.

SPLITS AND ARGUMENTS

As the strike developed, so that tension sharpened. In some areas it was resolved, in others it led to splits and arguments. Hazel Jones of Mountain Ash described this reality in a recent interview with *Labour Briefing*. "There are those who support the miners out of loyalty to their husbands. They're content with playing the traditional female role - fundraising and food parcels and children's parties...Then there are those who support the strike politically... These women want to be involved politically, to go picketing, to go to meetings as well as organising food parcels."

strength against Thatcher's laws was sabotaged by the 'right' AUEW and the 'left' TGWU. By December Thatcher's courts were ordering the sequestration of the NUM's funds and the BR management was launching an offensive against militants in a bid to get coal stocks moving again.

Again Arthur Scargill and the NUM executive failed to fight for the support they needed and to break with the trade union custom and practice that was preventing them from getting it. Indeed the majority of the executive opted to pay up their fine and not enter onto a course of defiance of Thatcher's courts. Still seeing the dispute as 'their' sectional struggle they would have coughed up if the delegate conference had let them.

■ PLATFORM RHETORIC ■

Repeated calls for 'physical support' from Arthur Scargill and calls for a General Strike from Benn and Skinner were left at the level of platform rhetoric. For the parliamentarians of the Labour Party they were verbal threats to the Tories "you call off the judges or we will start calling for a general strike". Scargill called for mass industrial action in defence of the miners, but again the miners were not organised to take that message to the ranks of their fellow workers. It remained a verbal demand on other trade unions, an alibi for the future rather than a call to action for his members. Instead they were being turned into an army of money collectors set on seeing the miners through Christmas and into the New Year's 'power cuts'.

■ GROWING DEMORALISATION ■

Although more militant, more left and far more fiery than his trade union peers, Arthur Scargill had led the miners' strike on their terms throughout the strike. The result was the tragic isolation of the strike which need never have happened. And the result was a drift of demoralisation from the executive's ranks downwards as it became increasingly difficult for the union's officials to see how their isolated strike and their traditional methods could defeat Thatcher and MacGregor. By February the executive was 'unanimously' calling on the TUC to do precisely what it had rejected in the first

Enormous obstacles faced wives and girlfriends in the second category. What were they to do to help spread the strike? Women's demonstrations and women's pickets were important. A June picket of wives at Calverton in Notts was an enormous boost to the morale of its strikers and their families. But the pickets came up against big problems, many of which they shared with the NUM's own pickets.

This was compounded by the attitude of the NUM at national and lodge level. After Orgrave the NUM in general scaled down its picketing operations. This was particularly the case in areas like South Wales. It made it even more difficult for the wives to get the backing for pickets, a situation made worse by many branch officials' hostility to wives breaking their traditional domestic role.

KEY TASK OF STRIKE

Throughout the strike *Workers Power* argued that the key task of the wives' groups - in addition to collections and kitchens - was to link the NUM's strike with the struggles of other workers. In the case of the wives' groups, this meant reaching out to working class women and winning not just financial and moral support for the miners, but also action from those women alongside the NUM.

Once again the wives who were prepared to endorse such a policy in principle came up against the problems of the strategy set by the NUM. As we point out elsewhere in this paper, the NUM left solidarity to deal with a handful of 'left' trade union leaders for the first six months of the strike and the TUC for the last six. Branches and areas generally - there were exceptions - were not organised to maintain a regular flow of agitators to urge solidarity action from rank and file trade unionists. No wonder that the wives got little backing or encouragement for such work.

The problems cannot all be laid at the door of the NUM and its officials. Many of the women supporters had little or no experience of the NUM let alone of the wider Labour Movement outside the communities. Women NUM members have rarely been encouraged to play an active role. The task of getting out to other workers, knowing where to go, knowing what to say, were daunting tasks in themselves, precisely because of the domestic role that women have been forced into from birth. With little help from the NUM it was a job left to



Willis

six months - mediate for it with the Tories and the NCB. Willis and Buckton could now ask for their dud cheques back. The fruits of their 'mediation' was nothing less than the NCB's own terms. This was the 'final' offering of Willis, Buckton and co.

The hands-off and hands-on phases of the TUC's treacherous involvement in the dispute were two sides of the same coin. They only wanted their hands on the strike so as to break it. And the NUM leadership was not prepared to openly fight their treachery and seek to mobilise their members as workers to ensure the action that was necessary and possible to secure a miners' victory. To say the TUC betrayed the miners is half the story. It is all the more convincing because of what happened in 1926. The harder half for most workers to swallow is that Arthur Scargill and the NUM leaders let the TUC betray the miners.

by Dave Hughes



Bernie Malone

Coalville demonstration, 1984

very small numbers of hand-picked women who toured the rally platforms.

The direction of the strike itself militated against the women learning these lessons and carrying them out. As the strike dragged on, as the pickets were scaled down, so the wives were under increasing pressure to return to their traditional role of supporting the strike in the strike kitchens and the children's parties. The more Christmas and the New Year loomed, and the more the men were enlisted in the army of collectors, so that pressure became greater. Only a few groups or individuals were able to press on with going out to fellow workers.

While many women expressed the fact that they wanted to become 'political' and felt they were being 'politicised' there were a variety of different 'politics' at work within the wives' groups. We never hid the fact that our 'politics' aimed at getting wives to fight with the miners to win a General Strike to secure victory. We proposed that the wives consciously set themselves the task of laying the foundations of a working class women's movement, a movement which could weld working class women into a united fight for women's rights and women's emancipation against capitalism and its agents in the labour movement. Our perspective for women in the strike flowed from this aim.

FEMINIST DIVERSION

However the politics of the women's support movement were of a different stripe. Betty Heathfield has been the principal spokesperson of the National Women against Pit Closures which held two conferences during the strike. Her emphasis was always on the wives reaching out to other women as women rather than as workers. In particular she has been anxious to ally the women's movement with the peace movement. Hence her backing for the Mines Not Missiles march and call at the 9th March Chesterfield rally for the formation of women for peace groups in the mining communities.

The problem with Betty Heathfield's politics is that they quite consciously divert the wives away from forging links with their real allies - working class women and men. Instead the wives are supposed to create alliances with the middle class 'womens movement' by appealing to them for help, or by joining in their existing campaigns. This was demonstrated in the most ludicrous manner in last summer's attempt to appeal to the Queen. Although she is a woman, she is also one of the richest capitalists and the Head of the Bosses State!

BUREAUCRATIC REPLICA

In pursuit of this political orientation the national leadership put together a national organisation of sorts. But it was not the kind that 'politicised' women needed to exchange experiences, learn from each other and develop a strategy for taking the strike forward. Its decision-making conference was attended by only two delegates from each NUM area. This minimised the authentic voice of the hundreds of support groups throughout the country. In common with the traditions of the NUM's own bureaucracy, the organisers had little time for mass democracy or the open exchange of ideas and opinions.

The leadership which emerged from the conference restricted itself to fund raising and channelling those funds to the local groups.

They organised no further national or regional conferences, no further demonstrations. They thus made sure that no alternative strategy for victory was voiced.

The lessons of the strike must be learnt if the groups are to survive and grow. Every group should continue with regular activities and meetings. They must set out to make sure that the burden of debts and the problems of the home are not allowed to undo the great gains of the last twelve months.

TASKS AHEAD

Groups must:

- commit themselves to actively campaigning on behalf of the sacked and imprisoned miners and their families.
- organise a programme of discussions on the political questions that were raised in the strike - how can women be emancipated, why are British troops in Ireland - these are the kinds of topics that should be discussed.
- they must organise to rally behind all miners fighting sackings, closures and speed ups.
- Arthur Scargill has called for women's groups to have associate membership of the NUM. The groups must see to it that this is made operational right away. They must make sure that the groups have observer rights at every level in the union. But at the same time the decision making and policies of the groups must be entirely in the hands of the women themselves. They must put demands on the lodge to guarantee it will provide child care and travel facilities to enable women to attend the meetings.
- they must draw up their own demands to meet the needs of the women in the communities - demands for nurseries, adequate public transport health care etc - and organise to fight through the local Labour movement both alongside other unions and in the Labour Party to achieve these goals.
- most importantly they must maintain the links they have built with other groups of working class women and actively extend them. They must be prepared now to support all workers in struggle as an independent force. They should establish their own funds to make this possible and in order to prevent the local lodge putting a block on women's initiatives.
- it is vital that the wives have a national democratic organisation and that those who agree get together and organise to fight for one. A national women's solidarity conference is being planned by the Midlands Women's Co-ordinating Committee, probably in April. It could provide an important opportunity for groups to propose and discuss future plans. At the same time we must organise to force the National Women Against Pit Closures to organise a much broader and more representative conference as soon as possible.

INSPIRATION TO OTHERS

The miners' wives have given inspiration not only to the miners but to other working class women. These women - health workers, the Fords' Machinists, the teachers - have shown that they too can fight Thatcher's attacks. With the aid of the women of the mining communities the months and years ahead could see the launching of a real mass working class women's movement.



NO POLITICS; NO VICTORY

THROUGHOUT THE TWELVE months of the strike one side or the other was repeatedly raising the question of whether the Miners' strike was political. It was a regular feature of the NCB's propaganda. To them Arthur Scargill was a politically motivated man trying to use an industrial dispute to overthrow the Tory government. In common with the IRA, General Galtieri and Colonel Gadhafi he is painted as "an enemy of democracy".

That this propaganda has any credibility in the organised labour movement is due to the role of Neil Kinnock and trade union leaders from Willis to Hammond who have kept up a constant chorus of condemnations of picket line violence and hallelujahs to the ballot box as the 'only way' to change governments.

Against this barrage Arthur Scargill has pugnaciously refused to condemn 'picket line violence'. He has steadfastly pointed to the brutal repression of unarmed miners and their families at the hands of the police. When asked whether the strike was political he always threw the charge back at the Tories. "You have planned and plotted this provocative pit closure programme, you set up a paramilitary police force and ripped up 100 years of trade union legality to smash the NUM and overawe the whole trade union movement".

Of course he was right. After the first six months even the Tories stopped concealing their total involvement. But the reply is a purely defensive one. The combined Labour and Tory frontbench campaign did have an effect on workers' sympathy and solidarity. It did so because of the historic weakness of the British labour movement when it comes to politics. Even after one year on strike some of the best NUM militants were still claiming they were 'not political' or talking of the need to 'keep politics out of it'.

What should be the relationship between politics and a strike over pit closures and job losses? The official leadership of the Labour movement has a pat answer to this. It has been dinned into workers' heads generation after generation. It is so widely accepted because it is a message the boss class approves of completely. Politics - the changing of governments and their policies - is a job for elections. Once every five years or so you can choose between two or three alternatives. If you don't like what they do you can protest. But in the last analysis you must leave it to the MP's of the party you voted for to moderate the government's politics by debate in parliament.

CAREERISM

On the other hand economic questions - wages, hours, employment itself, health and safety at work are the sphere of trade unionism. Eighty-five years ago the union leaders decided that they could no longer leave politics to one of the parties dominated by bankers, industrialists and landowners - the Liberals. The Labour Party was founded as the 'political wing' of the labour movement. But both the union leaders and the first generation of Labour MP's insisted that there was a brick wall between their two respective kingdoms.

The MP's insisted that politics be left to them and violently opposed the use of industrial action for political ends as unconstitutional. Kinnock has not just inherited Ramsay MacDonald's clothes as a scab. He has inherited his arguments as well.

On the other side of the divide the full-time trade union officials set up the sign 'no politics in the trade unions thank you!' Or more honestly 'leave politics to our relations with the Labour Party and the Government'. The bureaucracy's attempt to keep discussions of even parliamentary reform politics away from the bulk of the members has born bitter fruit. Many - perhaps most - union members are indifferent or even hostile to their union's involvement with the Labour Party. The repeated experience of Labour Governments that turned out to be bosses governments has deepened this cynicism. Politics has become a dirty word associated with unprincipled careerists.

Labour politicians with sizeable farms, multiple directorships, baronies and earldoms have proved a bitter mockery of the hopes which sent Keir Hardie in his cloth cap to Westminster, and which painted parliament on union banners with the legend 'the hope of the workers'.

However justified this cynicism about Labourite politics may be, it is nevertheless an enormous weakness for the working class. With NUM militants it often takes the form of proclaiming proudly "the NUM, that's my party". There is an obvious problem with this answer. Firstly if it is the case then 40,000 of its

members were fighting for the other side in the national strike. Secondly tens of thousands of labour movement militants who did everything they could for the miners could not join the 'NUM Party'.

But there is a more fundamental reason for rejecting the self-sufficiency of even the most militant trade union. Rejecting 'politics' in favour of union militancy has a long history in Britain and Europe. It was once a fully fledged theory - syndicalism, named after the French word for a trade union (syndicat). This trend was very strong with the miners' union. The authors of the famous pamphlet *The Miners Next Step* were syndicalists.

Syndicalism was a response to the way MP's and trade union bureaucrats sold-out union struggles and sacrificed working class interests to winning elections or preserving Labour Governments. We have seen the evil effects of this sort of politics, often enough in the last ten years. Labour's record, from the three phases of the Social Contract of the 1974-79 Labour Government to Kinnock's refusal to support the miners in the interests of his standing in the opinion polls, rightly arouses the contempt of ordinary workers who rallied to the miners' cause.

However to go on from this revulsion to rejecting or neglecting politics is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. In its own way it accepts Kinnock's definition of politics as being limited to the ballot box. This dispute has shown all too clearly that trade union struggles cannot keep itself unpolitical. If the miners' strike had just been between the NCB and the NUM - with

no government, judicial or police involvement then the miners would have won hands down. But of course the strategy for the NCB was worked out by the government, co-ordinated by the police and the controllers of the media. They waged an all out class war on the miners.



Q: Which way to Downing St?
A: On your knees....

They accepted no "separation of the 'economic' and the 'political' " for themselves. They had an economic objective - to close all pits that do not make sufficient profit (in their terms they are "not economic") They have a further "economic" objective which is to lower real wages and close down or drastically cut whole industries and services so as to boost the rate of profit.

The ruling class are prepared to use the full force of the state to crush working class resistance to their plans. Anti-union laws, magistrates, social security officials and the police are all at their disposal. They can tap phones and open mail. And still the government has powers in reserve that it did not use in the strike, the declaration of a state of emergency and the use of troops. The ruling class use state power to defend their economic interests.

Lenin rightly defined politics as "the concentrated expression of economics." By this he meant that political struggle is the pursuit of the whole interests of a class. For the capitalist it is concentrated through the forces of the state. For the working class it is concentrated against the forces of the state. It is a struggle for the interests of the employers or workers as a whole class, not simply



for the interests of this or that employer or group of workers.

The bosses are a tiny minority of the population and engaged in constant economic competition with one another. The only real concentration of power that they can achieve is through the state. Otherwise the sheer unity of the working class would overwhelm them. The unions have good cause to know what this state is - at bedrock the instruments of coercion, the special bodies of armed men.

It acts for the economically dominant class. It is the capitalists' state and not a neutral body or a democratic body representing the whole population. If Parliament was filled with Dennis Skinnors and Arthur Scargills tomorrow the state machinery would not answer to 'democratic' controls and support the millions who want jobs. It would not defend their jobs against the millionaires who want to destroy jobs.

On the contrary the real machinery of state - the chiefs of the armed forces, the judges, the top civil servants and police chiefs - led by the real 'head of state', the monarch would dispense with parliament. They would do so either until they could rig and election or for a prolonged period until they had smashed the workers' movement sufficiently. This was shown in the bloody destruction of Allende's government in Chile.

All the immediate needs and demands that the working class fights for against the bosses are political. The right to work, to job security, to decent housing, the best medical care and education, even the right to organise and picket are political. These are the concentrated economic interests of the working class. The fight for any one of these involves conflict with the bosses as a class. If they are conceded, in whole or part, they are reforms.

REFORMISM

The trade union bureaucrats and the parliamentarians draw a false conclusion from this. They conclude that capitalism can be gradually abolished by a series of reforms and that these reforms are best won by trade union bargaining, the minimum of strikes and disruption, and by electing a majority of Labour MPs. Thus bit by bit the evil features of capitalism can be removed and replaced by pieces of socialism - nationalised industries, welfare state, social security and so on.

This view appeared at its strongest in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s. In this period even the Tories carried out the odd reform or two. Only revolutionaries argued against this reformist view, that capitalism had not been fundamentally changed and remained a system of crisis. The bosses had conceded concession out of a fear of real fundamental change, a revolution that would deprive them forever of their source of profits. This fear - most sharp at the end of the two world wars - led the bosses to make substantial concessions. After the last war, the long boom meant that it was twenty years before they began to find these concessions irksome. With the onset of a period of severe crises in the 1970s the ruling class set about devising a strategy to claw back these reforms.

The reformist Labour and union leaders now proved worse than useless even as defenders of the very gains they claimed the credit for. The first wave of working class resistance to these attacks - including the 1972 and 1974 miners strikes - succeeded despite Joe Gormley, Vic Feather and the Labour leaders. The Tories, and indeed the old union leaders, were caught completely by surprise. After a quarter of a century of boom and peace between the classes, at a national level, they did not know how to handle the eruption of real class struggle. Whilst the militants of the early 70s had radicalised their trade unionism, in terms of tactics, organisation and the whole spirit of struggle, they had not changed their politics. Their politics were in the background. They were Labour lefts or CP members, sometimes members of small 'Trotskyist Groups'. But in the struggles of this period they were first and last trade union militants.

This meant that they never posed themselves objectives which went beyond economic demands. When the bosses or the government conceded the struggle abruptly ended. The most drastic example of this and a turning point that still affects us today was the miners' strike of 1974. Heath called an election, lost and a Labour government came in.

The union leaders were soon into Number 10 and came out with a deal - the Social Contract. The trade union militants may not have liked the talk about 'planned growth of incomes' but they didn't know how to oppose it. A massive economic crisis was impending. Labour might reign in Downing Street but Capitalism still ruled in the City, in industry and commerce and in Wall Street. One year of small scale reforms and the IMF came to London demanding major cuts in public expenditure and that Labour use its credits with the union officials to hold wages below inflation. Thus Labour demobilised and demoralised the fighting movement of the early 1970s and opened the gates to Thatcher.

With Thatcher in power it was the union bureaucracy's turn to do the dirty work. Bill Sims stabbed his own members powerful strike in the back and sold the job of half his members. The NGA and railworkers were betrayed. The miners battle has seen a concentrated repetition of these betrayals at the hands of both the TUC and the Labour Party leaders. Kinnock and the PLP leaders spent all their time trying to prove they were a trustworthy bosses government-in-waiting. The "general staff of the unions" combined with this "political leadership" to betray the miners. They hate the class struggle like sin. It spoils their electioneering and jeopardises invitations to tea in Number 10 and the chance of a seat in the Lords on retirement.

The experience of the last fifteen years of class struggle leads to one inescapable conclusion. Under its present leadership the working class cannot defend what it has got, let alone go forward. But there is an even harsher lesson. Militant union tactics are not enough either. They are not enough to meet the onslaught of a re-armed bosses state. After 1974 the bosses re-armed politically by developing a much more worked-out strategy for attacking all the gains of the working class.

After 1974 the ruling class worked out a new political programme for itself. It reorganised by marginalising the half-hearted in their own ranks (the wets) and placing hard class warriors in all the key positions. Meanwhile the working class slumbered. The Bennite movement remained fatally restricted to the constituency parties and to a revamped reformist perspective - the old 'Alternative Economic Strategy' of 1973 built on a perspective of capitalist boom. All it really asked for was accountability of MPs to their constituencies and to the party conference. The achievement of these gave the right-wing press a field day to ruin Labours electoral changes. The prospect of defeat at the polls cowed them.

Labour's defeat in 1983 made them bend the knee to Kinnock. Even after his Judas job on the miners the Bennites dared not openly challenge him. Within the unions the flabby 'Broad Left' remain hopelessly tied to the coat-tails of left talking bureaucrats and have failed to re-create a fighting movement at workplace level.

SINGLE-MINDED POLITICS

The price for our failure to learn the lessons of the 70s has been a string of defeats. The most bitter is that of our 'guards regiment' - the miners. We must learn from our enemies. We need to re-arm and re-organise more radically than they did. As a first step the enormously increased layer of active militants in the NUM and in all the unions and workplaces who rallied to them must shake off the "no politics" viewpoint.

We need politics but not reformist politics. We need a single-minded politics that fuses the fighting direct action tacks of union militancy with a programme for real working class state power. We will need movements of the rank and file in the unions and in the Labour Party. But most crucially we need a political organisation, a party consisting of the militant class fighters in all industries, amongst the unemployed, amongst the oppressed layers of the population. Such a party must be a party of socialist revolution. It must offer leadership in every major struggle. It must link them together and concentrate them into a united class-wide political offensive.

The miners must furnish the new political vanguard with many of its best fighters. So it was in the early 1920s. So it must be in the 1980s. We must learn the politics of class struggle and build a party to carry them out. Then we will have our revenge. It will be well deserved. It will be final!

by Dave Stocking



CP'S BROAD ALLIANCE - ROAD TO DEFEAT

THE MINERS' STRIKE was not over before certain left journalists were conducting an autopsy. One eager group of vultures were the writers clustered around the Eurocommunist monthly *Marxism Today*. They have come up with a particularly poisonous lesson - namely that it was militant trade union tactics, picketing and the fight for solidarity action that alienated public sympathy.

This argument is all the more poisonous in that it played a role in weakening the effectiveness of the strike action and in eventually paving the way for the sell-out resolution at the Delegate Conference that ended the strike. Our 'Euros' and their imitators in the Labour 'soft left' are quite unabashed. Their conclusion is simply that the miners should have taken more of their patent opinion and taken it earlier.

The refrain runs that the militants, and leaders like Arthur Scargill, just don't realise that the 1980s are not the 1970s. Since the start of the 1980s the working class has been ideologically mesmerised by "Thatcherism". It was unable, or rather unwilling, to come to the miners' aid. In such circumstances the crucial need was to win over "public opinion" in order to mobilise the broadest possible alliance to "isolate" Thatcher. The "movements" - peace, women's, gays, lesbian and blacks - the Churches, even the farmers, were the real allies of the miners. They could have been won only if the outmoded militant tactics of the 70's had been discarded.

Leading Eurocommunist and CP industrial organiser Pete Carter has argued that solidarity was not forthcoming because of "the attitude of the rank and file". Mass unemployment, the fall in trade union membership, anti-union propaganda and the political advances of Thatcherism, had produced "profound differences" with the 1970s. The failure to recognise these changes by the trade unions and the left "and their consequent reliance on the actions and approach of yesteryear as models for today's struggles and victories are counter productive" (*Striking the Right Note, Marxism Today*, March 1985). An attorney for the union bureaucrats, he merely elaborates their excuse - the backwardness of the membership.

Nigel Williamson, Editor of *Tribune*, quickly joined in the chorus deriding industrial action. Industrial action, he earnestly tells us, at the end of the biggest industrial battle for a decade, "no longer has the primacy it once enjoyed.... Old-style all-out industrial action, while still important is not a substitute for persuasion on the wider issues" (*Tribune* 8.3.85).

These arguments are not unfortunately limited to the declining Communist Party of Great Britain or the pages of *Tribune*. They chime in perfectly with Neil Kinnock's entourage of *New Statesman* journalists and speech writers. In their view Scargill and his supporters are "fundamentalists" who will lead the NUM and indeed the whole movement "to destruction". The Kinnockites were a powerful and debilitating force within the South Wales NUM throughout the struggle.

■ FEMINISM ■

Bea Campbell joined the 'New Politics' chorus with her own predictably feminist justification for denouncing traditional militancy and violence on the picket line. To her it is a symptom of 'macho militancy' that the left has been all too willing to tolerate, "while not necessarily condoning crass violence, it has shown plenty of sympathy with the 'lads'". (Old and New Politics) How terrible! When we see miners in tee-shirts being beaten bloody with truncheons, and women supporters hunted on horseback, we 'condone' their fighting back! Bea Campbell has no such feeling of sympathy. Indeed she quotes approvingly a mysteriously anonymous "woman in Ollerton" who thinks "one side as bad as another".

If the "new Politics" will have nothing with



Popular Frontism allowed steel production to continue unabated.

"muscular militancy", what does it offer instead? They reach for the bankrupt old tactics of Mahatma Gandhi and CND. They advocate the non-violent tactics of Greenham which have been totally unable to prevent cruise missiles being sited. Clearly if only the miners at Orgreave had woven wool around the police lines and sat down in front of the police horses a different outcome could have been expected!

Amongst the erstwhile 'hardleft' of the Labour Party another convert to the "New Politics", Peter Tatchell, takes it a stage further in the March issue of *Labour Briefing*. Here we are told of the "immense moral power" of non-violent action in winning "public sympathy". He advises women from the "distant pit communities" to converge on London. "It is one thing for people to see the Battle of Orgreave on their Television screens. But their reactions, and the government's responsiveness to negotiations, might be far more favourable to the miners if non-violent mass-picketing, and the inevitable police repression, were repeated daily on the streets of London." (*Time to Learn from Greenham*) So now the miners wives must come and be brutalised by the London cops to "gain" a more favourable public opinion!

Stripped of the verbiage of feminism and pacifism, this position is at one with Neil Kinnock. For these middle class radicals the idea of workers defending themselves against police attack and thus alienating public opinion is intolerable. The lesson of Orgreave becomes not that the pickets needed organised defence squads to make their blockade of the coke works effective, not that they needed the workers of Sheffield to march to their assistance as the Birmingham workers once marched to Saltley Gate, but that it should never have happened at all.

■ BITTER FRUIT ■

Communist Party member and author Hywel Francis launched the attack on "outmoded" militancy in the February issue of *Marxism Today*. He poured scorn on, "a 'syndicalist' strategy of industrial confrontation and regular sectional calls for a general strike and mass picketing" as a method of winning the strike. Perhaps his most insolent attempt to discredit militant trade unionism is when he picks on what looks like an easy target - the steelworkers. "Old fashioned solidarity has at its best, been reduced to 75 turkeys from Llanwern" (*Mining the Popular Front, Marxism Today* Feb, 1985) Who called off mass picketing at Llanwern? Who argued that turkeys and money were more important than solidarity? Why it was none other than Dr Kim Howells, Emyln Williams and the majority of the South Wales NUM executive. Besides it is a scandal to say that the steelworkers provide the best example of solidarity. Obstruct, delay, sabotage the fight for solidarity action, ignore the actions of rank and file railwaymen, seaman and dockers and then sneer at "old fashioned solidarity". This is the method of the Hywel Francis and his Euro friends.

It was in South Wales that the dreamworld of the "New Politics" gained the most reality for the CP. The Welsh Congress (chaired by Dr. Hywel Francis) was lauded as the broad alliance in prac-

tice, drawing in as it did the Welsh Nationalists and the churches.

However there was a price to pay for achieving or maintaining this alliance - "public opinion", as represented by the church, nationalists etc - could not be offended. Above all this meant distancing the South Wales NUM and the CP from "picket line violence". In a veiled attack on Arthur Scargill CP industrial organiser Pete Carter made this abundantly clear: "If public opinion is viewed as peripheral, then the language of the strike becomes coded, and not even understood by many trade unionists. In this respect there should have been an early condemnation of violence from whichever quarter it came, while emphasizing the overwhelming responsibility of the police in this context". (*Striking the Right Note*).

The role of the Welsh Congress in diverting the miners in Wales away from mass picketing as a means to gain solidarity action has been dealt with in a previous paper (Welsh Popular Front - fig leaf for surrender *WP* 69). There is no doubt that the same politics were a crucial factor in the surrender of the South Wales leadership despite having the most solid membership out on strike anywhere in the country.

For Kim Howells of the NUM, Hywel Francis and Pete Carter the most important development was not the phenomenal class solidarity and determination shown by the South Welsh miners and their wives, but the uniting of "whole communities" - chapels, shopkeepers farmers, "the movements".

Workers should in no way reject the support of other strata pulled into struggle behind their actions. But it would be totally self-defeating to abandon the actions necessary to win the support of our class brothers and sisters, to keep our weakest and most fickle supporters. What the miners needed was class unity. The 'new politics' was after a different sort of unity. "In South Wales we also discovered something else: that we were part of a real nation." (The birth of a new kind of politics in *Digging Deeper* - Verso) And having made such a discovery what would be more natural than defending the nation's steel plant at Llanwern.....against shortsighted trade union militancy!

The strongly CP influenced Scottish NUM led the way; "...on hearing that the Scottish miners were allowing regular deliveries of coal from Hunterston to Ravenscraig we negotiated an arrangement whereby Llanwern received about ten thousand tonnes of coke and coal a week." (*Digging Deeper* p143). And wouldn't mass pickets and appeals for solidarity strike action threaten the rest of Welsh industry? What would that do to the alliance with nationalist businessmen and farmers? The logic of the Broad Alliance was inescapable.

The CP fought tooth and nail against any attempts to move from sympathetic collections to taking industrial solidarity action. In the end it was the threat to this alliance, the threat of a 'divided community', which led the Welsh NUM leaders to be the foremost advocates of a surrender. They knew their "New politics" could deliver nothing to decisively win the strike. They also knew a significant crack in the Welsh miners, with the necessity of mass pickets, the influx of the police picket-busters and the resulting "picket line violence", would scatter their vicars and farmers like sheep on the mountains.

Is the mass picket, the call for solidarity action just counter-productive? Only if what you are interested in is the passive "opinion" of the uninformed "member of the public". And indeed this is just what the so called communists of *Marxism Today* are after. Their man-or-woman-in-the-street is not in fact a worker who must be won to active solidarity. He or she is a vicar, a shopkeeper, a farmer, a feminist who isn't at all well-disposed to workers unless they are well-behaved, long-suffering but deserving victims of hard, vicious Mrs Thatcher.

■ ALLIES ■

In fact "allies" come in two sorts. There are those who get stuck in alongside you when you are involved in a fight. The other sort try to hold you back. The latter sort often get you - and sometimes themselves - a black eye. In fact militant tactics change peoples' ideas a lot faster than preaching and emotional appeals for sympathy. Thus - first amongst the miners themselves - the actual experience of struggle blew away many of the ideas peddled by the bosses head-fixing media. As long as people are uninvolved in struggle, isolated in front of their TV's, and have no direct experience of the issues they will tend to be influenced by the bosses lies. To court this "public opinion" in a strike is to court disaster. In fact the miners had to go out and change "public opinion" into "workers' solidarity". Where they made direct links they got a long way along the road, but no thanks to the "alliance-builders".

In fact the miners' militancy gained the sympathy of millions who hate Thatcher and supported any one with the guts to stand up to her - the collections showed that. The question was to take it further. But that was just what the CP did not want to do. It would disturb their friends like Ray Buckton. No, a different direction altogether was needed.

For Pete Carter, "A crucial question has been and remains the battle for public opinion". And who represents this "public opinion"? Comrade Carter eagerly names one component, "Support from the Bishops and Churches should have been worked for and welcomed..." The Church of England has little or no influence in the working class. Its constituency is the upper and lower middle classes. If its Bishops want to sow confusion amongst the "Tory Party at prayer" good! But we should not give them an ounce of credit within the working class. If in fact you listened to the words of the Anglican and non-conformist clergy they preached conciliation, compromise and an end to "violence".

■ CHURCHES ■

They counselled the victim to "turn the other cheek to their assailant". They preached this message to Thatcher too. Wisely she ignored them and treated them like foolish muddle-heads who did not understand political or economic reality. Another reason for giving Anglican or Catholic prelates and non-conformist divines no credit is that on virtually every social-question - on abortion and contraception rights and the position of women, on morality etc they are total reactionaries.

It is an enormously positive thing that eighty or ninety percent of the working class are totally indifferent to the churches. It is a measure of the Euros 'unreality' that the class victories of ten years ago seem light-years away whereas these left-overs from the Middle Ages are to be part of the "New Politics".

To preserve their united "all class alliances" the Welsh CP, the Eurocommunists and the Kinnockites were willing to destroy the defence of 'actual working class communities by advocating a return to work and destroying the national strike. The popular front, the "New Politics", has revealed again its real nature as a strategy for defeat and betrayal.

During the 1905 General strike in Russia Trotsky analysed the same political opportunism of the Mensheviks. His characterisation shows the "New Politics" of the Euros are indeed very old: "Tired of its own inadequacy and unreliability, it goes in search of 'allies'. It hurls itself on the dung heap of liberalism. It implores it, it appeals to it, it invents special formulae for how it could act. In reply, liberalism merely contaminates it with its own political putrefaction. Opportunism then begins to pick out isolated pearls of democracy from the dung heap. It needs allies. It rushes from place to place, grabbing possible allies by their coat-tails. It harangues its own adherents, admonishing them to be more considerate towards all potential allies. "Tact, more tact, still more tact!" It is gripped by a special disease, the mania of caution in respect to liberalism, the sickness of tact; and driven berserk by its own sickness, it attacks and wounds its own party." (1905)

by Stuart King

Photo: Bernie Malone



McGahey, NUM pedlar of Popular Frontism.

Workers Power

25p/10p strikers

Paper of the Workers Power group

SPECIAL

LESSONS OF The Great Strike



UNIONS MUST HALT RATECAPPING RETREAT

"WE CANNOT GUARANTEE to win but I can promise that we are going to stand and fight", declared Ken Livingstone at the recent London Labour Party conference. Rarely can a promise by a left Labour leader have been so quickly and publicly broken. Within a week cries of "scab" and "traitors" greeted the outcome of Livingstone's sell-out, when the G.L.C. set a legal budget involving £55 million in cuts.

As John McDonnell, Livingstone's deputy, exclaimed - Red Ken simply "bottled out". In swift succession the GLC, ILEA, Merseyside and South Yorkshire have broken the united front agreed with the lower-tier borough councils. These involved a pledge not to set a rate in line with the Tories' demands for massive cuts.

Livingstone's reputation as a "hard left" - a title coined and bestowed by such papers as Socialist Organiser and Socialist Action - has been shattered at the first blow. Many Labour rank and file will be shocked. They should not be. For the last two years at least, Livingstone has been long on the rhetoric and short on the action.

GIMMICKS AND RHETORIC

The defence of London Transport fizzled out in the clownding of the Fares Fare campaign. A diet of expensive advertising and publicity gimmicks failed to stop the Tories. The GLC's anti-abolition campaign ended in appeals to the Tories Wets and the geriatric Tory peers. "Citizen Ken" went for toothless protest politics, keeping the unions which represented the GLC workers, London Transport and the ILEA firmly in the background. Yet none of this could be so discrediting as his latest public collapse.

What lies behind it and behind Frances Morrell's collapse in ILEA? "Parliamentary careerism", said angry Labour supporters. Livingstone and Morrell are doubtless ambitious to get a Commons seat across Westminster Bridge when the GLC is abolished in 1986. Being surcharged and banned



from public office for five years would doubtless cramp their style somewhat.

However, these motives are not a sufficient explanation. Indeed on their own they fit the old cynical explanation of Labour Reformism - "corruption of the leaders". The conclusion is always to get new, clean, uncareerist leaders.

This is not the answer. It is the politics of Livingstone, not his careerism, that led to his collapse. In fact none of the GLC or ILEA 'lefts' were committed to a head-on confrontation with Jenkin. They were engaged in a gigantic game of "call my bluff". In the end it was Patrick Jenkin who duly called it.

These 'lefts' based their strategy on a devious calculation. This was that they could play the militant fire-eaters, threatening illegality and the suspension of city services - without at the final moment having to carry it out. They hoped at best that Jenkin would back down enough to enable them to claim a victory, as Liverpool did in 1984.

HOPES IN VAIN

Their hopes were in vain. Liverpool had the great advantage that 140,000 miners were locked in deadly battle with the Government. Liverpool's victory was a pay-off. It was a shameful refusal to actually struggle alongside the miners. Today, with the miners defeated, Jenkin only faces the Labour bluffers.

Until recently the councillors thought they might be able to get away with their game so long as they could expect right-wing Labour members to team up with the Alliance and Tories to vote down Livingstone, Morrell and co's illegal budget, they could maintain it was a principled defeat. Their

left reputations and their parliamentary ambitions would be intact.

Yet two legal opinions about a month ago threw them into blind panic. These were that if the Tories simply abstained on the vote not to set a rate they would be legally clear of surcharge and disqualification. Horror of horrors! The decisive vote would then be with in the Labour group where Ken could not fail to get a majority! He quickly sounded the retreat.

'HARD LEFT'

Enter stage right one Reg Race bearing a legal budget created by "miraculous accounting". Our Reg - one of Socialist Organisers "hard lefts" before his electoral demise in 1983 - had discovered that the GLC had been 'misled'. There was enough money to make a legal budget.

In one bound Ken was free - but not quite. A minority of the Labour Group obstinately refused to vote for this budget. In the event the Tories did not abstain. A GLC budget of £750 million for 1985/86 was passed which implies spending cuts of £55 million. This budget - below the maximum allowed for by the government - drew support from the Tories and 15 Labour members to get through.

Was the "Reg Race" budget an alternative to the Tory triumph as Livingstone now claims? No. Even if they could have avoided by 'miraculous accounting' to manage job and service cuts this year, that is not the point. For one thing they could only do that by financing current expenditure out of capital reserves. This is only possible in any case because Jenkin was "generous" in his limits on the GLC precisely to encourage the Labour

group to desert the borough councils and thus weaken the opposition.

The boroughs do not have the same luxury and even the GLC can only do it once. What will they do next year? The central point however is that this year provided the best possibility for a united council/council unions fight-back. Not only has their renegation demoralised supporters, it has set a disastrous precedent. It has given other vacillating Labour councils a chance to follow that path, while blaming others for wrecking the campaign. Perhaps most damaging, it has made it much harder for militant GLC and ILEA workers to mobilise union members for strike action against rate-capping.

Can anything more be expected of the remaining "hard lefts" in the councils, and in particular from the Borough councils, which refused to set a rate on March 7th? Unlike the GLC, ILEA, Merseyside and South Yorkshire, none of the boroughs had a legal obligation to set a rate by March 10th.

Significantly in Lambeth Ted Knight amended the budget resolution to say "not setting a rate at this moment in time", thereby leaving open the option of setting one later. In Sheffield Blunkett reaffirmed that it was not the council's intention to break the law. The law he declared, "is there to uphold our rights. All we are doing is to ask Patrick Jenkin to sit down with us like a reasonable statesman, remove our penalties, restore our grants and see to it we are not in this situation again".

It is clear enough from Blunkett's statement that the vast majority of these fake lefts have not the slightest intention of a real confrontation with the Tories. Leaders like Blunkett are already waving the white flag, signalling to Jenkin that once the courts direct them to make a rate, they will comply

rather than break the law.

Already Leicester Council's leaders have said that a legal budget is "inevitable". They too will cover their scabbing on the fight with talk of "miraculous accounting".

So how can we stop the retreat? Everything now rests in the hands of the unions, whose members' jobs are on the front-line. 75,000 jobs nationally are at risk. By their cynical manoeuvre the town hall 'rebels' have shown themselves unfit to lead the fight. The rank and file joint trade union committees, now established in each rate-capped city and Liverpool, must take the offensive and regain the initiative.

To begin they should force the borough councillors to set an illegal, no cuts deficit budget before the end of March. Otherwise Jenkin will pick off one council after another at his own discretion. He may use commissioners, encourage court action by individuals or simply rely on Labour defections.

The National Local Authority Shop Stewards Conference on March 30th in Liverpool gives an opportunity to link up today's threatened council workers with tomorrow's around rate-capping and pay. This conference must set its sights on all-out strike action and win solidarity action from the private sector.

The campaign must reject the strategy coming from Lambeth council unions among others, which sees all-out indefinite action only as a "last resort". The lessons of previous "selective action" campaigns in demoralising and demobilising militancy, in the Civil Service dispute (1981) and the Health Service dispute of 1982, must be drawn.

At the heart of the stewards' present rejection of all-out action is the desire not to 'hurt the public' by their action. Quite honestly this is a utopian aim. We must turn the argument around. An all-out strike will stand a greater chance of forcing a quick retreat on the Tories and thus minimise suffering.

ALL OUT ACTION

In our propaganda we must explain that since 1979 failure to successfully resist the attack on the public sector by all-out action has allowed the government to impose untold suffering on the poorer sections of the working class.

In this struggle we cannot rely on councillors. The way they are shaping up, the unions may have to strike against their 'reluctant' imposition of the cuts. So be it. The next weeks are decisive. Take the offensive:

- *No cuts in jobs and services.
- *No rent or rate rises.
- *Restore the Rate Support Grant to 1979 levels.
- *Smash the Rate Act: Stop the Abolition Bill.
- *Force the councils to set a deficit budget.
- *Watch your councillors
- *For all-out indefinite strike action.
- *Build for solidarity action in the private sector.

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