

**Socialist
Organiser**

75p
Special issue

**STARVED,
BATTERED,
DEFIANT**

**MAGNIFICENT
MINERS**

THE 1984-5 STRIKE

The April sun was now well up in the sky, shedding its glorious warming rays on the teeming earth. Life was springing from her fertile womb, buds were bursting into leaf and the fields were quickening with fresh green grass. Everywhere seeds were swelling and lengthening, cracking open the plain in their upward thrust for warmth and light. The sap was rising in abundance with whispering voices, the germs of life were opening with a kiss.

On and on, ever more insistently, his comrades were tapping, tapping, as though they too were rising through the ground. On this youthful morning, in the fiery rays of the sun, the whole country was alive with this sound. Men were springing up, a black avenging host was slowly germinating in the furrows, thrusting upwards for the harvests of future ages. And very soon their germination would crack the earth asunder.

The last paragraphs of Emile Zola's great novel 'Germinal', describing the defeat of a miners' strike in northern France a hundred years ago.

Introduction

By Paul Whetton

Secretary, Notts rank and file strike committee (in personal capacity)

We lost. There were victories, and some degree of victory in defeat at the end of the dispute, but still: we lost. The reasons why we lost are quite obvious. TUC and Labour Party support was not forthcoming, despite the promises made at TUC and Labour Party conferences. Rank and file Labour Party and trade union activists made a very valuable contribution in support work, but we needed the backing of the big battalions, in industrial action and in a political campaign to counter the Tory propaganda — and we didn't get it.

There was no political will to do it within the hierarchy of the TUC. They just didn't want to get involved with grabbing a tiger by the tail. Neither did Neil Kinnock. But, as I say, there were victories. For example, there are five pits working now that wouldn't be if we hadn't fought. We have shown the will and ability to fight in defence of our jobs and our communities. We've shown that it can be done. The rank and file miners have shown that it can be done.

We've learned valuable lessons, and not just the miners, but women and children too, in the mining communities and support groups up and down the length and breadth of the country. Our fight has made a valuable contribution to the working class. The end of the miners' strike is not the end of working class resistance to the Tories but the end of the beginning of the resistance. The working class will build on the traditions we have created over the last year. The miners who have returned to work live to fight another day: the fight goes on. We are going to have to spend some time pulling back, rebuilding — but the basis is there, the skeleton's there and all we've got to do is put the meat back on it.

Ever since I started in the pits, I've been preached at, talked at and argued with about the '26 strike by people like my grandfather and others who went through it. We've lived with the '26 strike. In comparison to the fight that we've just had, 1972 and 1974 were mere skirmishes. It's inevitable that the 1984/5 miners' strike will be talked about for decades too — like 1926.

The basic lesson

The mistakes that were made, the lessons that must be learnt will be discussed and analysed over and over again. The basic underlying lesson, the message proclaimed to the Tories and the ruling class is that the working class has got the ability to organise and to fight and we will go on to make a very radical shift in the politics of this country.

Notts was the storm centre of the strike, where the decisive battles to unify the NUM and stop all coal production were fought and, tragically, lost. Right from the start, as soon as we went out on the picket lines, the police told us they were there to see to it that Notts would work normally — at all costs. I'm of the opinion that if it hadn't been for the formation of the Notts Rank

and File Strike Committee, the strike in Notts would have crumbled very quickly and we would have had the whole of the Notts coalfield churning out its full quota of coal.

The rank and file strike committee kept the police occupied and away from other areas; kept production down and raised the political debate and the political arguments. That was the valuable contribution that Notts striking miners made. Right from the start, of course, we knew that even with a 100% victory we, in Notts, were going to go back in a minority. Right from the start we dared not contemplate defeat and so we had to look on the positive side. Well, we didn't win the victory that we wanted, but we didn't get smashed and wiped out, either.

Inside the Notts coalfield, one of the problems was that information was not readily available. That was partly a physical thing.

Socialist Organiser made a valuable contribution. It printed information and facts, not only from Notts but from other coalfields. Throughout the strike Socialist Organiser gave its pages to miners and miners' wives to express their own views and opinions. It advocated policies for the strike and commented on events — but it didn't try to ram it down our throats.

Socialist Organiser

Socialist Organiser was responsible for many of the contacts that we made with Yorks miners, Kent miners — who were absolutely amazed early on in the strike when marching into Notts they found Notts miners on strike.

It brought in news about comrades having struggles in other parts of the world and understanding of their particular problems and the way they tackled them. It was a very valuable contribution.

But Socialist Organiser's contribution wasn't just information. It provided political analysis and raised questions in areas and about things that many people would not have thought of questioning. Many young people, many women, and many older miners as well who had never even contemplated any sort of political argument had questions posed. The strike created a thirst for information, a thirst for knowledge and therefore a thirst for political answers. It was the same among the women's groups. They were able to get in contact with other women's groups and see what their particular problems were and come together.

The paper helped to raise questions about the Labour Party and helped striking miners to understand what to do about it.

Despite our strong criticism of the Labour Party leaders we did not turn away from it and run to some other quarter, leaving the Kinnocks and Hattersleys in undisputed control of the working class political party.

Many miners turned into the Labour Party to raise the arguments and highlight the issues. And I think it's a very interesting thing that happened, that people in the



mining communities didn't turn their backs on the Labour Party although it could be argued that they would be entirely justified in doing so. Instead they turned into the Labour Party and said: we're going to alter it.

How far did the politicisation of striking miners and their families go? Are those lessons going to be held onto after the strike? Mining communities were highly politicised by the strike. We held some very big Socialist Organiser meetings at Ollerton. But there's no doubt that a lot of things will begin to fade after the dispute. It's like planting a handful of grain. Not all of them are going to take, not all the ideas, the contacts or the women's groups are going to stay. But many will and all the issues that were raised and argued about will continue to be argued about. If just a fraction of those politicised in the strike stay in the political fight so that next time round we'll be better prepared on the industrial front to take on the Tories, then that will mean we've made great progress, and we'll be delighted.

Miners must look closely at their experiences in the strike and learn the lesson that we've just paid so dearly for. We have faced the vile capitalist media and the whole apparatus of the state — the police, the employer and the government, united to beat the miners and grind the NUM into the ground. Don't let that lesson be wasted. Just because we're back at work and the strike is at an end doesn't mean an end to the fight. You have to continue to battle on. Nothing is going to be achieved overnight. It's going to be a long, hard and sometimes bloody battle, but that battle has got to go on. The dispute is still there about jobs and about communities, and you cannot afford to relax for one moment.

Transform labour movement

After the '72 and '74 strikes, many miners sat back and thought, we've got it cracked and we don't have to fight any more. They were very much mistaken.

Mineworkers should not repeat the error: stay in the fight — settle accounts with the Labour leaders and the backstabbing TUC. Help us transform the labour movement so that next time round we have a labour movement — at both the political and trade union level — able to fight on our side as seriously and determinedly as the media, the employers and the police fought on Thatcher's side during the miners' strike.

Contents

Socialist Organiser: special double issue,
nos. 219-220. March 19 1985.

Introduction by Paul Whetton..... page 1
Foreword..... page 2

**TWELVE MONTHS THAT SHOOK
BRITAIN: THE STORY OF THE
STRIKE**, by John O'Mahony page 3
MacGregor's assault page 4
Picket or ballot? page 5
The miners divided page 6
April-May: the strike gets
stronger page 7
May-July: the strike at its
peak page 10
South Wales NUM funds
seized page 12
Why solidarity was
inadequate page 13
The balance begins to shift page 15
The TUC congress page 16
Labour Party conference page 17
November: onto the
defensive page 18
Tories out to shred the NUM .. page 19
The fight goes on page 20

**WOMEN: THE HEART OF THE
RESISTANCE** page 21
The world turned upside down, by
Judith Bonner page 22
Build a working class women's
movement, by Jean Lane page 23

ISSUES AND EXPERIENCES page 25
Notts: the eye of the storm
by John Bloxam page 26
The critics of the NUM
leadership page 34
A general strike could have
beaten the Tories! page 36
The use of civil law
by John McIlroy page 39
Economics? Whose economics?
by Clive Bradley page 42
Rule of law? Whose law? by Bob Fine
and Martin Thomas page 45

**LESSONS FOR OUR
MOVEMENT** page 55
Yes, they should have
fought! page 56
Build a rank and file
movement page 58
Their leadership and ours page 60
Facts and figures of
the strike page 62
International solidarity page 64

All photos, unless otherwise credited,
by John Harris.

Published by the Socialist Organiser
Alliance, 28 Middle Lane, London N8, and
printed by Laneridge (TU).

Magnificent miners

This was the greatest strike in British working class history. Its scope and duration were unique. It aroused and involved thousands of the women of the mining communities. It made a central challenge to Thatcherism and, implicitly, to capitalism itself. For the demand and rallying cry of the strike, "no 'economic' pit closures" was a demand for a system of society radically different to what we've got now. It implied a social system and an economy whose main-spring is not profit but need. It implied socialism.

The miners didn't win that demand, but their strike has educated tens of thousands of militants — and not only miners and their families — to know and hate capitalism and those who run it.

Of course the defeat of the miners is bound to depress the labour movement. It will not demoralise it. Precisely what effect the defeat of the miners will have on the labour movement is not something mechanically determined and inevitable. It is still being determined — and we can still affect it.

This was a defeat. But it was a defeat after a magnificent battle, the memory of which will inspire and instruct other workers. And workers in other unions have seen what a difference it makes to a union to have a militant fighting leadership. Should the miners have fought in the unfavourable conditions created by mass unemployment? MacGregor and Thatcher gave them no acceptable alternative. There are far worse things than to fight and lose as the miners did. The passivity with which, after 1979, the labour movement accepted blow after blow from the Tories without fighting back — that is the sort of defeat that demoralises, enervates and destroys.

The business of the miners' strike is far from finished. There are 700 miners still sacked and about 150 still in jail. We must fight to reinstate and release these brothers. Listen to Arthur Scargill:

"Those men who have been arrested and jailed as far as I'm concerned are political prisoners. They've been jailed because they fought for this union and we should all stand up and say straight forward what we mean. Those of our young people and those in the women's support groups who were arrested in the most brutal way have been criminal-

ised by a state that has deployed every possible tactic against the miners' union as they have sought to defend their system against the demand of a union and a movement that sought only the right to work. It is a stain that the next Labour government has got to wipe clean. It is a stain that they have got to take on board. And I appeal to all our Parliamentarians and to all those in the trade union movement. When this union talks about amnesty, for God's sake stop the equivocation, we want an amnesty for all our members who've been sacked during the course of this dispute. They have a right to their jobs back."

We must build a powerful campaign for the reinstatement of the sacked miners and the release of the class war prisoners taken by the Tories during the miners' strike. Such a campaign can also help rally the labour movement and counter and offset the depressing effects of the defeat on the labour movement.

There is great scope for such a campaign. There was a notable swing of public sympathy to the miners towards the end. Thatcher figured a victory over the miners would bring her the sort of political boost she got from the Falklands war. It hasn't. Many who had not previously sympathised with the miners came to resent and detest Thatcher's bloody-mindedness and vindictiveness.

An opinion poll showed that most people think that sacked miners should be restored to their jobs.

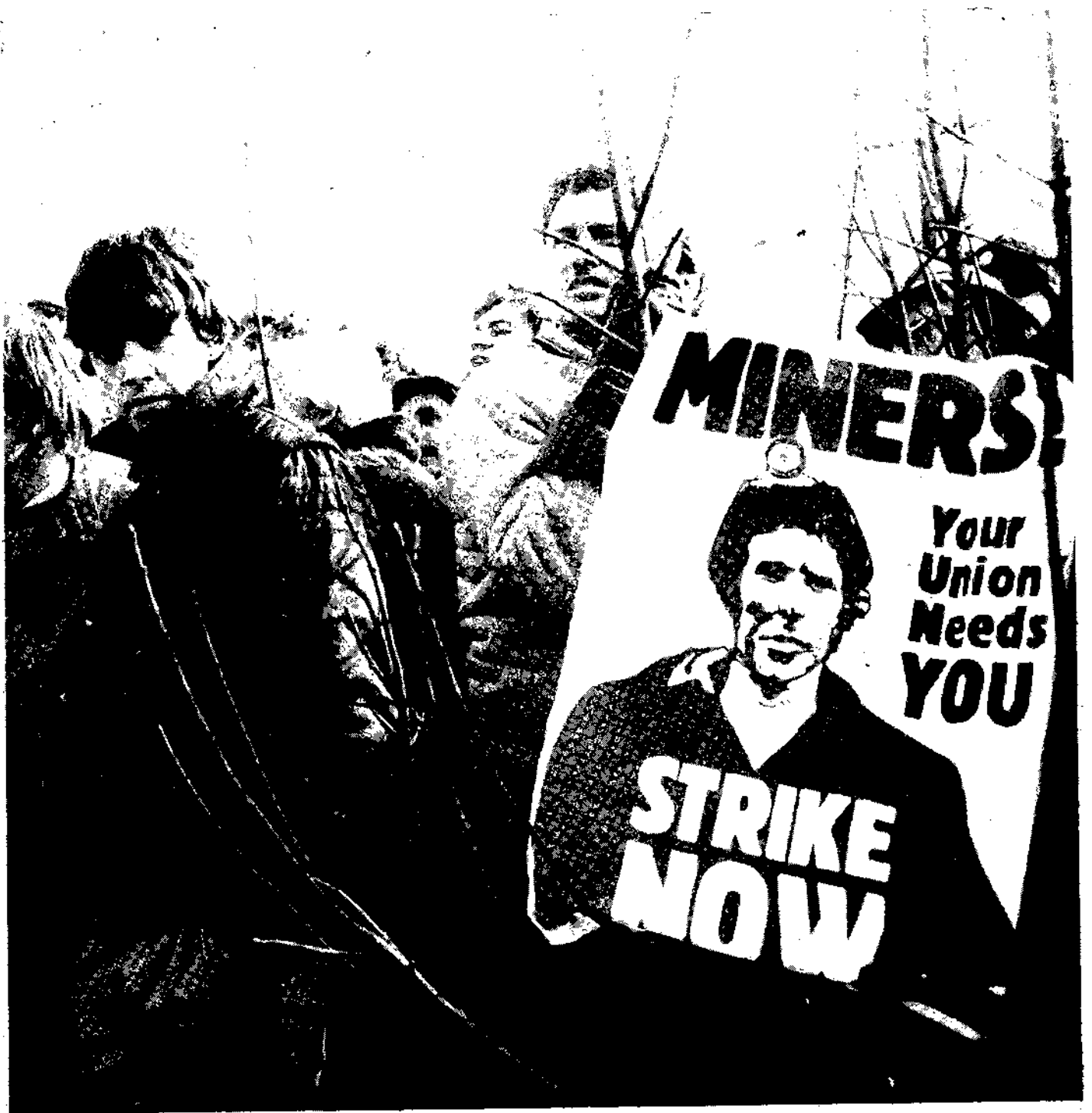
A campaign for reinstatement of the sacked and release of the jailed miners could develop into a powerful offensive to pillory the Tories for their treatment of the miners. It would be the continuation of the battle of the last year by other means and on other ground. The building of such a campaign is now the number one task facing the labour movement.

The miners' strike was a rich experience of open class struggle such as has not been seen in Britain for a very long time. The labour movement needs to study the events of the miners' strike and discuss and draw out the lessons for the future. It is as a contribution to this essential work that we publish this special double issue of Socialist Organiser.



Miners out in force on 'Democracy Day'. March 6 1985. Photo. Stefano Cagnoni, IFL.

12 MONTHS THAT SHOOK BRITAIN



THE STORY OF THE STRIKE

MacGregor's assault

IN THE small hours of Monday March 12 1984, hundreds of Yorkshire miners moved across the border from Yorkshire into Nottinghamshire. Their destination was Harworth pit, and by the evening shift they had picketed it out.

Over the next few days, hundreds of Yorkshire pickets came down over the border again and spread out across the Notts coalfield. Their mission was to persuade Nottinghamshire's miners to join them in a strike to stop the pit closures announced by the National Coal Board chief, Ian MacGregor. Their tactic was to picket Notts to a standstill.

In the great miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, miners had picketed coke depots and power stations. In 1984, for reasons which we will examine, it had to be miners picketing out miners. That fact dominated and shaped the course of the strike.

Within hours, 1000 extra police had been thrown into Nottinghamshire against the picketing miners. Within days there would be 8000 extra police — highly mobile, centrally-controlled, semi-militarised police — moving around the coalfields of Nottinghamshire.

The state had spent a dozen years preparing for this strike and everything had been made ready. Plans to beat mass picketing had been refined; police had been trained; special equipment had been assembled; and a national police nerve centre had been prepared and readied for action.

The Tory government had manoeuvred for years to avoid a premature battle with the miners. In 1981 sweeping pit closures were announced, and then withdrawn

industry.

After years of slump and mass unemployment the labour movement was in a weakened condition. Its morale was low, its combativity declining, its leaders more

Every local Labour Party, every union branch, every stewards committee must, in the next few days, put the miners' strike at the centre of all their activities.

Victory to the miners! Intensify the picketing! Boycott all coal movement! Bring out the power stations! TUC: call a 24 hour general strike! Organise for an all-out general strike!

Socialist Organiser Industrial Special,
April 4, 1984

concerned to undercut, sabotage and burke militancy than to fight the Tories. The NUM had been weakened too.

Between the miners' bloodless victory over Thatcher in 1981 and March 1984, 40 pits had been closed or merged. Morale had been eroded. The closures of Kinnell (December 1982) and Lewis Merthyr (March 1983) provoked only limited local

struggles.

Arthur Scargill was elected NUM president in December 1981 with 70 per cent of the vote; but in January 1982 miners rejected a leadership proposal to strike over pay by 55%. In October 1982 61% of miners voted not to strike over pay and pit closures — despite a campaign by Arthur Scargill for strike action. In March 1983, when the strike over Lewis Merthyr began to spread from South Wales, the National Executive Committee called for a national miners' strike, but 61% of miners rejected the proposal.

Arthur Scargill repeatedly warned miners that the NCB had a secret 'hit-list' of 70 or so pits marked down for closure, but either he lacked credibility with them or the miners no longer had the stomach to defend themselves.

That's how the Tories read it. So they decided that the time had come for a showdown with the miners.

In September 1983 Ian MacGregor became chair of the NCB. MacGregor had carved up the steel industry for the Tories. In America in the 1970s he had master-

The miners' strike is a tremendously important mobilisation, the most important working class battle for many years. (...)

Once again, the miners — despite their divisions — are the shock troops and standard bearers of the working class. Once more the miners are telling a foul anti-working class Tory government that they can't run things exactly as they like and that the miners are calling them to account. It is the most vital and direct interest of every worker in Britain to stand on the line with the miners and help them win.

Socialist Organiser Industrial Special,
April 4, 1984

when a wave of strikes swept the coalfields. The Tories were determined that the battle would come when the government was ready and thought the time right. In 1981 they weren't ready. The labour movement had not been softened up enough. So Thatcher backed off from a showdown with the NUM.

In 1984 they were ready. Now they would provoke the miners to fight back by giving them the alternative of surrendering and letting the NCB do as it liked with the



Picketing out Thurcroft colliery Yorkshire on March 5

mind the employers' campaign in one of the most brutal labour wars of recent American history — the successful war to break the miners' union in Harlan County. MacGregor was to be the Tories' pit-butcher and union-buster. His appointment was undisguised preparation, if not an outright declaration, of war.

But was the NUM ready for war? The

election for NUM secretary in January 1984 showed only a small margin in favour of the victorious left-wing candidate, Peter Heathfield, over his right wing opponent John Walsh. The miners still seemed in the mood to retreat; the militant leaders of the NUM increasingly out of line with their movement.

So the Tories attacked.



Lewis Merthyr closed in spring 1983

Picket or ballot?

Should they have a national ballot? The executive was in the business of mobilising the miners to resist MacGregor's attack, not out to demobilise those who had decided to act. So the executive voted 21 to 3 against a ballot.

They were 100 per cent right to refuse to go to a ballot at that point. It was the responsibility and the duty of the executive to respond to MacGregor's attack and to give a fighting lead — not to paralyse the NUM in the face of the challenge thrown down by the Tory hit-man MacGregor.

If Britain were engaged in a conventional war, having to respond to an attack, and with battles raging over a wide front, then the Tories, and the Dennis Healeys and Neil Kinnocks, would reject with indignation and scorn the idea that a national plebiscite should be held to determine whether the people wanted to fight or not.

They would say that anyone who wanted such a plebiscite intended that the country, and in the first place its 'leadership', the government, should be paralysed, and was, therefore, deliberately or unknowingly, helping the enemy. *They would be dead right about that, from their point of view.*

The advocates that the NUM should have held a plebiscite instead of immediate action when the Tories unleashed the war they had spent many years preparing against the NUM either wanted the NUM to be paralysed or didn't care whether it was or not. None of them demanded of MacGregor and the Tories that there should be a ballot to see how many miners voted for

pit closures. Neither the establishment politicians, nor the press, expressed indignation in 1977-8 against the introduction of area incentive schemes *despite* a national ballot vote against such incentives. They were keen to take advantage of a division among miners which, in part, resulted from those schemes. In the case of Notts, this was a major factor in the strike.

The miners' NEC refused to let themselves be paralysed. And now that the lines were drawn, the miners responded magnificently. Encouraged by the executive, the strike spread. On March 9 Durham and Kent called area strikes. A South Wales delegate conference recommended that South Wales should strike, but over the weekend of 10th-11th pits in the area decided by about two to one not to strike.

A MORI opinion poll showed 62% of miners wanting a strike.

The Notts delegate conference declined to take action before an area ballot, and the Northumberland and Leicestershire leaderships voted against a strike.

That was the situation on Monday March 12 as flying pickets went into action to make it a national strike and to enforce the area strike decisions. Despite their branch votes, most of South Wales came out immediately. The South Wales miners would prove to be obdurate, solid and immovable throughout the long year of hardship and deprivation that was to follow.

By Wednesday March 14 the NCB admitted that 132 out of 174 pits had been shut.

On March 1, when local management announced the closure of Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire, South Yorkshire miners immediately went on unofficial strike. On March 5, with half the Yorkshire miners already out, the Yorkshire area council called an official strike from March 9.

But South Wales miners had come out over the closure of Lewis Merthyr — and Lewis Merthyr had nevertheless closed. More than local action was needed. Miners had been this far towards confrontation before without an all-out fight.

On March 6 the Scottish area council called on Scottish miners to strike from March 9. Polmaise pit had already been out for three weeks against closure.

Now Ian MacGregor took a hand, pouring petrol on the fire. On March 6 he told the NUM that 20 pits would close in 1984, that 20,000 jobs would be cut, and *that there might be compulsory redundancies.*

MacGregor was telling the NUM either to back off, or to try to stop him closing down 20 pits. The Tories, not the miners, chose this fight. But — after the rejection of their proposal for a national strike over Lewis Merthyr exactly a year before — did the NUM national executive have any alternative but to back off and let the Tory juggernaut roll unopposed over the 'uneconomic' pits and coalfields? To their eternal glory they thought they did have an alternative.

On March 8 the executive endorsed the decision of the Yorkshire and Scottish areas to strike, and they endorsed in advance the decision any other area might take for strike action.

But Notts was the major problem. The Yorkshire flying pickets had some initial successes. When Yorkshire miner Davy Jones was killed picketing at Ollerton, on Thursday March 15, the Notts leaders called an area strike — until the following Sunday.

By Friday March 16 only 11 collieries were working normally, according to the NCB itself.

On Thursday March 15 and Friday March 16 ballots were held in many areas. Northumberland voted for a strike. Right-wing Cumberland, Midlands, South Derbyshire, Lancashire, Notts and North Wales voted not to strike. So, narrowly, did North Derbyshire. On Sunday 18th a Notts delegate conference decided to go back. On March 20 the result of a ballot showed 90% against a strike in Leicestershire.

The miners were split, without a common line. What happened next would be determined by the strength of the picketing by striking miners and their supporters, and by how the miners in areas which voted not to strike would respond when confronted by pickets from the striking areas. The press and politicians set up a tremendous din, telling the miners that they should not strike without a national ballot. The ballot was democracy and anything else was not democratic.

Newly elected Peter Heathfield put the issue squarely when he said this about the demand for a national ballot: 'Can miners in successful areas have the right to vote miners in less successful areas out of a job?'

To make a national ballot the essence of 'democracy', here was to make democracy into tyranny, and to deny the right of a minority — if miners who wanted to strike were in fact the minority: an opinion poll said that 62% wanted to strike — to defend itself.

The Tories tried to use the framework of the NUM as a straitjacket to imprison miners whose jobs were threatened. They could only fight, these strange democrats said — and not only the Tories, but Kinnock and Hattersley too — if they could get a national majority in the federal union to agree to fight. If they could not, they should lie down and let the Tories walk all over them, smash up their communities and

devastate whole areas like Kent and South Wales.

The call for a national ballot was never a democratic demand, but a demand to repress and straitjacket the militants. (Tactical considerations about the ballot are a separate matter, dealt with in the section, 'Critics of the NUM leadership').

The provisions about balloting in the new Tory trade union laws are designed precisely to make the unions into machines for repressing militancy. The pseudo-democrats in the Labour Party leadership who joined in the propaganda against the NUM leadership over the ballot stood throughout the miners' strike — and stand now — on the grounds and within the framework of the Tory anti-union legislation.

Once the militants had struck they had every right to appeal for basic working class solidarity to other workers — and in the first place to miners. South Wales, which voted not to strike, showed what was possible here.

Or didn't they have that right? If not, why not? Those who say they didn't stand yet again on the ground of the new Tory legislation, which forbids 'secondary' picketing.

Of course a united NUM would have been better by far. The fundamental thing about the NUM in March 1984 was that it was not united, and nevertheless its leaders and militants had to fight back against the well-timed Tory offensive.

The miners divided

The first part of the miners' tragedy — and that tragedy would unfold inexorably for a full year until the last moving scenes in March 1985, when singing miners, escorted by their families and by bands, marched back to work — lay in this: that, the NUM being divided, the militant, fighting part of the NUM had to appeal for basic working-class solidarity in defence of their jobs and their communities first to other miners, to members of their own union — and that solidarity was refused them.

Scab miners crossed picket lines, sheltered behind the police, played the media's game against the strikers, and used the bosses' courts against their own union and its embattled members and leaders.

The second part of the tragedy was that most of the labour movement did pretty much the same thing as the NUM's scabs.

Both the broad labour movement and the miners had had some of the fight knocked out of them by the slump and mass unemployment. But more than that was involved in the heartland of scabbing, Notts, where it was claimed they scabbed because they were refused a national ballot.

Most of the Notts scabs did not scab because of the ballot, or because of violence by pickets. That was the 'good reason', not the real one. It keyed the Notts working miners into the Tory propaganda offensive against the strikers, and it allowed the scabs to think of themselves as peaceful democrats and not as scabs. The real reason was that they were scared by the daunting battle ahead, they didn't feel their jobs were threatened, and they had been doing well under the area incentives scheme.

They made a religion of the national ballot because they needed a respectable excuse for refusing to help the threatened miners to defend their jobs and communities.

A majority of both South Wales and Notts voted against the strike. That's what they had in common in March 1984, though their motives were most likely very different. The magnificent one-year stand that the miners of South Wales can look back on in March 1985 pinpoints where the difference between them lay — in the absence of gut class loyalty among the majority of prosperous, unthreatened Notts miners. Only a minority of Notts miners had the self-respect to stand with their class.

The scabbing in Notts shaped the strike. As well as supplying coal throughout the strike, the 'working miners' gave the NCB



Picketing Daw Mill colliery, Warwickshire

a powerful hard core of scabs to build on. Without Notts the Leicestershire and other scabs would not have counted for much. When Notts went back to work on Monday March 19, after one day out, the NCB could claim that 42 pits were working normally.

With the miners split, the fate of the strike would be determined by the outcome of battles on two fronts — the battle of the pickets against the centrally-controlled semi-militarised police, who turned some coalfields into something like police states; and the political battle in the labour movement for solidarity from non-miners. In the battle for solidarity the propaganda front was the decisive one.

Never in the living memory of the labour movement had the police behaved as they did in the miners' strike. They concentrated in large masses, deployed and controlled from a centre at Scotland Yard. They set up roadblocks to stop Yorkshire miners moving into Notts and Kent miners into the Midlands. They stopped, searched, and arrested at will. They used thuggery and violence on a scale not known in any modern labour dispute in Britain — not even the Grun-

wick strike of 1977. They behaved as wreckers and bully-boys in certain pit villages as if they were understudying the British army in the Catholic parts of Northern Ireland.

And something else was new — organised scab-herding, on a vast scale backed up by a very loud barrage of propaganda.

Many railworkers and dockers refused to move scab coal. On March 29 the transport workers' leaders recommended a total blockade of all coal. But decisive solidarity lay in the hands of the power workers and steel workers to give or withhold — and they withheld it. On March 21 the power unions (including the GMBU) advised their members to cross miners' pickets. Steelworkers, fearful for their industry and bruised and battered from their own 1980 strike, crossed miners' picket lines.

The propaganda war against the miners was waged fiercely so as to limit and to try to stop workers supporting the miners. Picketing miners who were at the receiving end of the violence that police officials had spent years preparing for, were pilloried and denounced as purveyors of mindless and gratuitous violence. Miners fighting for their jobs were denounced as undemo-

cratic because they were on strike without sanction of a national ballot — and those who denounced them were industrial autocrats and dictators who were using massed armies of police to try to force the miners to accept the ruin of some of their communities!

Though the Labour Party gave its support to the miners, the high-profile leaders of the Party hemmed and hawed, joined in the calls for a national ballot — the cutting edge of the propaganda war — and denounced violence, meaning pickets who stood up to the police.

By Monday March 26, when the NCB claimed that 38 pits were working normally, the strike had reached a steady level. The strike would strengthen slightly after the NUM conference on April 19, but the contours of the battlefield were already visible, the areas of strength and weakness of either side known, the balance of forces stabilised. An unbudgeable minority of miners — the NUM said about 25,000 — refused to strike. Scabbing miners, picket-crossing power and steel workers, and far too limited general solidarity, forced the miners to dig in for a war of attrition. They knew it would take time. They could not have guessed just how long their war of attrition with the Thatcher government would be.

The 1974 miners' strike lasted just over a month — from February 9 to March 11. Just over a month after the start of the 1972 strike, Saltley coke depot was closed by mass pickets and the government was on the run. (It appointed the Wilberforce inquiry, which finally brought about a settlement on February 28. The strike had started on January 9).

By late March it was already clear that 1984 would be a much longer and more grim affair. Miners talked about "staying out until Christmas". The Times reported (April 18): "Mrs Margaret Thatcher is willing to spend any amount of money to ensure that the Government is not again defeated by the miners' union". Chancellor Nigel Lawson would later publicly explain that the money spent on beating the miners was a "worthwhile investment". They would spend over £2 billion on it directly, with indirect losses of perhaps another £3 billion.

But the miners were as determined as



Kent miners collecting in London. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni (IFL)

the government. Kent area NUM executive member John Moyle voiced their determination:

"No one should be in any doubt about what is at stake in this dispute. We are up against the most basic facts of this government's philosophy — they care about profits, not people...

"The rank and file will fight on under any circumstances, and they will win. The only question is how long it takes. We are not looking for a victory for the miners, but for the whole working class" (SO 174).

Arthur Scargill appealed to other workers: "Stop merely saying you support us. Come out and join us. We are facing a fundamental challenge to the whole working class, not merely miners. We are facing the organised might of the state machine" (Nottingham, April 14: SO 175).

A Kent miner told SO in mid-March: "Once we've got our own people out solid, we'll go to the rest of the movement and say: 'give us your support. Let's have you all out and deal with this government'."

A general strike?

"Yes, if that's what you want to call it" (SO 171).

The pickets never did get the whole coalfield out solid. The scabbing in Notts would be a terrible drag on their efforts to get solidarity from other trade unionists.

But the energy of the strike was still expanding, and it became stronger. On April 12, the executive faced down right-wing calls for a national ballot, and the right wing Notts area president, Ray Chadburn, emerged from the meeting to tell his members: "Get off your knees and support the strike!"

On April 14 7000 miners and supporters marched in Nottingham to demand 'Police out of the coalfields'. On April 16 a Notts rank and file strike committee was formed. If the scabs in Notts disgraced themselves and the labour movement, the Notts strikers summed up everything alive and good in the labour movement. Led by Paul Whetton and others, they kept the flag of militant labour flying in the Notts coalfield. Intimidated, assaulted, deprived, the hard core never let themselves or the NUM down.

April-May: the strike gets stronger

To stop miners striking the bosses relied, as we have seen, on a vicious caterwauling of propaganda about democracy in general and about a national ballot in particular. The rank and file of the NUM had the chance to reject their NEC's policy at the NUM special conference which met on April 19 — the first of eight to be held during the strike — lobbied by tens of thousands of chanting, singing, cheering miners. In fact the special conference called on every area to join the strike.

It boosted the strike. Midlands and Notts NUM leaders then declared the strike official in their areas, and more miners stopped

work, though in Notts a majority or something near that continued to scab.

There was now a surge of solidarity. The rail and transport unions had promised to boycott scab coal. Railworkers in Coalville, Leicestershire, enforced this boycott throughout the strike, in the midst of the most solidly scabbing coalfield in the country (30 strikers out of 2000 miners). Notts railworkers began stopping coal trains on April 16.

The Labour Party national executive voted on April 25 to support the strike and to ask every Party member to donate 50p a week.

By the end of March, steel production at Scunthorpe had been cut by half, and by early May three major power stations had been taken off the grid — West Thurrock, Aberthaw and Didcot. By massive use of oil, nuclear power, and imported coal, the Central Electricity Generating Board was in fact able to last out the entire strike without crippling power cuts: but that was not at all clear at the time. The strike was making progress, albeit slowly.

From May to August the strike was at its peak. About 80% of miners were out. There was some drift-back in this period (the strike was already a long one by usual

standards); but it was marginal. Notts suffered a drift back after the High Court, on May 25, ruled the strike unofficial in the county: by late August only 20% of Notts miners were out, as against maybe 40 or 50% at the peak. In Staffordshire the strike was fraying at the end of May, and over 50% were scabbing at every pit except Wolstanton by early August. Lancashire weakened.

In the vast majority of pit communities, however, the strike was solid, and becoming more determined and confident.

This was a strike in which something in excess of a hundred thousand workers and

their families found themselves up against a pitiless, relentless, determined government which had all the advantages on its side: entrenched power and wealth; the police; the deprivation and sometimes hunger that gripped miners and their families a few weeks into the strike. To stay in the fight the miners and their families had to find in themselves reserves of strength, determination, fortitude, and creativity. The mining communities had to rouse themselves completely and throw everything they had into the class war. The strike had to become more than a mere strike. And it did.

The outstanding new thing in the miners' strike was the involvement of the women of the mining communities.

By early May the pit villages were full of militant women's groups.

The women's groups ran communal kitchens or food-parcel centres — and many of them went out on the picket line: that hadn't happened before. On April 30 there was a 150-strong women's picket at Thoresby colliery, Notts. They broke through police lines twice, and a local miner commented: "If the women had been there from the beginning, the strike would have been won by now" (SO 177).

Women's pickets were a regular feature of the strike, and on May 12 the streets of Barnsley were swamped by an exuberant women's demonstration.

Repeatedly the pit women would cite the women's peace camp at Greenham Common as an inspiration. Direct links were made between the normally somewhat isolated, conservative, male-dominated pit villages, and feminists who might never before have seen class struggle as anything central to politics.

For a lot of people, the strike shook up their ideas in a way that normally happens only in great semi-revolutionary struggles like a general strike. Opposed to the Tory class-warriors, the police chiefs, the Fleet Street editorialists eulogising the heroic scabs, here at last was something more than the quibbling, middle-of-the-road, trimming whines of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. The miners were a pole of opposition, and inevitably they became a magnetic pole of attraction for the oppressed.

Spitting boldly in the teeth of all Tory philosophy, the miners rallied round them all the movements, impulses and rebellions against that philosophy and against the system it defends. The miners inspired and gave focus to an across-the-board challenge

Leicestershire's 'Dirty Thirty'

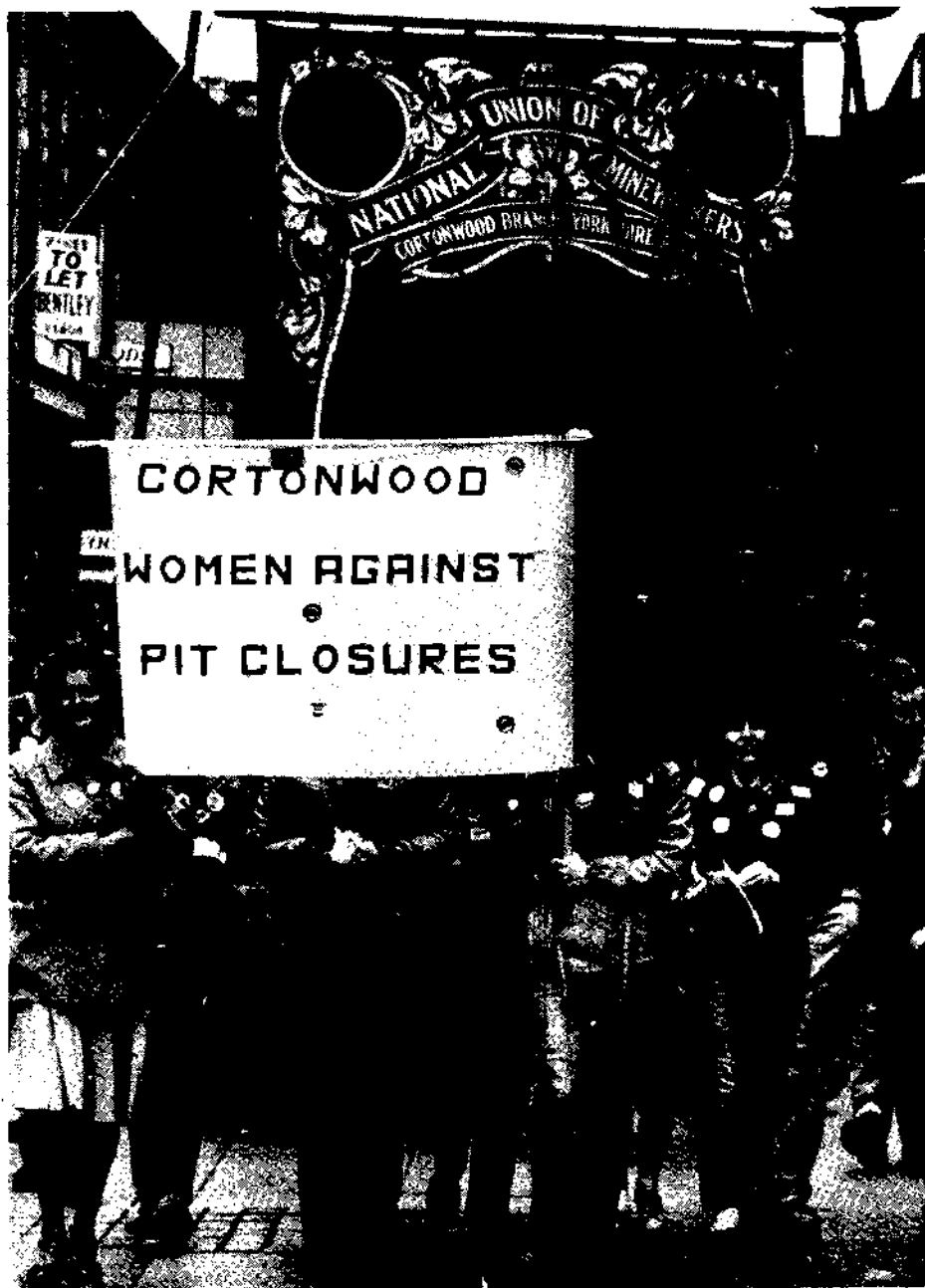
We are a small band of striking miners in Leicestershire given the name of "The Dirty Thirty" by the 2,000 who are still working.

The name was meant to be a derisory title but we are proud to be so named because it identifies us from the rest who are prepared to see their pits close and the future of their families put in

jeopardy by not supporting the strike and NUM policy.

We say: No surrender. The strike goes on till we achieve victory on our terms.

Statement by Leicestershire striking miners to NUM delegate conference carried in Socialist Organiser, August 16, 1984



10,000 women demonstrated in Barnsley on May 12 1984

The Coalville railworkers

Out of it have come good things and bad things.

On the bad side you've got train crews in the East Midlands, not at Coalville, who are moving coal trains. They are breaking every condition of service.

But it won't deflect us from what we are doing. Because it is more than compensated for by good.

We've made friendships with other railway depots, particularly in London. We've forged an alliance with the 30 striking miners in Leicestershire: we even share the same office. That's a strong alliance and that will remain even when the dispute finishes.

These friendships will stand us in good stead when the miners' strike is over and if the railway unions get involved in their own dispute.

Railwaymen's wives have become friends with striking miners' wives. So you've got these marvellous bonds and these marvellous friendships which more than outweigh the bad.

The miners' strike is not just about pit closures. It's become a question of solidarity, a question of loyalty, it's become a question of trade unionism and standing up for what you believe in.

Roy Butlin, secretary of Coalville NUR. Socialist Organiser November 28 1984.

May: women invade Barnsley

On Wednesday May 12 Barnsley was invaded by some 10,000 miners' wives, marching to oppose pit closures.

It was very much a women's march, not just in its constitution but in its atmosphere.

Women from all over the country — Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Northumberland and South Wales — came together to give a very lively and resounding NO to MacGregor's closure plans.

Not your boring run of the mill trudge, this... chants of "the miners united will never be defeated" and "I'd rather be a picket than a scab" continued throughout the march. Drum majorettes provided more noise and colour. And I don't think anyone in Barnsley centre escaped without getting a 'Coal Not Dole' sticker plonked on some part of their anatomy.

Socialist Organiser, May 17, 1984

to Toryism; and that challenge became an increasing part of their own awareness of the world.

Thatcher did have an 'enemy within'! And hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people rallied to it. Many of them were shocked by the Tories' remorseless drive to compel the miners and their families to let her offer them as human sacrifices to her savage god, Mammon, the god of profit and lucre; and shocked at the will of the police to use any means necessary to beat the pickets. They started to think about

alternatives to Thatcherism.

Jenny Dennis, from Kiveton Park, Yorkshire, told SO in November:

"Mining communities are traditionally male-dominated. It's the men that work and the women that do: having babies, washing and making snap is our lot. Then it changed.

"It was as though we'd been sleeping for hundreds of years. We awoke, we realised a new political awareness.

"Organising food, raising money, speaking. Men have acknowledged that we, as women, are vital to that victory. We're an active part of that struggle, side by side with our men in the battle's frontline.

"We are witnessing something amongst the women which I can only compare with the suffragettes. We are living and making history. We won't return to the status quo. We can't.

"Personally it has made me realise that not only must we fight our injustice but others too.

"Because we have lived through media lies we ask ourselves: 'What other lies have they made?'

"Look at the injustice in Ireland. What really happened in Tosteth? In Brixton? I realise the black community is struggling against injustice.

"After we win we must turn and right other injustices".

'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' set themselves up in June, and found miners coming to their meetings, saying things like: "Since the strike their ideas had really changed, and perhaps now the 'traditional' labour movement should go to black people and lesbians and gay men to relearn what socialism is all about" (SO

199). But the lesbians and gay men had things to learn from the miners, too: the strike drew a class line among lesbians and gays.

Black groups organised to help the miners; and miners came to understand better what black communities feel about police harassment.

Frank Slater of Malby NUM (Yorkshire) put it like this:

"What did we do when blacks were being harassed? We said — it's not us. But we're ethnic minorities now" (SO 200).

The local miners' support committees were never anywhere near having the weight, in official labour movement terms, to organise strikes in support of the miners.

Usually they were run by the Labour Left. (The Communist Party organised its own activities, often trying to exclude or suppress more active people to its left. The Socialist Workers Party continued its 'splendid isolation', pouring scorn on the 'left-wing Oxfam' and 'baked beans brigades' of the support committees, until October, when it readjusted and joined in. 'Militant' never joined in.)

But, if the support movement was organisationally weak and ramshackle, it was

'Outcasts of the state'

We, as lesbians and gay men, black people, the organised working class, are a threat to the power of the state — and their main weapon is the police and they use it.

We've got to fight together because there's no way we're going to be able to beat them if we're divided.

The miners from Dulais Valley who've met us have said just that. They've said that they are now outcasts of the state — we've seen what the police and media are like.

Mark Ashton and Mike Jackson of 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners': Socialist Organiser October 4 1984.



NUR-ASLEF picket at Coalville, Leicestershire

the umbrella for a vast amount of individual activity. Workplace collections, door-to-door collections, street collections, pub collections, football ground collections; benefits, demonstrations, mass pickets; visits from miners, visits to pit villages...

The 'Coal not Dole' sticker, the bundle of 'The Miner', and the collecting bucket became the standard hardware of political life. Hundreds of thousands of people who did nothing more than give donations or wear a badge were stirred and inspired by the miners' fight. Labour activists miles from any coalfield found themselves talking, thinking, breathing, living the miners' strike week after week.

In Basingstoke, Hampshire, for example, the miners' support committee became the centre of political life. In May Carla Jamison reported on their links with the Notts strikers: "Long after the benefit night was over [one of the Notts women] was still sitting up talking over the issues with the SO supporters she was stopping the night with... It was a great and inspiring weekend for us [the visit of the first strikers' delegation], and hopefully for the delegation too..."

"For us it hadn't just been a one-off visit, it has been very special and we will hopefully be seeing them again soon... Like Chris Whelan said, they have probably done more for us than we did for them".

Joe Green: killed by a scab lorry

"There's blood on coal", people say, meaning that many miners die or suffer terrible injuries working to bring the coal to the surface.

Now the saying takes on a different meaning, in the fourth month of the strike — the blood of miners killed and injured fighting to stop Thatcher and MacGregor wrecking the coal industry. The blood of working class martyrs in the fight against Toryism. The blood of militants prepared to stand up against the state.

Last Friday, 15th, Joe Green was the second miner to die in this strike. Joe was 55 and he died picketing Ferrybridge power station at Castleford, Yorkshire. He was pulled under the back wheels of a scab lorry and crushed to death.

Arthur Scargill, who was himself to be injured and hospitalised as a result of a police attack outside Orgreave last Monday, said this about the death of Joe Green:

"Joe Green gave his life for the right to work — every miner, every trade unionist in Britain must ensure that he did not die in vain."

Socialist Organiser, June 21, 1984



On Thursday March 15, Davy Jones, a 24 year old Yorkshire miner, was killed on the picket line outside Ollerton colliery Notts. Arthur Scargill wrote to Davy Jones's parents. 'In a few years time, those who inflicted damage on our industry and were directly responsible for the tragedy that befell David, will have been forgotten, while David will be remembered...'



May-July: the strike at its peak

Could the labour movement have been rallied to the miners in sufficient strength to tip the balance against the Tories? Yes they could — if our movement had been headed by leaders who wanted to fight. The response to the local and regional activities called (and inadequately campaigned for) by TUC bodies proves it.

Between May 9 and July 13 there were regional TUC days of action in every major region except the Midlands. Railworkers, hospital workers, council workers, dockers and shipyard workers struck; demonstrations in London and Manchester were up to 50,000 strong. But there was no centrally organised campaign to develop the potential shown by the days of action. Len Murray denounced the days of action in advance. The central TUC leaders stood on the sidelines, sharpening their talons, eyeing Scargill and Heathfield with hatred. But the miners, keeping their distance, had not yet approached the TUC.

It was the miners' picketing that mainly drove the struggle forward. On May 2 the police (probably exaggerating) estimated 10,000 pickets at Harworth colliery, and on May 3 almost as many at Cotgrave (Notts). On May 7 1000 miners picketed Ravenscraig steelworks, near Glasgow. On May 14, 40,000 marched in Mansfield. Between May 29 and June 18 thousands of pickets and police fought battles outside Orgreave coking plant, near Sheffield: coke runs from Orgreave were suspended on June 18.

On June 7 the transport unions agreed

not only to boycott coal and coke, but also to block substitute oil movements. On June 9 union leaders Jimmy Knapp and Ray Buckton persuaded railworkers at Shirebrook depot in Notts to follow this policy; by July 13 Knapp could announce that only 10 coal trains were running daily in Britain, out of a normal 356. On June 25 railworkers stopped iron ore supplies to Llanwern steelworks (South Wales); on June 28, to Ravenscraig.

From early June the Tories became visibly alarmed. They had schemed and prepared for years, waited patiently for the right moment to strike; they had split the miners; they had thrown many thousands of

specially trained police at them; they had mobilised the entire press to engulf them in a barrage of lies, misrepresentation, libel and hate-filled propaganda — but still the miners remained in the fight and seemed to be advancing steadily, though slowly. They could fight epic battles like the one at Orgreave, near Sheffield, and hold the cops to a draw, forcing — temporarily — a halt to coke movements there.

Thatcher saw that, like some fabled 'British square' of soldiers on the battlefields of the Napoleonic wars, the miners could take a tremendous pounding, stand in a swirl of smoke and shell, and then move forward on the offensive. The Tories had

Arthur Scargill's demands

Last week, Arthur Scargill set out his demands for the pit strike:

- * A complete withdrawal of the Coal Board's closure programme announced on March 6 aimed at reducing capacity by 4 million tonnes.

- * A reaffirmation by the Board and the government of the Plan for Coal, the expansionist plan agreed between the government, Coal Board and unions in 1974.

- * Development of 40 million tonnes new capacity.

- * New investment to expand all existing pits.

- * Rapid development of new coal burning technologies.

- * The introduction of a four day week.

- * A substantial increase in wages.

- * Retirement age brought down to 55.

- * A scheme to protect wage rates.

- * Consolidation of the incentive bonus scheme

The demands for the four-day week and for scrapping the incentive scheme are particularly important as part of a working class programme to defend jobs and unite mineworkers.

Socialist Organiser, June 21, 1984

good reason to be worried. So they stepped up the counter-attack.

MacGregor sent a letter to every miner. The NCB talked about organising a ballot over the heads of the NUM.

There was a new and sinister development of police thuggery, directed not against miners on the picket line but against miners and their families in their home villages. Police began to act like a hostile army of occupation in some pit villages.

On the night of May 16-17, 160 police in riot gear terrorised Thorney Abbey Road, Blidworth, Notts. Annette Holroyd and Pauline Radford told Socialist Organiser what happened:

"They managed to get Terry [Terry Dunn, a Yorkshire picket] over the driveway onto the road and about four or five got hold of his arms and got him into the van.

"Everyone asked why they were arresting him. They refused to give an answer and said, 'We don't have to tell you'.

"Then they chucked him in the van and all the men ran up to the van but they slammed the doors in their faces. One of the lads said, 'Come on, take me. If you're going to lift him you should lift the lot of us. They just drove straight off'.

"I went over to see my baby-sitter. She was terrified. It was my house just next door. I asked her what was the matter. She said, 'There's been five or six policemen knocking on the door, and asking questions: Where's my dad? Where's my husband? Where is everybody?'

"I calmed her down and by then there were thirteen or fourteen police vans out in the road. There were policemen lined up across the road. I've never seen so many policemen — hundreds of them.

"I was terrified, as was everyone else. I kept clinging hold of my husband so he wouldn't go through the gate. If they went through the gates they'd get lifted.

"All the men said, 'What are you doing here? We're not causing any trouble'. The police said they'd had a report about a disturbance — they need at least 13 police vans to check out a disturbance, 160 police in riot gear!

"The union official said he saw another 20 vans in the next street waiting to come round.

"I feel the police wanted all the Yorkshire lad to go over the gate into the road and get into a riot with the police, and then they'd do them all for rioting.

"It was definitely an act of deliberate provocation".

The tone of Tory denunciations got more and more shrill and hate-filled, until, on July 19, Thatcher denounced the NUM as 'the enemy within', a domestic equivalent of the Argentines she had fought in the Falklands war. Other Tory speakers followed up the attack, and the 'Times' editorialised: "There is a war on".

On June 13, with the battle of Orgreave still in full swing, Arthur Scargill had set out an expanded set of demands for the strike, including a four-day week. By June 25, Tony Benn was calling over the heads of the union leaders for other workers to strike immediately alongside the miners, and the next day in Parliament Labour MP Martin Flannery spoke of an "inexorable march towards a general strike... now under way".

Tony Benn was right to appeal over the heads of the union leaders for workers to back the miners. But that it was Benn the MP who did it was also the measure of the



The picture that said it all

weakness of the official trade union leadership.

The NUM special conference on July 11-12 was jubilant, endorsing Scargill's expanded demands and approving a rule change which could be used to discipline scabs.

Miners had a right to be proud of what they had so far achieved against great odds.

They knew that if they could build on what they had done, and develop from where they were, then they could win. But the miners could not themselves do it — they could not at will generate the irreplaceable help of others in the labour movement. They didn't get the help. And the Tories counter-attacked, putting the miners on the defensive.

A Notts striker at Orgreave

There was plenty of blood. I went to the assistance of a young miner who was lying in the grass. He was bleeding profusely from the head. I knelt on one knee beside him. I could give no useful medical assistance other than trying to comfort him.

I called to the police for an ambulance. The police lines were no more than 15 yards from this injured man. An inspector shouted over, "We've got an ambulance coming, son". They made a gap in their ranks for an ambulance to come through.

I was still knelt there waiting for the ambulance when a black policeman ran through this gap and straight to me. As he reached me I looked up and he was above me and flashing through the air was his truncheon, which he brought down on the back of my neck. There was a sickening, deadening pain in my neck, and as I was trying to get to my feet I saw this black policeman run back through the

gap in the police ranks. The police closed ranks and stood behind their riot shields.

As I was walking from the scene, a solitary policeman riding a grey horse rode his horse straight at me, swinging his baton freely. The horse knocked me down and the mounted policeman struck me across the right thigh and knee. He then rode off...

I got home at 8 p.m. When I got set down with a cup of tea I thought about my experiences since the strike began and determined that whilst I could stand, police violence would not keep me from the picket lines.

I arose this morning, though on crutches and wearing a surgical collar and in severe pain, I made my way to Bevercotes Colliery to stand on the picket line.

And when I can't walk, I'll crawl.

Notts striker Robert Cooper, writing in Socialist Organiser, June 28 1984



Scab lorries at Ravenscraig. Photo: Rick Matthews, IFL

South Wales NUM funds seized

The forward-movement phase of the strike ended on August 1, when the High Court ordered the seizure of the South Wales NUM's funds. The union had defied an injunction against picketing granted to two haulage firms.

The Tories were upping the stakes. The seizure of a trade union's funds was a matter for the whole labour movement, not for that trade union alone. It was an attack on the whole labour movement — and only the whole labour movement could hope to confront and beat the government that stood behind the courts.

Miners occupied the area NUM headquarters and demonstrators gathered outside to hear area president Emlyn Williams explain what the labour movement needed to do:

"We hope trade unions will show solidarity with the miners, and as of today throughout the country there will be a general strike" (SO 190).

Arthur Scargill called on the TUC for "physical support". But nothing happened.

As Socialist Organiser commented: "The startling thing about the savage fine on the South Wales NUM is that the other unions haven't come to their defence. The cry for a general strike should have rung through the labour movement at every level. Instead we have a numb silence at the top" (SO 191).

After all the clamour and the uproar of

the summer, suddenly there was numb silence. Some days later, Ron Todd of the TGWU did start talking about plans for a 'big bang' of trade union solidarity, but nothing came of that. The same numb silence would happen again, and more damagingly, in November, after the central NUM funds were sequestrated, and in December after a Tory lawyer was declared 'receiver' of the NUM's finances.

Why?

Just a week before the seizure of the South Wales funds, Notts striker Paul Whetton had observed this "numb silence" in microcosm. He told an SO meeting in Ollerton:

"I spoke with Dennis Skinner in Basingstoke, and of course everyone was clapping and cheering everything Dennis Skinner said.

"Dennis Skinner made the point that we were begging not only for money and for food, but for solidarity action. He said: there is nothing to stop you taking action now. [And the applause stopped].

"People were taken right up to the edge of it, and when it was put point-blank to them, they hesitated and drew back. That's a natural reluctance. They fear the machinery of the state, they fear the machinery of the employers and all the rest of it" (SO 189).

So, by failing to respond to the seizure

of funds, the movement went into retreat, and the miners began a new phase of their war of attrition with the government — the phase in which the balance, inch by painful inch, was turned against them.

The sceptics and defeatists will say: the NUM leadership should have known in

Eric Heffer backs the law-breakers

If you've got legislation of this kind, then it's quite clear that workers are bound to come up against those laws. They're bad laws, they're class laws.

Whether the Labour Party thinks they ought to come out against those laws or not, the workers are going to do so. And when workers are in struggle against bad laws, it is my feeling that the Labour Party has got to support those workers, while at the same time pressing for a change in those laws.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs — the people for whom we march around with banners saying how marvellous they were — they broke the law. We have a trade union movement in this country because people were prepared to stand up against bad laws and break them.

Eric Heffer speaking on TV-AM, August 1, 1984

advance that it would go like that; the labour movement was in no condition for an all-out fight. Some of them — like the Socialist Workers' Party — will add that nothing better could have been expected from the TUC.

When something has already happened and is now history, then it naturally seems in retrospect to have happened inevitably — and that all the pieces fell into place as they had to in the circumstances. But that is to substitute hindsight for an examination of the actual course of events. *There was no-*

thing inevitable about the isolation of the miners.

At a number of points dotted across the middle of 1984, great possibilities for broadening the struggle came into existence, before vanishing unrealised. The most important of these were the two dock strikes, but there were others. The leaders of the NUM tried again and again to link up with other workers and broaden the struggle. Again and again they appealed for solidarity, to the broad labour movement or to particular groups of workers.

On May 9 Arthur Scargill appealed to railworkers, then due to start an overtime ban on May 30: "If ever there was a time to join with this union, to come out on strike... now is the time".

In the event the NUR and ASLEF settled for a miserable 4.9% rise. Paul Foot later printed documents in the Daily Mirror showing that Thatcher had instructed the British Rail bosses to make whatever concessions were necessary to avoid a 'second front' with the railworkers.

Why was solidarity inadequate?

But the most dramatic point in the struggle to broaden the front came in July, when the dockers came out on strike on July 9. Mrs Thatcher must have remembered the fate of Edward Heath.

Dockers struck against the use of non-dockers to unload iron ore for Scunthorpe steelworks at Immingham. The fire had jumped from the miners to the dockers.

Britain's dockers are in trouble. Shifts in trade patterns have redirected traffic away from the old ports and into new ones where dockers do not have the job security long ago established in the older ports and enshrined in the National Dock Labour Scheme. One Tory minister said openly in mid 1984 that the Dock Labour Scheme should be scrapped. The jobs of many dockers were — and are — under threat.

On the docks, as in the mines, the basic issue was jobs. Here were ready-made fellow-fighters for the miners. And dockers had the power to close down Britain very quickly. Within weeks of a solid docks strike the Tories would either have to surrender or use troops — and that would have escalated the conflict further.

Competent leadership could have welded the dockers to the miners in a common fight for jobs. The dockers' leaders, whatever good intentions they may have had, bungled it.

The TGWU did not even formulate clear demands for the strike. The basic demand should have been extension of the National Dock Labour Scheme to the new, unregistered ports.

When the strike was on, Socialist Organiser called for the creation of joint action committees of dockers and miners. But the NUM did not make much initiative to link up with the dockers. It was difficult for the NUM. The leaders of the TGWU were protesting that their dispute was quite separate from the miners', and would not have welcomed any such initiative.

On July 19 anti-strike lorry drivers threatened violence against dockers in Dover, where the strike was shaky anyway, and the dispute collapsed. The press that had been screaming against 'violent' miners either gloried in the threats against the strikers or reported this in a matter-of-fact way: the police had no comment! Instead of organ-

ising flying pickets, the mighty TGWU crumbled.

As we have seen, solidarity also failed in the steel industry. The steel unions had been unresponsive from the start. When the NUM and the rail unions applied their blockade in June, Tommy Brennan, convenor at Ravenscraig, said he would work with scab deliveries of coal and iron ore. Peter McKim in Llanwern said the same. ISTC general secretary Bill Sirs, according to the Financial Times (July 2), "sounded almost like a British Steel spokesman".

Uniting dockers and miners

We need to coordinate the action of striking port workers and striking miners. The best way to do this would be immediately to set up — in areas where that is practicable — action committees. We should also invite railworkers' and seafarers' representatives to join them.

United, dockers and miners can massively augment and increase each others' strength. We must unite. Unity will bring us victory".

Appeal from Paul Whetton to dockers' delegates, August 24 1984.

From late June British Steel started running huge convoys of scab lorries into Ravenscraig and, especially, from Port Talbot to Llanwern. Miners' picketing in Port Talbot soon tailed off, and was token at Ravenscraig. The steelworks kept running at full, indeed increased, production.

Many miners were critical of the area NUM leaders on this. In South Wales, for example, where area president Emyln Williams had publicly criticised Arthur Scargill's effort to mobilise for Orgreave, Mark Thomas of Penrhynwceiber NUM told Socialist Organiser:

"The leadership [in South Wales] — or the majority of them — are failing to give us a determined lead. This comes out most notably in the way they have handled the steelworks situation and the scab miners at the Point of Ayr colliery in North Wales. Increased picketing is not only essential to win the dispute but key to keeping the mem-

bership involved. Many people have drifted off, not because they have lost interest, but because of the token nature of the activity we are involved in.

"There are 4000 steelworkers at Llanwern. Not all of them can be Bill Sirs fans. [There should be] a regular bulletin attempting to speak inside the plant, leafleting of the pubs and clubs in the area..." (SO 187).

Stopping steel would have been difficult with the best tactics from the NUM, given the steel unions' attitude and the steel workers' recent experience. But some of the NUM leaders were so overwhelmed by the difficulties that they practically gave up.

In rail and docks, too, problems of leadership had combined with problems of confidence among the rank and file.

Having seen the miners on strike for four months, railworkers, dockers and steelworkers knew what was involved in a serious battle with the government — the risk of months of deprivation, legal threats, police violence. The prospect was especially daunting in the steelworks, where the workforce was a shattered remnant, reduced in numbers by a half since 1980.

Railworkers and dockers were still often willing to take a stand for principle: to show solidarity when they were asked to handle coal. But to link their fate more fully with the miners in an indefinite strike? There was, in Paul Whetton's words quoted above, "a natural reluctance". London dockers, for example, told SO that they just did not believe that the extension of the Dock Labour Scheme could be won under a Tory government.

In addition to all this there was the deadening effect of the Labour Party's role in the strike. The Party rank and file were with the miners. Labour Party activists, premises and equipment were involved in the miners' strike to a degree probably not seen in any dispute since the 1920s. The National Executive Committee backed the miners and called for a levy to support them. Conference condemned police violence and defied Kinnock's request to condemn pickets' violence.

But what most people saw, courtesy of TV, was the public weaseling of Kinnock, Hattersley and others. We should not underestimate the role played by this in

dampening the spirits of the labour movement.

To rally around the miners and against Thatcher, the movement had to have the feeling of being a movement, the feeling that it could win, that its leaders wanted to win and would fight. It had to have its leaders saying, with political boldness to match the boldness of the NUM's industrial challenge to Thatcher: 'There is an alternative to Thatcher'. The leaders had to say it, mean it and fight for it, and in the first place back those already engaged in the fight against Thatcher.

A politically confident movement could have boosted the industrial solidarity by countering the fears, depression and hopelessness that held back many workers from acting who sympathised with the miners. Kinnock and his team played a fatal role here. Instead of creating a movement against the Tories around the miners, they made the emergence of such a movement impossible. They acted like acid corroding the links and sinews of the movement.

The leadership could have swayed it. A leadership which puts the issues squarely and is visibly prepared to fight to the end can rally the faint-hearted. In the charged atmosphere of summer 1984, there was a lot of potential militancy that could be rallied.

The union leaders were inadequate, too.

The ISTC leadership was positively opposed to a struggle. Having sabotaged the steelworkers' chance of saving jobs in their industry in 1980, Bill Sims now preached no option except the strictest cooperation with management to preserve 'viability'.

The TGWU leadership had made some gestures towards supporting the miners. The ineffectiveness of its boycott on coal movements by road was partly due to the inherent difficulty in organising an industry like road haulage, with a multitude of small employers. But TGWU Scottish secretary Hugh Wyper is reported to have sent 52 union cards to scab drivers at Yuill and Dodds, the main firm involved in taking supplies into Ravenscraig. On payment of a £10 fine, the scab drivers have had full union membership restored.

And the way the TGWU leadership ran the docks strike was a disaster.

In July, and again in August-September, when there was a second docks strike, the TGWU did not even put forward any precise demands for the strike. It argued that the disputes had nothing at all to do with the miners. Nobody believed them, least of all the dockers whose solidarity with the miners had triggered the dispute. Many other dockers — men who could have been won to a fight which linked their own threatened jobs to the miners' fight for jobs — felt they were being manipulated.

In November, TGWU members struck again, at Austin Rover: the union leadership supported them, after a fashion, but did nothing at all as the AUEW and EETPU pressurised the strikers back to work. When the High Court fined the TGWU for supporting that strike without a ballot as prescribed by Tory law, the union leadership again opted for masterly inaction. It didn't pay the fine, nor did it organise any action in defence of the union.

The TGWU leadership, in other words, did not fight to raise the confidence of their members. They reflected the lack of confidence, in the debased form of bureaucratic

Why steel was crucial

British Steel chair Robert Haslam said after the end of the strike:

"I have the temerity to believe that if our employees and management had not responded so positively in those early days of the strike, our production would have been halted very quickly with immediate, serious ripple effects for the motor, food and many other key industries."

"Also, other unionised employees would undoubtedly have been encouraged to show much more solidarity with the National Union of Mineworkers. Thus the evolution of the strike would have been very different and the pressures on the National Coal Board and the Government would have been immeasurably greater."

Sir Robert said the corporation had to resort to extraordinary measures to keep going, including massive lorry convoys and the use of armadas of small ships delivering imported coal to small ports on the River Trent and the River Usk.

Financial Times, March 13 1985

cowardice; and thus became a factor against action.

The rail union leaders likewise. They gave official support to a boycott of coal movements, although the militants in the front line of that boycott — as at Coalville — were highly critical of the lack of support from the leadership against British Rail harassment. But when they had a chance of going out in front themselves — over pay in May, and again over workshop closures in September — they shrank back.

If the NUM had had leaders like the rail unions or the TGWU, let alone the unspeakable Sims, then the miners themselves would probably never have had a national strike.

As Dennis Skinner told Socialist Organiser in July: "I don't think the NUM would be on strike now if it hadn't had some very competent leadership" (SO 188).

The truth, as Dennis Skinner put it, is that only competent leadership got even 80% of the NUM out. The basic difficulty was not this or that tactical device, but that in the political and industrial situation of March 1984 the odds were extremely daunting.

At the start of the strike (editorial of March 29) Socialist Organiser had said bluntly: "The strike cannot be won in the pits". Solidarity was irreplaceable. And on April 4 John McIlroy wrote: "It would be self-deluding to pretend that today's miners' strike is anything but an uphill

struggle. The miners are divided. The price is now being paid for the weaknesses of the past period. Conditions are very different from those prevailing in the victorious struggles of the early '70s".

The editorial of April 19 added: "Only a general strike can stop the Tories. The alternative is to let the miners get mauled in a strike that could stretch into next winter".

Miners understood this too. No wonder sections with weak area leadership and more apparent security from closures — like Notts — were not keen to go on strike.

The wonder is not the weaknesses of the strike, but its strength — the stubborn courage with which the miners defied all the iron laws and the iron fists of this soulless government of exploitation and repression.

It is true that the NUM paper, 'The Miner', which had the job of rallying, encouraging and fortifying the striking miners, sometimes gave an impression of over-confidence, as if victory would be certain if only the miners stuck firm for a few weeks. But Arthur Scargill, in an interview on June 15, made it clear that he had a lucid view of the odds.

"Faced with the Coal Board's closure plan, the progressive elements in the NUM discussed two options. One, you accept the plan and allow pits to close. Alternatively you fight it. If you fight and you have lost, at least you fought it..."

It is this combination of realism with willingness to stand on the line which raises Scargill — and the other NUM left-wingers — head and shoulders above the other leaders of the trade union movement. And Scargill consistently did what was necessary in the situation.

"If I am the last person left rejecting the closure plan, then that will be my position. If I am right, I'll stick there. I don't know how some people can fudge and compromise on... a principle" (Financial Times, June 15).

And right from April 14 onwards Arthur Scargill appealed repeatedly and urgently for other workers to strike — both through their union leaders and over their heads.

He was not able to do more than make appeals. Scargill's great predecessor as NUM leader in the 1920s, A J Cook, was a leading figure in a cross-union rank and file movement, the so-called 'Minority Movement', as well as being the miners' president. He thus had an organisation to campaign for solidarity in other unions. Scargill had no such organisation: one major lesson from the strike must be the need to build a new Minority Movement.

The Scab as Hero

The typical hero of Mrs Thatcher's brave new Britain is the scab. No-one in Britain today is more honourable or respectable, worthy, the mass-circulation newspapers tell us, than the "men who take their courage in their hands and, braving the violent savagery of crazy left-wing-led pickets"... crawl on their bellies to lick their bosses' boots and help them defeat and beat down their fellow workers.

No trade is more honoured than that of the scab-herder, no force more highly praised than the militarised ranks of police thugs who protect them.

No, the working class heroes are still the men and women who dare to take on this vicious government despite the pressures of slump and mass unemployment. They are the dockers who fight for their own concerns, but also want to help the miners. They are the millions of loyal trade unionists who resist the pressure and the hysteria with the grim determination of people who know what the capitalists and their government are trying to do in Britain right now.

Socialist Organiser, August 30, 1984

The balance begins to shift

The lack of such a rank and file movement was the basic reason for the failure to stop steel. By late June all the major steelworks were fully supplied, and set to stay that way.

The docks strike, the solidarity which stopped almost all coal trains, and the six well-supported regional days of action (well-supported considering the lack of official campaigning) offset the failure in steel.

On July 16 the well-informed Financial Times wrote: "There is now a substantial lobby in the Coal Board — though not in the government — for a settlement before the end of autumn, even if a settlement means conceding that pits cannot be closed on purely 'economic grounds'..." These tensions in the NCB would erupt later in sackings and resignations of top officials.

But nevertheless from early August, as we have seen, the balance began to shift. The government had used its legal bludgeon on a section of the labour movement, and discovered that it could get away with it without the TUC responding on behalf of the whole movement. Now it could confidently wait its time to use the bludgeon again.

The shift in the balance was, however, slow and unstable. The miners put up a fierce resistance. They were still solid, and would remain fundamentally solid until November.

No-one quite knew how near or remote power cuts were. The debacles at Llanwern and Ravenscraig had marked a reflux of solidarity, following its high point, but the rail action was still strong — and, indeed, additional solidarity action was still developing in late 1984 and early 1985, in the form of new mass pickets of power stations. In the huge furnace of the strike, new flames were constantly leaping up.

Women

For example, at Florence colliery, North Staffs, the first women's picket in the Midlands took place as late as October 11. "150 women descended on the picket line armed with seng sheets, candles, streamers, and bags of enthusiasm. The all-male police presence were at first slightly bemused, but soon called in a couple of dozen women PCs.

"The non-stop singing and jeering turned three scabs back, but much more than that, the whole atmosphere generated vast quantities of energy, confidence and determination.

"As a grand finale, the 150 women joined together to form 'The Miners' Strike Conga', and danced and sang around the main road to the pit. The police found this 'intimidating'..." (SO 201).

Meanwhile, the longer the miners stuck out, the more likely was a 'second front' which would put the screws on the Tories. (The second docks strike, for example, ran from August 24 to September 18).

From June, and more intensely from August, the Tories and the NCB mounted an offensive to break the strike. Backed by



In August, at Silverwood in Yorkshire miners set up a blockade of the pit entrance in order to stop scabs

all the propaganda the tabloid press could put out — backed up none too subtly, though less crudely, by TV — they launched a back-to-work drive. Scargill-baiting and NUM-bashing became the obsession of the press, in a campaign of unbridled hatred against the miners' leader they could not cow.

To match and balance their demonology against the best leader any section of the labour movement has had in decades, the press in 1984 (in August, especially) discovered the representative working-class hero of Mrs Thatcher's new Britain — the scab.

An atmosphere of hysterical pressure was built up in the country, resembling almost the atmosphere in the big marquee during an evangelical revival meeting when the call goes out for sinners to get up and 'testify for Jesus'. Instant glorification, if not on-the-spot canonisation, awaited the man who would step forward to 'testify' for Thatcher and for strikebreaking. He would be dubbed with some would-be glamorising name like 'Silver Birch', or the 'Dockers' Silver Birch'.

Drive

The back-to-work drive had little success in June. Then from July North Derbyshire NCB area director Ken Moses started a campaign of unprecedented ruthlessness. Miners living outside the main pit villages were singled out. They were written to, phoned, visited, systematically pressurised.

Moses' effort produced few results until November. But in late August a 'National Working Miners' Committee' was set up, under the wing of Thatcherite whizzkid David Hart. A Notts 'Working Miners' Committee' had existed since the end of May.

Ominously, towards the end of August a few scabs appeared in South Yorkshire. Huge numbers of police descended not only on the picket lines but also on the pit villages, which in the following months were transformed into mini police states.

Sue Carlyle penned this picture of life in Kiverton Park, where it sometimes seemed as if the entire might of the British state were being mobilised to ensure that seven scabs would get to work.

"To support and defend their right to scab, and help the Coal Board break the strike, the village has been turned into a mini police state.

Guards

"The scabs now have police guards back and front of their houses, or hiding in their garages and back gardens. After each shift the scabs are taken home in convoys consisting of from three to five transit vans loaded with police.

"As you look through the guarded windows at them speeding past, the scabs hold their heads down...

"Every morning in the early hours between 2,000 and 3,000 police drive in to barricade the pit from pickets. The picket line is physically pushed every morning from the pit entrance into a country road away from the village. The police make charges through the old people's estate and parade horses and riot gear through the main street, endangering local people, young and old."

From late August, a second wave of mass picketing was mounted by striking miners — not to spread the strike but to stop scabs at their own pits, where, as soon as one single scab could be found, the government would send hundreds of police to bully and intimidate the community.



A thirteen year old boy is dragged away by riot police in the early hours of the morning in Grimethorpe, Yorkshire - October 17

The TUC congress

This was the situation when, six months into the miners' strike, the TUC congress opened at Brighton on September 3. By now even a David Basnett was worried enough to make a seemingly sincere speech about the responsibility of the TUC to stop the government in its manifest desire to destroy the NUM.

The ball was at the feet of the TUC. There was still time to rally the working class to the miners. But, of course, the TUC leaders had made it clear months before that they would not support the miners. They wanted

to get themselves in as mediators between the miners and the government, so that a deal could be fixed that would end the strike.

The congress, despite all its bureaucratic limitations, would want something better. The miners' strike had gripped the imagination of militants and activists throughout the movement. So the leaders trimmed and faked.

The NUM had put down an amendment calling for "industrial action involving all trade unions". The furniture union FTAT

called for a 24 hour general strike. But, under pressure from the TUC leaders, these were withdrawn in favour of near-unanimous resolution recommending — conditional on the agreement of each individual union concerned — a boycott of coal, coke or substitute oil moved across NUM picket lines.

The resolution was passed with great enthusiasm from the floor.

SO commented: "Either this TUC congress will mark the beginning of a new rallying of the working class around the

miners. Or it will go down in history as one of the worst examples of vile left-talking fakery in the history of the labour movement.

"The reflex of every militant with an ounce of sense will be to regard the almost-unanimous vote as mainly an exercise in left-fakery by the leaders of the TUC..."

"[But] the TUC decision is a lever which miners can use to gain solidarity. For it to be effective rank and file militants should start organising to use it now" (SO 195).

Vile left-talking fakery it was. The rail-workers and seafarers had already been giving such support for months. Some power stations likewise. A few more power stations did start boycott action, but, as it turned out, not enough to be decisive. The EETPU and the power engineers' union voted against the TUC resolution and did nothing to implement it: the GMBU and the TGWU, who had the majority of coal-handling workers in power stations, did practically nothing.

Arthur Scargill complained in mid-January: "I did ask the leaders of the major power unions if they would arrange meet-

ings of shop stewards in the major power stations. Although there was no rejection of this idea, it has not been put into operation" (SO 212).

The TUC resolution strengthened NUM appeals for solidarity, and was thus something to build on. But it wasn't much. The question arises: would it not have been better if the NUM leaders had pushed the call at congress for a general strike? It would have given a rallying point for the militants and the Left, at least. Socialist Organiser thought at the time that they should have pushed the general strike resolution, and in hindsight we think we were right.

But the lack of an organised rank and file movement was especially critical in the weeks after the TUC. This lack ensured that the solidarity produced was no more than the TUC leaders intended.

The first week after the TUC was occupied by talks between the NCB and the NUM — shifting to and fro between Edinburgh, Selby, Doncaster and London. Many rank and file strikers were bewildered and disturbed.

Stan Crawford of Bevercotes NUM, Notts, wrote in SO: "The main problem during the week of NUM-NCB talks was not knowing what was going on... All we knew was what we saw on television or read in the papers. We were left to guess."

"I would like to see talks held in the open, as they were during Solidarnosc's negotiations with the Polish government four years ago. Then, the discussion was broadcast to the membership as and when it was happening" (SO 197).

Then, once more, the prospect opened up of other workers decisively tilting the balance in favour of the NUM. The pit deputies' (overseers') union NACODS decided on September 12 to ballot its members on strike action over the two issues of pit closures and pay being stopped for deputies who refused to cross picket lines. If NACODS struck, every pit in Britain would stop.

The result of the ballot — 82.5% for a strike — was announced on September 28. The same day the High Court declared whole NUM strike 'unlawful' because there had not been a national ballot.

Labour Party conference

The Labour Party conference opened at Blackpool on October 1. Labour Party conference is less tightly sewn up than the TUC, and it overturned and overruled the platform line on the miners' strike.

Arthur Scargill got a tremendous reception. Neil Kinnock had given the impression for six months of slinking around on the edge of the great working class battle, waiting for a good chance to savage Arthur Scargill; but now the Labour Party conference rejected his 'statesmanlike' even-handed condemnation of violence, by which primarily he meant pickets' violence.

Conference condemned police violence, called for police to be removed from the coalfields, and thus implicitly sided with the pickets. (SO supporters originated the crucial clauses).

Albert Bowns (Kiveton Park NUM) commented: "We got the support we wanted from the rank and file, but we certainly didn't get the support we wanted from the leadership, particularly Kinnock."

"I thought he was very skilful, the way he skirted round the issue — it was a typical politician's answer."

"Kinnock is concerned only to put forward policies he thinks people will vote for and so, of course, he was worried about the violence. But the present situation is the perfect opportunity to put forward socialist policies. Instead the leadership... think that all working people are 'moderates'. But what is happening now is not moderation..."

Two scab miners had applied for a High Court declaration that it was unlawful for the NUM to run a national strike because its rulebook required a national ballot for a national strike. The legal action paralleled the new Tory anti-union law which had come into force in the course of the strike, requiring ballots for all strikes, but that law

was not actually used. The court took it upon itself to interpret the NUM's rule-book, and declared the strike unlawful.

On October 1 the NUM leaders were served with a court order, as they sat in the Labour Party conference, declaring that they were in 'contempt of court' for continuing to call the strike official. They responded by insisting that the strike was official according to the rules of the NUM, and that they would not let the court dictate to the union. On October 10 the court fined the NUM £200,000. When the union would not pay, it ordered the seizure of the NUM's entire funds, on October 25.

The day before, October 24, NACODS had called off strike plans with a miserable compromise, slinking away while the miners fought for jobs. Now, for the NUM, blow followed blow.

Police violence in the Yorkshire pit villages was stepped up dramatically. The screaming, spitting gutter press was now witch-hunting and agitating about an NUM official's fund-raising visit to Libya (although many British firms, and even the NCB itself, have links with Libya). The TUC leaders did nothing to help the NUM. Congress was over for a year, so fake militancy and fake concern for the survival of the NUM was no longer at a premium.

TUC chair Jack Eccles said publicly that the TUC should pressurise the NUM into accepting the NACODS deal. Several top trade union leaders agreed — off the record. TUC general secretary Norman Willis went through the motions of dissociating the TUC from Eccles' rambling. He did nothing to help the miners.

At the time union leaders who backed Eccles did not even dare go on the record about it. But now many people in the labour movement or on its journalistic fringes are trying to set up in business as wise

men and sages with the thought that really the NUM would have been best advised to accept the NACODS deal in October. After all, the NUM did end up in February offering to accept that deal and being told by the Tories that now they had to have something worse.

Such a philosophy would rule out almost any serious struggle. In October the strike was still around 80% solid. The strikers were still confident and strong. The Coal Board was visibly in trouble: NCB official mouthpiece Michael Eaton was suspended on October 29, and director of information Geoffrey Kirk was sacked on October 31. A second front was about to be opened up by Austin Rover and Jaguar car workers striking over pay from November 1. Only a faintheart could recommend settling for the miserable NACODS deal.

Even as it turned out — with the Austin Rover unions leaving their members in the lurch, and the TUC remaining inactive even when the High Court appointed a receiver over the NUM's finances — the miners did not end up worse than they would have done by settling in October.

If, by some quirk, the NUM leaders had gone for the NACODS formula and bulldozed the strikers into accepting it, then many miners — certainly, the militants who were the heart and soul of the strike — would have gone back feeling let down and shamed, if not betrayed. They would feel that they had accepted defeat in mid-battle. Such an outcome would have been worse for the miners, and for the labour movement as a whole, than the defeat which actually happened.

In any case, there was not a single voice within the NUM for accepting Eccles' line. Right-winger Trevor Bell talked about a ballot on the NCB's proposals in mid-November, but that was all.

November: onto the defensive

With the start of November, the strike went decidedly onto the defensive. After months of chipping away, the Coal Board finally claimed a breakthrough with scabbing in North Derbyshire. The NCB offered a massive Christmas bribe to miners — who had not had a wage packet for eight months, and were now suffering serious hardship — if they returned to work. By November 19 the NCB was claiming a record 2282 miners returning to work on a Monday. Two pits which come under the Yorkshire NUM but are geographically in Notts — Manton and Shireoaks — suffered major back-to-work moves.

The NUM was organising a series of regional strikers' rallies. These showed the tremendous continuing determination of the hard core of the strike, but also their bitterness about the official leaders of labour. At Aberafan on November 13 a symbolic noose was dangled in front of TUC general secretary Norman Willis; 'Ramsey Mac-Kinnock' was pilloried for refusing to speak at the rallies.

Now there was a growing note of anguish in Arthur Scargill's appeals: "We have to translate resolution into action. I am not going to appeal to the barons of the TUC — I want to ask the ordinary men and women of this country to give industrial action support to this union."

"How much longer can you stand to one side and see this union battered? We are asking you to come out now and stop scab coal being delivered into power stations" (Birmingham, November 14: SO 206).

At police-battered Kiveton Park, there were still only 26 scabs in mid-November. But branch delegate Albert Bowns, a leading militant, told SO how things now looked to him:

"I think a general strike is less likely at the moment than it has been in the past... I just can't see anything happening through the TUC."

"I was hoping for something more from the national delegate meeting [of the NUM on November 5] than these rallies. I was hoping for, perhaps, a national mass picket on particular collieries or particular areas. Now, we're just sticking to our own collieries and it's making us weaker..." (SO 206).

The labour movement was shamelessly leaving the NUM to its fate in the struggle against the government. So the Tories pressed relentlessly on.

On November 30 the Tories delivered what they hoped was a knock-out punch. Tory lawyer Herbert Brewer was appointed by the High Court as receiver of the NUM's finances. Brewer declared, "I am the NUM".

Legally, he was the NUM. But there was another NUM, not the notional legal entity now embodied by the High Court in the unlikely figure of the former Tory councillor, but the 140,000 striking miners and their families. And that NUM refused to go down under the new blow. They refused to surrender the union's money, which they had moved overseas.

Four days previously, on November 26, the High Court had fined the TGWU

£200,000 (to be paid by December 10) for supporting the Austin Rover strike without a ballot in Tory-prescribed form. All the other car unions wriggled out (including the Communist-Party-led TASS, whose general secretary, Moscow-liner Ken Gill, told the court that he had wished to obey the injunction to withdraw support from the strike — but since he had not been supporting it anyway, he had not known what to do). But the TGWU would not pay the fine.

Unfortunately, it would not do anything positive either. The meeting of its executive in early December decided to take no action against the threat to the union. If passive endurance could beat the Tories, then the TGWU would have done the workers of Britain a great service in 1984. But passivity — even defiant passivity — is not enough.

Now Arthur Scargill's efforts to rouse the labour movement and to make it aware of what was happening reached a new peak of desperate urgency. Again and again he appealed for industrial action to back the miners. "There must be the most massive mobilisation of industrial action our movement has ever known, and we must have it now."

"There is no other way to stop the court's attempt to destroy the NUM" (SO 209).

Other voices on the Left augmented and supplemented Scargill's. Tony Benn (reportedly on the private urging of Scargill and Heathfield) called for a general strike; so did Dennis Skinner.

But the TUC leaders did nothing. They went sleep-walking on. Neil Kinnock had earlier refused a request by the Labour Party NEC to speak at the November series of NUM rallies. Now he condescended to speak at a miners' rally in Stoke on November 30, to put "the case for coal" (as dis-

tinct from the case for the miners!) and — faced with jeering, baiting demands from Mrs Thatcher and her press that he do so — to denounce pickets' 'violence'.

Things were going badly for the miners, but, despite all the miners' difficulties, the Tories were still scared of a second front. That was shown very clearly by the careful way the courts handled the TGWU, using an official called the 'Queen's Remembrancer' to take £200,000 rather than seizing the union's whole funds. Despite everything, even a limited initiative from other unions could have swung the balance against the government.

Socialist Organiser proposed a campaign for a recall TUC, which might call the leaders to account for their failure to implement the decisions of September. A campaign for a recall TUC could be used to focus discussion of the miners' strike in the trade union branches. We argued that, if a full general strike were not possible immediately, then as a first step a 24 hour general strike should be called by the pro-NUM unions or even by the NUM itself.

"I'm not sure", objected Paul Whetton. "It's a hell of a gamble. A call for a strike could rebound on the NUM if the NUM itself called it... For the NUM to call a one-day general strike would be the last card. It always is the last card in a shop steward's or a branch secretary's hand — if you call a strike and nobody answers, then you have played your last card" (SO 210).

That 'last card' could have rallied and helped to organise the hundreds of thousands of active supporters that the NUM had won in the labour movement. But scepticism was understandable. Albert Bowns, for example, disputed the demand for a recall TUC.

Scab-herding in North Derbyshire

"From the start of the strike, the management armed itself with names, addresses and telephone numbers of workers and plotted their residence and likely attitudes on large maps."

The plan was to concentrate on workers living outside the immediate area of the pit villages. The management also drew up lists of men believed to be strongly hostile to the strike, or even those who had worked a lot of overtime and might therefore be finding things particularly difficult financially.

The management began telephoning and visiting those likely to return. After organising the men into groups, buses were arranged to pick them up at central points.

"Putting transport on was a key", said Mr Moses. So was the growing role of the working miners themselves in breaking the strike. Mr Roland Taylor, from Shire-

brook and a member of the national working miners' committee, was responsible for court actions preventing disciplinary action by the union.

He said: "Everything that is happening now has been tried in Derbyshire. I've thought things through with management at my own pit. They suggested we use phones to call people up — they gave us lists and lent us vans. Shirebrook has been a well-oiled team".

NUM activists complain that the area has three working miners on full pay doing nothing but knock on people's doors. "We try to go round and counter it, but we cannot provide them with the instant gratification of over £600", said Mr David Crowther, an NUM delegate from Warsop.

The scab-herding operation in North Derbyshire, as described in the Financial Times, November 14 1984

"We all hoped that we would get a good reaction from the TUC when its congress met. We hoped that they would get everyone out alongside us. Since that hasn't happened, I just can't see anything happening through the TUC" (SO 206).

"I think we've got to call for a recall TUC conference", said Paul Whetton, but without any illusions — "put the arguments again and give them one last chance to come in with us".

The NUM leaders followed up their November rallies with a speaking tour in the pit villages during December. The back-to-work drive tapered off, collections increased as Christmas came nearer, and at Christmas itself the pit communities celebrated with defiant solidarity. Despite all the hardships, many strikers and many strikers' wives insisted that it was their best Christmas ever, because of the warmth and comradeship. Instead of isolated families each slumped in front of their television, whole communities came together to support each other and celebrate.

But the turn of the year brought back the grimness. Energy minister Peter Walker confidently claimed (December 29) that there would be "no power cuts in 1985". Although the City and East London were blacked out for some hours on January 7, the policy of oil-burning and maximum use of nuclear power did in fact see the CEB through to the end of the strike without any crippling cuts. As if to rub brine in the miners' wounds, the Tories marked New Year's Day by giving peerages to Len Murray and former electricians' leader Frank Chapple — the symbols and representatives of everything in the labour movement that had combined with the slump and effects of mass unemployment to allow the Tories to impose the sufferings of a ten month strike on the miners and their fami-

lies, and would ultimately allow them to win the strike.

The steady dribble back to work was now usually to be measured in hundreds per day. Neil Kinnock decided that the strike had gone near enough to defeat for him to visit a picket line (by chauffeur-driven car) in the same way that he might attend commemorations for the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

But the miners were very much alive. The indomitable spirit of defiance of capitalist 'normality' was still strong.

At Kiveton Park the strike started to break up seriously from January 21, after 10 months out and five months of heavy police occupation of the village.

When people set out together on a difficult, testing struggle, and some of them break and give up or change sides, those who continue to fight are forced to think hard and define for themselves and others just what they think they are doing. Albert Bowns did that when Reg Moss, a branch official at Kiveton Park, started scabbing in late January and allowed the Daily Express to proclaim the fact and use him against the strikers. Albert Bowns published an open letter to Moss — and to others who had given up the strike — in Socialist Organiser:

Reg Moss had said he wanted to return to 'normal life'. But: "What is normal about having to accept mass redundancies? What is normal about having to accept pit closures on economic grounds (possibly Kiveton Park)?"

"What is normal about craftsmen being de-skilled...? In effect, what is normal about running to accept every crumb which the management might, and I say might, condescend to offer us?"

"That is the 'normality' which you will have to return to if the rest of us follow your example.

"The Kiveton Park NUM was directed to fight against this kind of 'normality' and will continue to do so until the final outcome" (SO 214).

Socialist Organiser tried to present an accurate picture of the stages the strike went through as it unfolded. We refused to voice any of the pessimism or defeatism rampant in sections of the Left (in Socialist Worker, for example). Even so, by February 6 we had to admit: "Whatever the exact number of new scabs, it is true that a steady stream of strikers seem to be giving up and letting themselves be driven back to work. Inevitably this drift back puts pressure on the strikers and encourages Thatcher's belief that her lust for the NUM's blood can be satisfied" (SO 215).

In this adverse situation, South Wales NUM official Kim Howells floated the idea of a return to work without an agreement (February 6). Whatever the possible merits of this as a tactic once the union was collectively convinced that a further attempt to maintain the strike would only tear shreds off the NUM, to raise it there and then through the hostile media was highly counter-productive.

Paul Whetton commented: "To make that statement on the eve of a crucial meeting of the executive showed exceedingly bad judgment, at best, and at worst an attempt to scupper any cohesive policy... When it came over on the news, the reaction amongst the Notts striking miners was one of horror. Absolute horror... In fact the Notts striking miners lobbied the executive meeting... to oppose the suggestion coming out of South Wales" (SO 216).

The executive did not even discuss the idea, and Kim Howells was removed from his job as an area NUM spokesperson. But damage had been done. And then the TUC stepped in with its final blow.

Tories out to shred the NUM

On February 19 seven TUC leaders scurried to Downing Street, not even bothering to conceal their glee that they were back in contact with the people who had just sent Len and Frank to the House of Lords. They eagerly took on the job of acting as messenger boys to the NUM. The message from Thatcher said, in essence: 'Surrender, or else. No negotiations, no concessions: surrender!'

When the NUM rejected this document, the TUC let it be known that they were washing their hands of the miners, and retired to let Thatcher urge her surrender terms under the title of 'the TUC document'.

Few things in the strike were more sickening than the cat and mouse games played by the government from November to the end. First they offered the Christmas bribe to needy miners, and howled with indecent glee when some miners deserted the strike. They were showing their displeasure with Scargill's undemocratic methods, said the press, as the broken ruen slunk back to work.

Then the Tories played the game of the on-off negotiations, raising the hopes of the miners and then, having softened up a

few, slamming the door and waiting for more miners to give in. Having said for months that the NACODS deal was on offer to the NUM, they withdrew it at the point, at the end of the strike, when Arthur Scargill said he would accept it.

The Tories now did not want a settlement. They wanted to shred the NUM.

Commenting on the great Dublin lock-out of 1913, the employers' leader in that struggle, William Martin Murphy, cynically identified the fundamental disadvantage for labour in any long industrial war of attrition. The workers, he pointed out, soon have difficulties getting enough to eat; the employers rarely have that problem. By March 1985 Britain's glorious miners had that problem.

The Tories had all the resources of the ruling class at their disposal. The miners, some 2 per cent of the labour movement, had to fight 100% of that centralised ruling-class power with insufficient support and sometimes downright sabotage from the leaders of the other 98%. That was the cause of the defeat.

On March 3 the eighth NUM conference since the strike began met to decide what to do. South Wales proposed a return to work without an agreement. Arthur Scargill

opposed the return to work, and so did the executive. They argued instead that, with over 50 per cent of miners still out, the strike should continue until 700 sacked strikers got their jobs back.

The majority of delegates felt that there was a danger that a big acceleration of scabbing would further erode the union's bargaining power on the 700 (and everything else), and result, ultimately, in a return to work with the union in tatters. They decided to stop that happening.

Starved, battered, but still defiant, they voted by 98 to 91 to return to work without a settlement, but as a still-intact union.

To go back without the 700, and fight for their reinstatement in local negotiations, was a bitter and agonising decision to have to take. In the circumstances the conference had little viable alternative. This was confirmed a few days later when the first wave of Labour councils failed to deliver on their promises of opening up a second front, instead collapsing ignominiously.

Once the decision was taken, Scargill and the left-wingers on the executive urged a united return to work, and most areas went back on Tuesday 5th.

Kent, and a few pits elsewhere, stayed out for a week after the national return to



Mass picket at Frickley, Yorkshire, February 1985

work. Polmaise, in Scotland, the first pit out in 1984, did not go back until Tuesday March 12, after one year and four weeks on strike.

The greatest strike in British history was over. But the miners' strike was one battle in a war, and the war is far from over. "The fight goes on", said Arthur Scargill after the decision to return had been taken. The NUM has been forced to retreat to 'guerilla' struggle — "like the Resistance in World War 2", as Scargill put it.

The fight goes on

It was a defeat; and what we said during the dispute about the heavy implications of a defeat for the whole labour movement was true. But it was not just a defeat; nor was the struggle in vain. And it is not the end of the fight.

Despite all the horrors and hardships suffered by the pit communities during the strike, and the further horrors and hardships that will be imposed on them and on the whole working class in the immediate period ahead as the Tories improve on their victory, many good things have already

come or can yet come out of this struggle.

In the first place, the Tories were shaken. We still do not know how close they were to crippling power cuts at the end of the strike. They certainly had to sacrifice over £5 billion for the dispute, and they have built up a vast fund of working-class resentment against themselves.

Thatcher's success so far will reconcile the ruling class to the huge costs of this strike as a 'worthwhile investment' in crushing class struggle once and for all. But class struggle never can be crushed once and for all. And the ruling class will not lightly agree to Thatcher taking them into further ventures if they look like rousing resistance similar to the miners'.

History shows a standard pattern after serious working-class defeats in struggle: first, a period, often not very long, when matters go from worse to worse and reaction reigns; then a revival during which it sometimes becomes clear that the defeated struggle chastened the ruling class more than at first seemed.

Studying the very terrible defeat of the Paris workers' uprising in 1871 (30,000 supporters of the Commune were massacred, and many others deported), Marxists later argued that despite defeat the uprising actually did achieve limited gains, in that it tipped the scales towards a republic in the long debate during the 1870s on whether France should be a republic or a monarchy, and helped thereafter to safeguard France's republican constitution.

They also hailed the uprising as a great political inspiration for future generations.

The 1984-5 miners' strike will inspire not only future generations but this one. The miners have shaken Britain and remodelled the political landscape. Class conflict, class bitterness, and class hatred on a level

not seen here for a very long time have been brought into the centre of British politics. The ruling class starved men, women and children for a year, and now Mrs Thatcher gloats in public over her triumph. But the miners' strike has stored up memories and hatreds — not only among miners and their families — that the ruling class and the Tories will live to regret.

Tens of thousands have learned that capitalism is a soulless system that sacrifices people for profit; tens of thousands of new militants have learned to hate capitalism and those who run it.

Coming out of jail after a week of being locked up simply because she insisted on picketing, despite police 'cautions' and despite bail conditions, Nottinghamshire striking miner's wife Brenda Greenwood spoke the language and expressed the feelings that live in thousands who have gone through the miners' strike.

This is not, as the editorial writers fondly believe, the language of the past, or of a stage in the history of the labour movement which the miners' strike has brought to an end. It is the language of the future.

"The shattering experience of being sent to prison will be etched on my memory for as long as I live. But I am in no way deterred, nor has my spirit been broken.

"The time has come for the working class of the 1980s to stand up and be counted. We must not be afraid to face the machinery of the state head-on in defence of our rights.

"We must fight on every front in defence of all the rights and standards that have been won for us in blood, sweat and tears by the working class of the past.

"It is our duty to defend, protect and uphold all these rights and standards, and it is our proud heritage to hold them in trust for future generations of our class".

WOMEN:



Mardy women march in Birmingham, July 19

The heart of the resistance

The world turned upside down

"At a time of unrest and strike action, the proletarian woman, downtrodden, timid, without rights, suddenly grows and learns to stand tall and straight. The self-centred narrow-minded and politically backward "female" becomes an equal, a fighter, a comrade. The transformation is unconscious and spontaneous, but it is important and significant because it reveals the way in which participation in the workers' movement brings the woman worker towards her liberation, not only as the seller of labour power, but also as a woman, a wife, a mother and a housekeeper."

Alexandra Kollontai wrote that in 1920, yet it could be about today. Alexandra was writing a history of working class Russian women with whom she fought, as a socialist and sister, against the Tsarist tyranny. The development and organisation of those women then is comparable to the spirit of the women today, organising in Women Against Pit Closures groups.

The Russian women Kollontai writes of were struggling for basic rights of bread, peace and land. They fought alongside their male counterparts but fought also for their self-liberation as women.

Women Against Pit Closures was much more than a support group of women fighting for the jobs of their husbands, sons, brothers, lovers.

At first, women responded to the strike by providing essential services — organising food distribution, soup kitchens, etc.

A new awareness

Within weeks, women were not just staffing the soup kitchens but organising pickets, rallies, demonstrations, collections and public speaking.

"On early pickets, 2.30 am and 4.30 am, too early to go back to bed. Back in an hour or two or three. Stay up to see the kids up and breakfast. Food parcels to go out 11 am - 3 pm. Back for the kids coming home. Tea time. Meeting, social security problems to sort out. Someone needs shoes for the picket line. Someone is depressed. Fund-raising needs organising. Provisions need buying for the food parcels, and parcels need making up, 500 of them..."

The list of tasks is endless and gruelling. Most women doing this have kids, some like Ann from Kiveton Park have jobs to do as well. Some like Mary from Wales have to stop a husband and son going back to work.

Clearly the strike could not have got this far if it were not for the dynamic, forceful organisation of women in the pit villages. The level of solidarity they have provided has been unrivalled by any other section of the organised labour movement.

Crusty socialists still maintain that the self-organisation of women is by nature divisive and what is more, working class women just don't do it. Really?

Women Against Pit Closures have turned such arguments on their head.

"It was as though women had been asleep for hundreds of years. We awoke to a



Photo: Martin Jenkinson/Yorkshire Miner

new awareness, a realisation of what we as women could do. It is only comparable to the suffragettes. Do you know, I believe we are a part of history being made" (from South Yorkshire).

The aspirations raised by women involved in the strike can only take us forward. Women have gained much by breaking their

isolation, having childcare more available and collective eating. We must now organise around such demands as 24 hour, free nurseries, a woman's right to choose and collective facilities.

"After the strike we will keep ourselves together and do you know what we'll do first! We'll have a campaign against low

pay because it hits women — and we'll start with the women in the canteen and bar staff — get them a pay rise, something the NUM should have done" (from South Yorkshire).

In a traditionally male dominated set-up, many men are acknowledging the contribution of women and respecting their need for independence. A sense of equality has been reached far greater than at any other time of our working class history.

At the same time, women have witnessed in themselves changing consciousness and political awareness which makes them say "We cannot go back to the status quo". Kids have eaten better in the collective soup kitchens, shopping has a whole new meaning — it's collective or non-existent because it's distributed, shared and some days you don't have to do it at all.

Women get out more, go off in flying pickets, go to meetings or even get away to parties...organised by support groups. Women meet other women in struggle, from Greenham Common, from Barking and South London Hospitals, from Namibia, from Ireland.

Women do not want to return to the status quo. That means we have to take up women's demands and fight for them here and now. Women have fought alongside their men in the NUM because they realise that if the NUM is smashed then our hopes of equality and liberation will be that harder to fight for.

Working class women, normally isolated and alienated in the home have come out, got together and organised with determination to win.

Though circumstances are the most materially severe and repressive they have ever experienced, there has been a sense of freedom gained. It has cut across much of the mythology of women's "natural" role, leading them to question their former selves.

Cooking Picket Pie

The Women's Action group has been working hard since the early weeks of the strike. We've been providing families with three food parcels a week, since we don't have cooking facilities in our club.

We started off by raising voluntary funds ourselves — by going out in the street with the NUM banner and standing out all morning. We got some funny looks at first, but soon contributions started coming in.

We also go to Rotherham to collect, but the funds are drying up now. We've bled our own areas dry. If people are not unemployed, they're pensioners or strikers — mind you, some pensioners are our best supporters.

We also run a weekly coffee morning

and jumble sale and run raffles all the time. Last month we had a good laugh holding a funny football match between the women and the "flying pickets". We didn't raise much money but we got a lot out of our system.

We cook at home in my kitchen and so when pickets get back we have a home-baked meat pie and peas — it's called Picket Pie — and we can't cook anything else now, the men won't have it.

Some weeks we cook three or four times but because you don't always know when it's required, it's difficult to have a rota. Also you can't cope with more than two people cooking in my kitchen!

Ann Bowns interviewed in
Socialist Organiser, August 16, 1984



Women march in London, August 11. Photo: Andrew Ward, Report.

Build a working class women's movement!

In 1981 12 million workers were members of a trade union, of whom 30% were women.

When you look at the people in the leadership of the trade unions and of the TUC, how many women do you see?

And that's at a national level. At a local level of areas and branches, it is just as bad if not worse. In unions where the majority of

members are women, the people in the decision-making positions tend to be men.

What are the reasons for this? Many men are convinced that it's because women aren't interested: we only work for pin money anyway — it's the men who earn the family wage.

Actually the reasons are more practical

than that: meetings tend to be held at times when women with families can't attend, creche facilities are not provided at meetings, and because the issues that affect women both at home, at work, their conditions, etc., are not taken seriously, or even seen as trade union issues.

Over the last few years, women have organised in the trade unions to change this situation, and the issues we have been taking up are those that enable women to attend — meeting times, creches, and positive discrimination.

Positive discrimination means encouraging women to take up positions and get involved in the union; it means that a certain number of positions in the union will be reserved for women only, to ensure that women are encouraged to be in the decision making and active role in their union.

A lot of people both on the left and right argue against positive discrimination, saying that we should vote people into positions on the basis of their politics.

'If we'd been organised before...'

We were saying last week how if the women in the village had been organised a couple of years ago the way we are now they would never have got those schools shut. Never. We would have fought...

We had some problems with one of the blokes at the pit here, he really is a male chauvinist pig... He comes out with 'Oh, the one with big tits'.

I mean, it was really insulting, so we had him about it, and we said we didn't like it... We said things like 'how would

you like it if we described you as the one with the little bulge in your trousers?' He just went bright red. He couldn't handle it at all. So we said, 'Well, that's how we feel'...

Coal mining is swamped in tradition, and the tradition is that it is a man's job and it's no place for a woman. But the attitudes have changed very much during the strike.

Sylvia Jackson, from Keresley (Coventry) miners' wives' committee.
Socialist Organiser June 14 1984.

Miners at Greenham

Three striking Notts miners visited Greenham Common peace camp on June 26. Afterwards they spoke to Angela Fraser.

'Why did you ask me to take you to Greenham?'

'To see how the women were struggling. It was an experience. I was really frightened, but I enjoyed the visit.'

'Why were you frightened?'

'Because of what the media have said about them. They are not really like that...'

It's like the miners. Everybody's expecting the miners to start trouble and it's the same with the women there. They are made out to be right freaks.

'Do you see any link between the miners' strike and the Greenham women's struggle?'

'They're fighting for what they believe in, aren't they... They're fighting for loads of things, aren't they? They're fighting for equal rights for women. We're supposed to

have that now. Well, what can I say? It is supposed to be equal rights for women but it's always been the same — men always seem to be the most dominant. I think they're fighting to do something on their own. They need to keep men out of it because of that.'

'When you go back home, will you encourage women to go and stay at Greenham?'

I don't really know — I'm not so sure.

In fact, most of the time, men get re-elected year after year on personal likes and dislikes, making the movement quite stale and not moving forward with new people or bringing in new and younger people into union activity. So positive discrimination is actually a democratic thing in that it opens it out to new people.

Secondly, such is the oppression of women in society that prevents us getting involved that we have to make special attention and arrangements to allow women to get involved.

I don't just mean meeting times and creches but also sexist attitudes we face every day which make coming to meetings and getting involved very intimidating. At union conferences you're whistled at as you walk to the rostrum; or in local branches they sneer at women and make comments about our breasts.

That is one of the issues that women organising in the union must and do take up — sexual harassment. Not only at work by management (in the typing pool, etc), but also by the union — for example nudie calendars.

Women are organising in the Labour Party and forcing it to change its politics and structure in a very small way. But there is still a long way to go.

For example, every year there is a national women's conference in the Labour Party and quite often it is a section of the Labour Party which takes up more militant positions than the rest of the party. It was, for example, the only section which opposed the sending of the Task Force to the Falklands. They supported Benn for deputy leader, they have a position of troops out of Ireland and they were one of the sections to back the moves to democratise the way the leader and deputy leader of the party are elected.

But women's conference does not have a right to put to Labour Party conference as a whole any policies that it adopts, so it's



more like a lobby than an active section of the Party.

Also, the women's conference does not have the right to vote women onto the Labour Party National Executive Committee.

The women's movement

Meanwhile, the women's movement from the 1960s to the present, has tended to be a middle class movement. It does take up issues that should concern all working class women such as the right to abortion — control over our own bodies — the questions of sexuality and gay and lesbian liberation, the right to walk the streets without fear of attack, against the portrayal by the police and courts of victims of rape as if they asked for it, etc.

But to a large extent the movement has organised in a way which does not attract working class women. Women's movement meetings tend to be consciousness-raising groups, and many elements in the women's

movement refuse to have anything to do with the Labour Party or the unions because they see them as male-dominated.

Consciousness-raising is all right. It is necessary for every woman to be able to meet other women and discuss their oppression and talk about how they are isolated in the home and how the law discriminates against them. But if you stop at just talking about it and don't put those ideas into action and force the labour movement to take them up, it becomes a futile exercise.

The miners' strike opens up the possibility of breaking down this division between a male-dominated labour movement and a middle-class women's movement — of building a working-class based women's movement.

The miners' strike and particularly the women's involvement in it, forces the labour movement to see women as political, active, militant people who don't just sit at home and soak in the media, or just work for pin money or can be treated as mere sex objects. It really does challenge all those attitudes which the male labour movement has lived by for years.

We need to discuss how that challenge to men's attitudes can be sustained after the strike has been won. How do we make sure that those lessons learned during the strike (like the men who now tell other men to shut up when they come out with "Get your tits out", and the men in the labour movement who can no longer say "women aren't interested in politics, they just organise get back to work movements" and things like that) aren't forgotten but become a way of changing the labour movement into one which includes women and seriously takes up women's issues?

And also how do we use the lessons to make the women's movement a movement for working class women rather than middle class consciousness-raising groups?

Women in the labour movement

The growth of women's support groups since the start of the miners' strike has been a tremendous boost to the women's movement in Britain. The Tory government have not been able to buy them off or use them as propaganda against the NUM.

Their courageous stand has given confidence to working class women everywhere who, over the years, have been attacked by the policies of cuts, redundancies, extra police powers and media lies.

All the women involved in WAPC are determined that their groups will not just

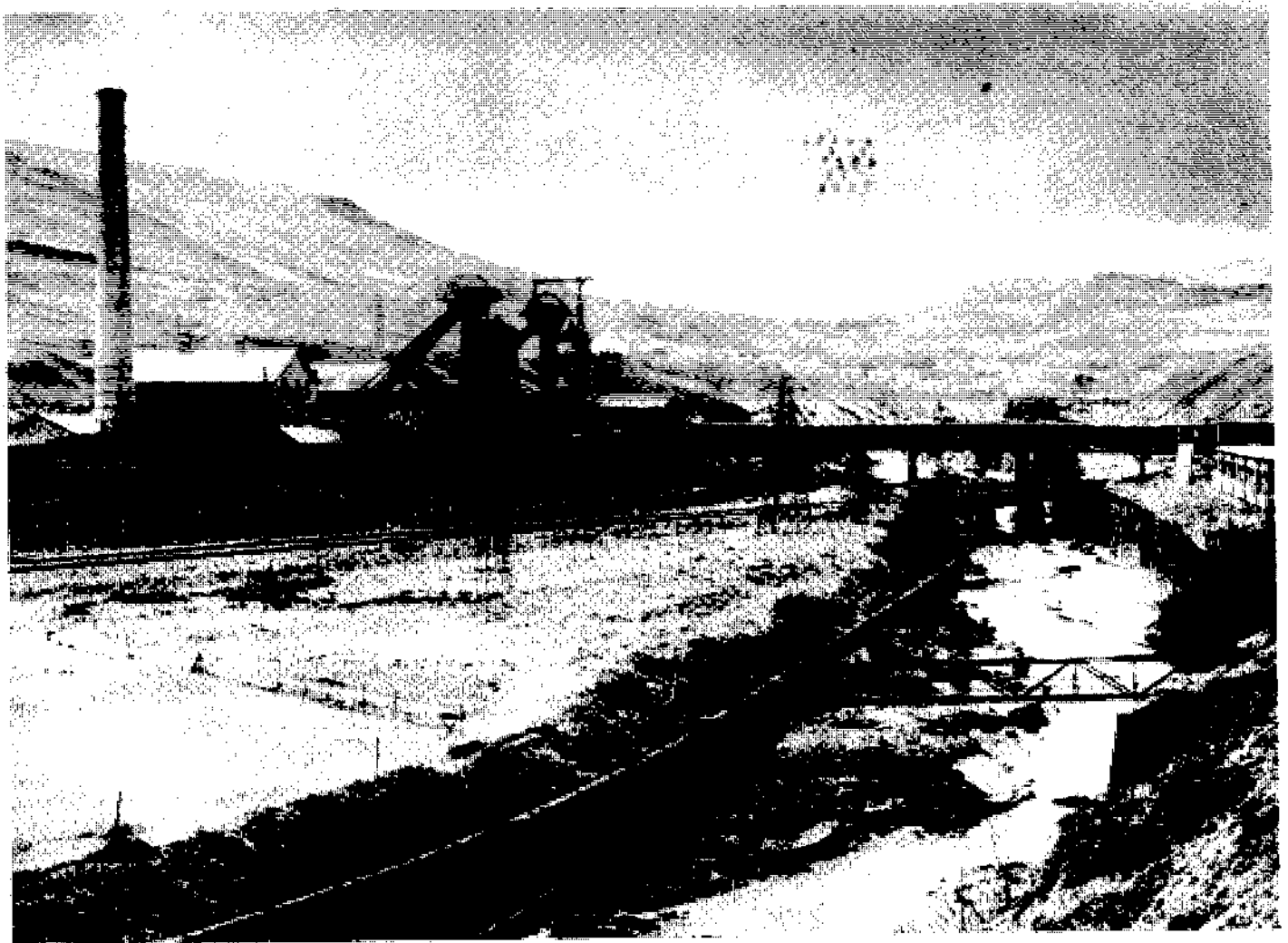
disappear when the miners' strike is over, because there are still so many battles to be fought.

The only way that this can be ensured is if all working class women in struggle join together and fight together — not just against the Tories' attacks which throw us out of work and treat us as second class citizens, but also to force the labour movement to take our battles seriously and to give us equal voice.

The militant action of working class women can only strengthen the labour movement and democratise it.

Socialist Organiser, January 9, 1985

ISSUES & EXPERIENCES



Page 26 Notts: the eye of the storm

Page 34 The critics of the NUM leadership

Page 36 A general strike could have beaten the Tories

Page 39 The use of civil law

Page 42 Economics? Whose economics?

Page 45 Rule of law? Whose law?

Notts: the eye of the storm

1. The importance of Notts

Throughout the strike, Arthur Scargill argued that it could be won without getting the whole of the Notts coalfield out — it would just be more difficult and take longer. His assessment is basically right. How — ever, the job of attempting to get the coalfield out was a major consideration for the NUM for the first four months of the strike.

Indeed, many militants have argued that too much was put in to it, especially after the second month and the firm consolidation of a semi-police state in Nottinghamshire, at the expense of sending pickets to steel works and power stations.

Whatever the tactical assessment, Notts was important. At stake was the unity of the NUM. All coal production would have been stopped if they had brought out the second largest coalfield in the country. In fact, the government and NCB kept the coalfield working.

How important was this? Coal was certainly produced throughout the strike's 12 months, but it was a blatant lie — if effective propaganda — to say that there was 'normal working'. The overtime ban started in October 1983 remained in force and was generally observed, cutting normal production figures by up to 20%.

The strike also cut production. The NCB itself reported a 52% decline during the May peak for the strike. For most of the time the impact was less than that, but even with the great majority scabbing it was still disproportionate because faceworkers remained the backbone of the strike.

Distribution was affected too. Despite the difficulty of organising a boycott in a coalfield where the majority were scabbing, there were sufficient railworkers prepared to take solidarity action to disrupt the rail 'merry-go-round' (pit-power station-pit) linking the pits to the long and crucial chain of Trent Valley power stations. At the end of August, Rob Dawber, secretary of the Sheffield and Chesterfield NUR District Council, reported in Socialist Organiser that "all movements of coal by rail are now more or less stopped."

But production was continued — at the rate of 300,000 tonnes per week for most of the strike, claimed the NCB. And the coal produced was transported to the power stations in massive convoys of scab lorries. The overwhelming majority of power station workers accepted the coal, and were little troubled by the feeble campaign run by the TGWU and GMBU in support of the TUC guidelines.

Most of Notts coal goes to power stations — in 1983, 70% of the total production of the coalfield, and 100% of the production of six of the 25 pits. With the CEBG with-

holding detailed information, it is impossible to assess how important Notts coal production was during the strike in helping the government to avoid power cuts, as compared to the massive shift to oil-burn and the increased nuclear output. But the government obviously thought the Notts output had more than propaganda value, as they showed by their frightened reaction to the threat of a national NACODS strike in October and the immediate possibility of Notts being shut down.

Throughout the strike, the Notts coalfield was commonly referred to as the 'jewel in Thatcher's crown'. Whatever the precise importance of the coal produced, the propa-

ganda, organisational and political value of the Notts scabbing was immense. It was a very large fifth column for the NUM for the whole 12 months, helping the NCB and government and also acting as a beacon and organising centre for scabs in other coalfields. It tied down and demoralised large numbers of pickets. It made more difficult the job of convincing other workers to take solidarity action. It helped bureaucrats throughout the trade union and labour movement evade their responsibility to organise support for the NUM. It gave leverage to the Tory-sponsored use of 'democracy' as an ideological bludgeon against the miners.

2. Why did Notts scab?

For most miners, the Notts coalfield is synonymous with conservatism and right wing domination. At the last election Sherwood constituency, with the largest number of pits of any constituency in the country, elected a Tory MP. There have been militant struggles in the coalfield — notably at Harworth, to break the 'Spencer' union in 1936/7 — but the reputation is made by different events.

The first coalfield to return to work in 1926; the home of 'Spencerism'; the main supporters of the introduction of an incentive scheme in 1977; the base of George Spencer and Ray Chadburn.

Conditions in the coalfield — thick straight seams, and relatively good wages and conditions — helped. Notts is not the only area with a right wing tradition but, unlike neighbouring Yorkshire (also right wing until the late 1960s), it has had little history of militant rank and file organisation and strikes.

The Notts coalfield came out in 1972 and 1974, following national ballots, but the issue in both cases was wages, and the area had suffered particularly badly with the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement in 1966. Following the introduction of the incentive scheme in 1977, which the Notts Area had championed, the divisions reduced by the NPLA reasserted themselves with a vengeance.

On the issue of pit closures — on which the Notts coalfield was relatively unscathed and had the promise of a secure future — the area was always going to be a hard nut to crack. In the March 1983 national ballot, only 19% of Notts miners voted for action in support of the South Wales strike.

The Notts Area did abide by the national overtime ban, from its beginning in October 1983 until the very last days of the strike in

March 1985, but an overtime ban is very different from a strike.

Was the national ballot issue crucial?

Even late in the strike, after nearly a year of strike-breaking, leading Notts scabs would proclaim that, if only there had been a ballot with a yes vote, they would have been out too. Coming from people who had refused to abide by the national ballot decision against a bonus incentive scheme in 1977, and who in early 1985 refused an area ballot on their decision effectively to break away from the NUM, this was disgusting hypocrisy. Most scabs, however, were not as cynical as that. Rather, the ballot was a convenient excuse for their unwillingness to come out.

The flimsiness of the argument was underlined in April 1984, when the Notts Area voted against the simple democratic proposal to reduce the majority needed in a national ballot from 55% to 50%. The only justification could be that they didn't want a majority for strike action, never mind the democratic principles.

But the issue still remains. If there had been a national ballot with a majority for strike action, would this have changed the situation in Notts? The answer must be a qualified yes.

Yes, a few rank and file scabs did regard the issue as one of principle, and saw the failure to have a ballot as a denial of their democratic rights. Yes, many more saw the ballot issue as a rationalisation for their unwillingness to come out. Stripped of it, they might not have felt strong enough to hold back. These people could have been won to the strike, at least in the short term.

Yes, the issue of the ballot certainly did give the leading scabs an ideal campaigning weapon to use with waverers against the strike — though even if there had been a

national ballot many in Notts would have simply ignored it, and it would have been preceded and followed by a legal campaign to declare it invalid.

Few people doubt that a successful ballot vote would have made some difference, but that was never the basic question. The key issue was whether a ballot would (as the Notts Area hoped) demobilise and go against the strike action. The strike against pit closures was the central thing, the ballot issue a secondary tactical point; it could never be used to jeopardise the struggle.

3. The attempt to picket out Notts

The alternative tactic in the fight to unify the NUM was to spread the area strikes through picketing. The main responsibility for picketing the Notts coalfield was taken by the Yorkshire Area. Originally the Area leadership tried to stop pickets crossing the border into Notts, but they were rapidly forced to change their position after rank and file strikers from a number of South Yorkshire pits seized the initiative and started picketing from Monday March 12.

Many have since wrongly blamed those men, and the officially organised picketing later on, for polarising the majority of Notts miners against the strike.

On Monday March 12, and Tuesday 13th, the Yorkshire pickets adopted a domino strategy — first picket out one pit, then move onto the next. They were initially successful. On Monday Harworth was closed by "the weight of the pickets and persuasive argument", as the scarcely sympathetic Guardian labour correspondent reported. On the Tuesday and Wednesday, they moved from Bevercotes to Ollerton and Thoresby. On Thursday 15th, David Jones was killed outside Ollerton pit entrance. This event and subsequent clashes, received a lot of publicity, and were used to back up the picture of violent Yorkshire pickets. But what was the real picture?

Frank Slater, Maltby NUM delegate who was involved in the picketing from the beginning explained in Socialist Organiser:

"...when Ray Chadburn said that the Notts miners would ballot but he expected them not to cross picket lines when they were formed, the rank and file of the South Yorkshire miners not unreasonably took this as a go-ahead for flying pickets...the mood on most picket lines has remained generally cordial, with Notts miners joining pickets and miners' wives supporting..." (SO171).

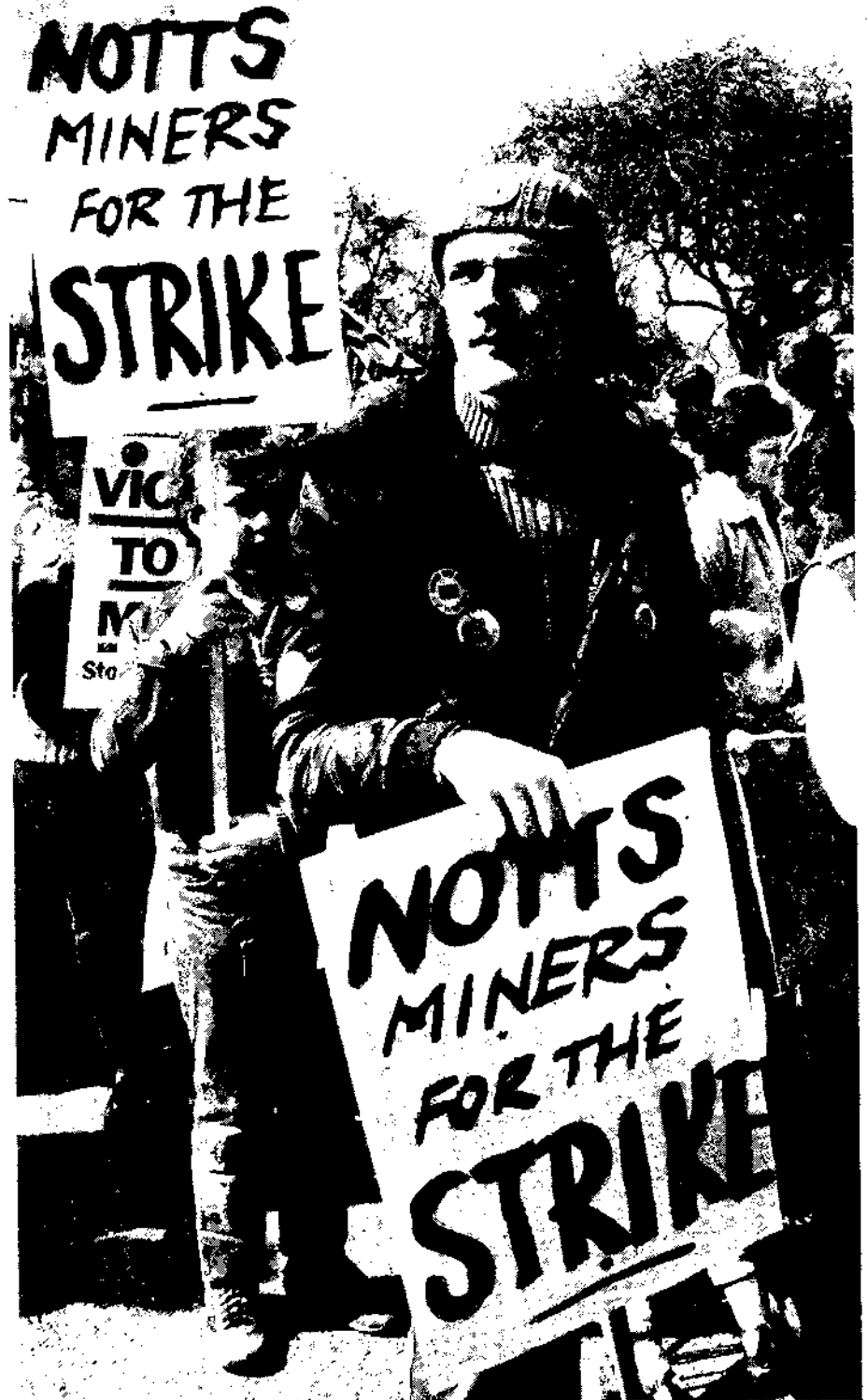
There was also clearly hostility. Frank Slater reckoned that the disgraceful role of most local and Area officials was decisive. More concerned with getting re-elected in June than with the fight against pit closures, branch officials either equivocated or openly encouraged strike-breaking.

And:

"...Chadburn gave us practically no support. He's not issued any clear instructions to his members. As far as I'm concerned, with the death of Davy Jones, he's got blood on his hands."

(Frank Slater, SO 171)

The other basic cause was the role of the police. Speaking later in the strike, at a Socialist Organiser meeting in the Rhodesia



7000 march in Nottingham to demand 'Police out of the Coalfields', April 29 1984

Miners' Welfare, Frank Slater described what happened.

Initially, the pickets were having considerable success. Standing on one picket line, they told the local Chief Constable:

"We've come down here to peacefully persuade our fellow members not to go to work. Fair enough, he said, pick out six men and I'll stop everything that comes in so you can talk to them. He did exactly that. I think there were three men went into work that night.

"On the morning shift exactly the same thing happened again. Then a riot van rolls up, and another one...I've never seen a provocation like it. That was the start of it, because we were having success..."

(SO 200)

Soon the whole of the Notts coalfield was flooded with police. On Thursday March 15, they waded into pickets outside Thoresby. Roadblocks were set up at every junction, in and out of the county. On Sunday March 18, Kent pickets were turned back at the Dartford tunnel. Police on picket lines made no secret of their orders — to keep the Notts pits open "at any cost". They succeeded in stopping the great majority of flying pickets, and walling off most of the Notts miners.

In April, South Wales miners from Cwm were arrested and charged after trying to leaflet houses in Blidworth. The May and June police riots in the same village were principally aimed at driving out Yorkshire pickets who were staying with local strikers.

Could the arguments have been got across to the Notts miners? Certainly, much more could and should have been done before the strike in getting the propaganda across to the rank and file. The need for it was crystal-clear after the derisory yes votes from Notts in the national ballots. Indeed,

when the pickets did get through in the first two weeks, a number reported that the Notts miners were hearing the arguments for the first time. But by then, police organisation, brutality and national media propaganda ensured that it was probably for the last time.

4. The responsibility of the area leaders

After the April 19 special delegate conference had put the dispute in the hands of the national officials, there was a concerted attempt by the NUM nationally — right through May — to convince the majority of Notts miners. On April 27, Arthur Scargill spoke to a packed meeting in the Ollerton miners' welfare, and then led the strikers and their families onto the Ollerton picket line. A number of similar meetings were held. The campaign culminated in a national solidarity demonstration in Mansfield on May 14, attended by 20,000 from every coalfield in the country.

But few, if any, scabs came to the meetings, and the Mansfield demonstration had no noticeable effect on the scabs. The campaign was a very important morale-booster for the strikers in the coalfield, but it didn't change many scabs' minds.

The number of Notts strikers did increase significantly at two points — at the end of the first week of the strike, and during most of May. On March 16 a number of Notts pits were completely closed down for the only time during the strike. In May the number of strikers approached 50% of the coalfield. In a number of North Notts pits over 50% were out. The NUM claimed a high point of 12,000 on strike; local strike leaders estimated up to 16,000. Around twice the 7285 Notts miners who had voted for action in the area ballot on March 16 were on strike.

The actions of the Area leadership were decisive for both periods of advance. In March, they called an official strike while the area ballot took place, and as a bargaining ploy to get the Yorkshire pickets withdrawn. At the end of April, strike action was declared official in the Area and remained so throughout most of May.

Following the national delegate conference on April 19, the Notts Area Council met on the 20th and officially called for strike action. On April 26 Area Secretary Henry Richardson issued a circular insisting that the official picket lines should be respected and assisted by local branch officials. Only after this policy was declared invalid by the High Court on Friday May 25, following legal action by leading scabs in the area, did the number of strikers begin to decline. By the end of July, the number still on strike had dropped by at least 50 per cent, to five or six thousand.

The advances in mid-March and in May indicate what would have been possible given a clear lead by the Area officials. So do countless other examples in different NUM Areas. In the neighbouring North Derbyshire coalfield, an area ballot showed a tiny majority for *not* taking action. But the Area leadership still called the coalfield out and, with the help of picketing (almost all peaceful), shut all the pits with a strike that remained virtually 100% for eight months. Despite votes against action, the import-

ance of a decisive lead from the Area (together with picketing) was also underlined in South Wales and North Staffs.

Such a lead never came in the Notts coalfield, and that is why there were never more than a minority of miners in the Area prepared to join the other 80% of NUM members on strike.

On Sunday March 11, the Notts Area Council met and voted for no strike action without a ballot. During the following week and in response to the flying pickets, a number of miners came out, but the Area and local officials — including Area Secretary Henry Richardson, who had been elected on a left ticket — while sometimes mumbling about not crossing picket lines — attacked the Yorkshire pickets and said the coalfield should be working until there was a ballot.

When the ballot was held, mainly on March 16, the vote was 3:1 (20188 - 7285) against the strike, with no single pit recording a majority. The 27% who voted in favour did represent an improvement on the 19% who had voted to strike in the previous national ballot, but in the atmosphere, and with the issues posed sharply, it was not a very significant increase.

On Sunday March 18 the Area Council met again and declared that Notts wouldn't be coming out unless and until there was a national ballot vote in favour. For Henry Richardson, the area ballot had given them "their marching orders". Only two delegates spoke out against crossing picket lines.

5. The rank and file strike committee

The Notts strikers were thus the most exposed targets of the whole state offensive against the NUM. Unlike in 1926, they were always a minority — for a brief period in May nearly 50%, but for most of the time 20% or less.

In some of the pits, only a small handful were on strike throughout — 16 out of 600 at Pye Hill. In no pit was the hard core much more than 100.

As in 1926, they were victims of relentless police harassment and violence, open occupation of their villages and blatant victimisation by the courts.

Pit villages in other coalfields suffered similarly at a later stage, but without the strikers having the double burden of being a perpetual minority in a sea of scabs and the violence that often entailed. The Notts strikers also had to contend with, at best, apathetic local Labour councils, and local government organisations in which the scabs were a significant influence.

From the 25 pits in the area, the only miners' welfare the strikers had regular use of was at Ollerton. In Welbeck, the

Socialist ORGANISER

Swing Labour behind miners' strike

MOBILISE!



Strike with the miners on May 9!

For the crucial next three and a half weeks the main demand of the Area officials was for a national ballot. Ray Chadburn was centrally involved in the right wing's attempt to get one. It wasn't until after the April 12 NEC meeting — the heavily lobbied meeting that ruled the call for a national ballot out of order — that Chadburn and Richardson called on Notts miners not to cross picket lines. Right-winger Chadburn declared: "Get off your knees and support the strike". Paul Whetton, at the time Bevercotes branch secretary, said that these statements gave "a hell of a lift to a lot of men".

April 12 was the first time that the two main officials clearly and publicly supported the strike. Just over a week before, after the transport unions had voted to boycott coal movements, the Area executive (on an 8-5 vote) called on Notts miners to respect picket lines. But this was overturned two days later by the full Area Council.

Women's Action Group had to occupy the village hall in September to ensure that they had a soup kitchen for the second half of the strike.

Despite the odds, though, as Alasdair Jamison wrote in Socialist Organiser following a solidarity visit to Ollerton in August (and every visitor agreed), "The fighting spirit among the striking miners in Notts is irrepressible." (SO 192).

Whenever the Notts strikers' banners appeared during the course of the strike, there was enthusiastic applause. Tribute was paid to them from countless platforms. They were, as Peter Heathfield said in February 1985, "the foundation of the NUM".

Defiant and militant they were still an embattled minority.

Largely because of the special situation faced by Notts strikers they threw up a unique rank and file organisation. But in other coalfields where strikers became minorities, for example, in North Staffs, similar organisations were not set up.

The Notts Miners' Rank and File Strike



Outside the NUM special conference, April 19 1984

Committee was formed in April. Pete Radcliff explained:

"In the early stages of the strike the lack of an organised left in the NUM outside the official bodies of the union presented Notts strikers with many problems.

"The right wing of the Notts Area NUM based themselves on the parochialism resulting from the productivity scheme. They had control of most branches in the Notts Area and held sway over the Area executive and Area Council.

"Those refusing to cross picket lines at the beginning of the dispute often found themselves supported neither by their branch, nor the Area executive nor the Area Council. Some also had no contact with strikers in neighbouring pits.

"There was real confusion. 400 of the 1100 miners from Cotgrave pit, for example, who were on strike from March 30 to April 6, eventually went back to work in order to campaign for a strike vote in the national ballot they thought inevitable.

"With Yorkshire and other pickets unable to reach every pit because of the police, many miners were forced back to work.

"When a North Notts (later all Notts) Rank and File Strike Committee was formed it was a turning point. Experienced branch officials on strike in the more militant North Notts pits organised a meeting on April 10 at Ollerton Miners' Welfare.

"About 100 miners from four pits attended. They decided to join forces and organise their own flying pickets.

"One striker declared at the meeting,

"We need our own area leadership for those supporting this strike. The scabs have got theirs in Chadburn."

"Before that the only coordination of the left had been the Notts Miners' Forum, a small though influential grouping primarily designed to mobilise the left vote in union elections. It had produced a leaflet early on in the strike, but it was clearly inadequate.

"The second meeting of the Strike Committee, on April 17, attracted 500 striking miners, including representatives from 17 of the 25 Notts pits. For the first time strikers from pits such as Hucknall and Cotgrave saw the possibility of a planned campaign to stop the Notts coalfield.

"The Strike Committee was also an important pressure on area leaders Ray Chadburn and Henry Richardson, counteracting the right-wing majority in the NUM branches. Chadburn and Richardson came out in favour of the strike.

"The Strike Committee has also spurred on miners in the weaker pits and encouraged them to form strike committees and strengthen their picketing."

(SO 174 and 177)

Paul Whetton, secretary of the new committee, said in SO 175:

"The prime objective of the committee we have set up is to organise the picketing in Notts — to get the Notts coalfield to identify itself with the National Union of Mineworkers and to bring the coalfield to a standstill.

"The second objective is to raise finance

to achieve that, with petrol for the pickets and hardship money for the single lads who have been out on strike for five weeks and haven't received a penny from anywhere."

Some strikers still refer to the 500-strong meeting on April 17 as the beginning of the strike for them — it gave them confidence, showed what was possible. The picketing that the committee organised was crucial in backing up the official strike call at the end of April, and getting a significant section of the coalfield out. After the strike, Paul Whetton said:

"If it hadn't been for the formation of the Rank and File Strike Committee... the strike in Notts would have crumbled very quickly; and we would have had the whole of the Notts coalfield churning out its full quota of coal. In fact, the Rank and File Strike Committee made a very valuable contribution in keeping the police away from other areas; keeping production down and raising the political debate, the political arguments."

The single Notts strike committee covering the whole coalfield was soon split up into North and South Notts Committees, linked together by a small coordinating committee. It remained in existence right until the end of the strike.

Given the balance of forces, the history and what had happened in the first weeks of the strike in the Area, the Committee was never going to bring all of Notts to a halt — and therefore cannot be blamed for not doing that. Its main — invaluable — job was to hold the strike together in extremely difficult circumstances.

6. The scabs organise

Meanwhile, the main strike-breakers began to organise openly.

On May 1 about 7000 scabs assembled in a mass demonstration outside the Area headquarters at Berry Hill, Mansfield. Although a number were bussed in from other coalfields, and they had the full cooperation of both the police and the NCB (buses were laid on, paid leave granted), it was still an impressive demonstration. They outnumbered the strikers who managed to get through the police roadblocks and harassment to demonstrate their support for the Area Council's pro-strike decision.

Later in the month, the 'Notts Working Miners Committee' was officially launched, although even earlier a letter appealing for funds had been sent to local Labour Parties (and to Tories, Liberals, businessmen). At the same time leading members of the committee won the legal action against the Area's official support for the strike.

The 'Working Miners Committee's' links with the NCB and government were clear right from the beginning, with open cooperation from the police and direct use of Coal Board facilities. The chair of the committee,

Bevercotes COSA member Mick Smith, was quoted at the time as saying "...the police want us to carry on". Later, starting with Paul Foot's expose in the Daily Mirror, the full extent of the links came out. MacGregor had put them in touch with lawyers; and one of his (and Thatcher's) advisers had sat in on and helped to organise the early meetings.

This Tory/NCB assistance helped the scab committee, though they also had a real base amongst the rank and file scabs.

The Committee presented an anti-strike slate for the June branch elections. With the police harassing strikers who wanted to vote, the scab committee swept the board. They gained control of all the branch committees. Before he had even taken up his position, the secretary-elect at Bolsover wrote to all the strikers: "In your best interests, I ask you to start work as soon as possible." The scabs also gained overwhelming control of the Area Council.

After this capture of the official machinery, the need for the scab committee receded, and it became only a platform for some of the individuals involved. By

December, the main scab organisers felt quite able to repudiate the Committee — it had become an embarrassment, particularly after publicity about its links with the Tories and the NCB.

Scab control of the official machinery also brought closer the formation of a breakaway union in the Area. Given their open strike-breaking drive, the possibility of them co-existing inside one union with the NUM majority became less likely (and less desirable for the scabs) the longer the strike went on.

Unlike in 1926, some of them probably had a breakaway perspective from the beginning. They couldn't move more quickly than they did because their base among the scabs was for strike-breaking, not for leaving the NUM and setting up a company union. Indeed, most of those who went back to work, and some who never came out, were hostile to any breakaway. They had to be lined up and manoeuvred slowly. In the meantime, and using bodies like the 'National Working Miners Committee', the leading scabs tried to help organise strike-breaking in other Areas.

7. The move towards a breakaway

Inside Notts, the scab leaders had to wait for the normal rule-change meetings at the end of the year to widen the breach. With a series of detailed constitutional amendments, drawn up by friendly lawyers, they cut loose from the NUM at an Area Council meeting on December 20. Later they first suspended and finally sacked Area Secretary Henry Richardson (and the staff that had supported him at Area HQ) in retaliation for the clear stand in favour of the strike he had taken from mid-April onwards. In February they organised for and won a vote to unilaterally break the national overtime ban. From December 20, they effectively had a breakaway union, and all their actions since then underline their determination to bring back a company union into the coalfield, similar to the one organised by George Spencer after the 1926 strike.

That they want to dress up their actions by denying the intention, by putting it in terms of defending themselves, by keeping the name NUM but gutting the substance, by — at worst — provoking their expulsion, doesn't change what they're doing — it just shows the problems they have in taking a lot of rank and file scabs with them.

The growth of this openly 'Spencerite' movement during the strike presented the national union leadership with major problems. It threatened the future unity and strength of the NUM. Under extremely difficult conditions they endeavoured to prevent a breakaway. Perhaps what they did — some threats against the scabs and some organisation, but mainly no action while the strike was on, and, at the end, attempted conciliation — was imposed on them by force of difficult circumstances. But

whatever the reason, these moves actually helped the scabs more than anybody else.

In July and August, the national union leadership introduced the long-prepared and scheduled new disciplinary rule 51, and then immediately insisted that it wasn't intended to be used against scabs.

Because it was never used, the rule was never a positive weapon against the scabherders. But the existence of the rule and the way it was brought in, gave the scab leaders another 'democratic' issue to campaign around. So it wasn't used? Most scabs believed the accusation that the national leadership had been forced to back off, but would come back with the rule as soon as they could.

The proposals to change the composition of the NEC, making for a fairer and more accurate representation of the membership equally backfired. Again, these proposals had been promised and prepared for before the strike. But again, they were proceeded with during the strike in a way that

was bound to be interpreted as an attempted blow against the scabs. And an ineffectual blow — the proposal was dropped in January '85, before it came to a NEC meeting, in a last ditch attempt to conciliate the South Derbyshire Area and prevent them joining the Notts breakaway.

Dropping the proposal did not undo the effects of the scabs' campaign against it — it probably confused and demoralised some strikers, and certainly it encouraged the scab leaders, who interpreted it as a sign of weakness.

The national NUM's whole policy was based on the correct idea of trying to avoid driving the rank and file scabs into the arms of the scab leaders: that is why they proceeded cautiously. But the basic polarisations in the strike had lined up most of the scabs behind the scab leaders, and the longer these leaders were left untouched the greater their chance of consolidating their links.

In the end, the national leadership was



Kent miners outside Nottingham Town Hall. Photo: Mark Salmon

forced to take some action because of the blatant breakaway moves at the Notts Area Council on December 20. But again it was indecisive.

On January 10, the NEC began proceedings to expel the Notts Area. At the same time, with the Notts strikers, it began a 'Keep Notts National' campaign, aimed at re-recruiting rank and file scabs to the NUM. By putting the issues sharply, and positively organising amongst the rank and file, the campaign rapidly gained support among the scabs. But it just as rapidly ground to a halt when the expulsion threat was not proceeded with.

Silence throughout February, followed by a meeting between the national officials and the Notts scab leaders, indicated that the expulsion had been dropped in favour of attempted conciliation. Scab leader Lynk and his friends simply interpreted this as a further sign of weakness. They lifted the overtime ban immediately and sacked Henry Richardson just after the strike for the 'crime' of supporting national NUM policy. The Financial Times reported that the scabs were pressurising both the NCB and the government to maintain their intransigence, and not to settle too soon — they wanted time to consolidate their organisation.

With the end of the strike there remains a de facto breakaway union in the Notts Area, which is part of the NUM in name only.

8. The strikers beleaguered

After the scabs' successful court action at the end of May, and the declaration that the strike action was no longer official in the Area, the numbers on strike declined during June and July. It wasn't a wholesale and rapid collapse, but a steady decline. By August the NUM accepted that 80% of the coalfield were scabbing. Bevercotes striker Stan Crawford accepted that "a low point has been reached in Nottinghamshire" (SO 193) and Paul Whetton reported that "Notts has reached a levelling-off point". (SO 194).

Between late May and August, over 6000 Notts miners started scabbing (many for the second time). In the next seven months — the most difficult in the strike — a further 4000 at most went back. When the strike was called off, 1500-2000 Notts strikers were still out.

By August the storm centre of the strike had shifted decisively to other areas, above all South Yorkshire. It was clear that the strike was going to have to be fought with the majority of Notts scabbing. The struggle in Notts became a dogged, defensive one. Notts strikers continued to make their presence felt nationally, lobbying the TUC Congress and NEC meetings; speaking throughout the country; sending pickets to help their comrades in South Yorkshire, but their basic activities were fund-raising and maintaining the pickets.

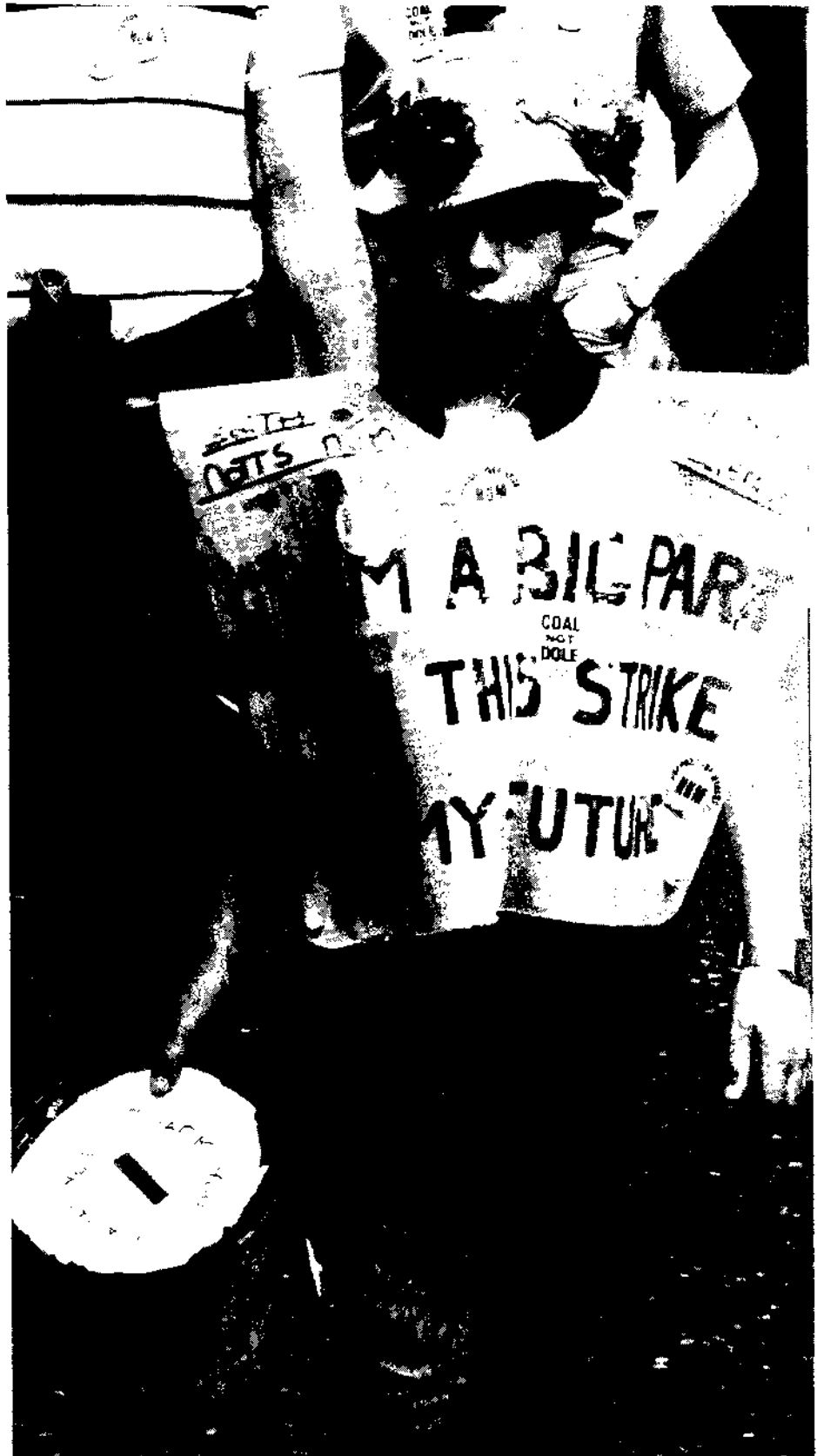


Photo: Paul Mattsson

With few if any of the NUM Area and branch resources available to them for most of the strike, getting substantially less picketing pay than most other areas, and with little help from local councils and other organisations, fund-raising was critical.

Picketing was maintained throughout, mostly at strikers' own pits. There were also, regularly, at least until December,

surprise mass pickets — 'big hits' — which helped to tie up the police and maintain the strikers' morale. There were debates among the strikers on picketing strategy. Wasn't it demoralising and a waste of resources to keep standing outside pits with little if any hope of turning back scab miners or transport? But then wasn't it necessary to keep a presence there and prevent other strikers

returning? As early as May, in Socialist Organiser, Bevercotes striker Stan Crawford argued forcefully to "go flying" outside the county. "We're just banging our heads against a brick wall here. The police presence here is so much, we can't do anything. We can't peacefully picket the pits now. So we might as well go on flying pickets." (SO 180).

The Notts strike committee did manage to send pickets on an occasional basis to the long chain of key power stations in the Trent Valley. Despite these power stations' central importance, direct national assistance was not given until the end of November to help the strike committees cover them on a regular basis. By early January, Paul Whetton reported "We're attempting to ensure that power stations are now covered by pickets virtually 24 hours a day, seven days a week." (SO 211).

The strikers also debated what to do about the scabs. In early August, Paul Whetton wrote: "I know that the vast majority of the rank and file on strike in Notts are saying they want to see something definite done about the scabs. At least the leadership has got to be disciplined. And not after Christmas, but now." (SO 191). By Christmas, when the scabs had taken their decisive moves to break away, the strikers were unanimously for the expulsion of the Area. The only issue was how, and under what conditions the rank and file scabs should be readmitted into the NUM. The overwhelming majority accepted that they had to be won back, to stop Lynk's break-away company union and to rebuild the strength of the NUM in the Notts coalfield.

9. Women in Notts

The women also organised.

In one of the scenes in Ken Loach's TV film, 'Which side are you on?', a woman in Durham reads out a poem written by Pat Davison from the Whittall Miners' Support Group. It was dedicated to the Notts strikers' wives, who "have had a hell of a time".

*Now here's a tale for all to hear,
As wives of the striking miner.
Search the country far and wide,
But you will never meet none finer.*

*Not for them the moppish life,
Staying home and crying,
Or sitting back while others fight,
Their part in the battle denying.*

*As living gets tougher we tighten our belts,
And despair the work to be done,
We remember your courage, our sisters in
Notts
And you give us the will to go on.*

*No mercy was shown you, no peace ever
given,
Your lives must be one living hell.
But always remember, though distance may
part us,
Our thoughts are with you, hearts as well.*

*When the years have rolled by and we'll
sit and remember,
The struggle our jobs to protect,*

*We'll tell them with pride how the Nottingham wives
Wholeheartedly earned our respect.*

*Husbands and wives hold up your heads,
Walk tall, look all straight in the eye,
For the tale of your courage through these
bitter times,
Will live on and shall never die.*

The women lived with the day-to-day effects of police brutality and the occupation of the villages; of being a minority in a 'sea of scabs'; and of having few if any official union resources or other facilities. In Welbeck women organised and undertook an occupation of the village hall in September so that they could continue to have a soup kitchen.

The women organised groups in every pit village from very early in the strike; these were soon linked through an all-Notts Women's Support Group, which later produced an information bulletin 'Here We go!'

They also got onto the picket line, with women from other areas (particularly Yorkshire), as part of the national campaign to stop the coalfield. SO 177 carried a report by Ann Crowder of the first such picket outside Thoresby colliery on Monday April 30.

"It was the first attempt, and a very successful one, at getting Notts miners' wives, women trade unionists and women activists out picketing together, showing the great solidarity that is growing..."

"They felt it necessary to organise a woman's picket to fight against the image that women are strike-breakers, to fight against the image that they are just fund-raisers, and to fight against being kept in the background, quietly working away."

"We also have to fight against the sexism of some of our brothers. The slogan 'Maggie Thatcher's got one, Ian MacGregor is one' has been widely used during this dispute. But we challenged the miners and at the picket the men present dropped the use of it."

"...We were physically jabbed back by the police who seemed shocked that we were fighting back...The solidarity seemed to shake some of the men and take them by surprise — it certainly shook the police!"

Women's Fightback carried a report of Yorkshire women from Thurnscoe going to Ollerton on April 24 to help the women set up a soup kitchen, and also to put the case for the strike across to the women in the village. When they had been there before they had got a good response: "...some of the women wanted to hear our side of the

story". On the second visit the police stopped their coach. "After a couple of hours...we decided that if the police were going to treat us like flying pickets, we might as well be flying pickets". They then walked three miles to picket Harworth, turning five lorries back.

The women suffered police obscenities and brutality. One woman from Ollerton, Brenda Greenwood, was thrown in prison for seven days last November. But the women went through a long and liberating experience of self-organisation and political activity. They are committed to continuing their organisation and their growing political involvement after the strike.

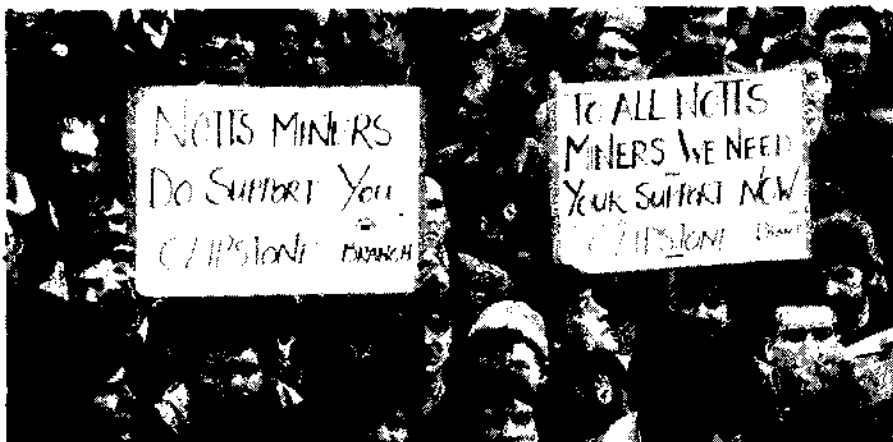
10. The Labour Party

Because of the close links between the NUM and Labour, it was inevitable that the battle in the coalfield would spill over, to an extent at least, into the local Labour Parties. Traditionally they were solidly right wing. The core of the 'Notts Working Miners Committee' were right wing Labour branch officials. Many other leading scabs are active in the Party. In Sherwood CLP in September, four of the five NUM members on the EC were scabs. Don Concannon, the NUM-sponsored MP for Mansfield, was reported to have complained at the beginning of the dispute about local rail workers taking solidarity action. At the end of the dispute, he addressed the scab-dominated Notts Area Council and assured them that they wouldn't be expelled from the Labour Party. There were persistent reports of striking miners being vetted when they applied to join the Party. In the first weeks of the strike, the County Council police committee, with a Labour chair, passed a unanimous vote of confidence in police chief McLoughlin's handling of the dispute!

But the right's control has been challenged. Newark CLP, in the north of the county, solidly supported the strikers from day one; it also submitted and got carried the strongest resolution against the police at the 1984 Labour Party conference. Paul Whetton spoke as the Newark CLP delegate.

Most of the strike leaders in Notts are active in the Party. The County Labour Party strongly attacked the police's actions and passed a resolution demanding not a penny for the extra policing, the withdrawal of outside police forces and a public enquiry into McLoughlin's behaviour.

Many strikers and strikers' wives joined





The NUM rallies in Notts - Mansfield, May 14 1984

the Party — as an arena for political activity; to help in the battle to defeat the right wing and the scabs; and to turn local Party organisations into instruments for the working class. In September Sherwood CLP processed over 50 new membership applications, mainly from strikers. 45 came from the Ollerton branch. In the village of Blidworth alone, there were 27 new applications.

Despite the right wing Labour Party links of many scabs, some of the scabs clearly want to use the sharpening conflict to cut union links with the Party. The 'Notts Working Miners Committee' held a fringe meeting at the SDP conference, and some scabs have been organising a campaign to withdraw from the political levy. Reports of the number who have withdrawn vary from 2000 to 5000, so clearly the main body of scabs have not withdrawn.

The County Labour Party blocked three scabs going forward to the panel for the county council elections. The three then appealed to the Regional Executive. Following an initiative by Socialist Organiser supporters, strikers responded with a statement about why they thought the appeal should be rejected.

The signatories to this statement included strike committee members Paul Whetton and Jimmy Hood, and the statement was also supported by Betty Heathfield.

"...The Labour Party, through the financial and political support of its membership for the miners, has gained considerable credibility in the eyes of the NUM membership. Hundreds of miners locally and many thousands nationally are joining the Labour Party as a result. This work would be seriously undermined if the Labour Party were now to allow scabs to go forward to secure positions of responsibility in its name..."

The Regional Executive supported the scabs. But the issue is coming up again at the 1985 East Midlands Labour Party Con-

ference, with a resolution modelled on the strikers' statement (again originating from a Socialist Organiser supporter).

11. The fight goes on

The battle in the local Labour Parties is just one aspect of the continuation of the fight for the Notts striking miners, their wives and supporters. It is by no means the only one.

On Tuesday March 5, they went back to work en bloc after the delegate conference decision to call the strike off. Management reaction varied between pits, but all the strikers have to organise as best they can against harassment and possible victimisations — with a union structure dominated by scab-herders and company-union men. They have the immediate campaign to reinstate the 26 Notts strikers sacked by the Coal Board. They have to continue the 'Keep Notts National' campaign, and fight to stop the development of the breakaway union. And they are also considering how to involve those politicised during the strike and organise a left within Notts NUM that is

not just a machine to get left wingers elected to positions but is based on rank and file struggles. Such an organisation is a precondition for a campaign to transform the area union, and prevent a recurrence of what happened in the 1984/5 strike.

The core of it will come from the strikers who carried on the fight for a whole year against tremendous odds. They have tremendous assets — militancy and fighting spirit, a wealth of organisational and political experiences.

Something happened right at the end of the strike that illustrates this better than anything else. On the Friday before the last delegate conference, four representative of the Rank and File Strike Committee went to France with £1000. The money had been raised from a levy on the picketing pay — 50p from £2, over two days. For some strikers this picket pay was their only income.

The £1000 was for the relatives of the 22 French miners slaughtered in an underground explosion at the Simon mine near Forbach. The delegation of four Notts strikers went to the funeral as a mark of respect and of international working class solidarity.

'It's woken the lads up'

The women's involvement in the strike... we couldn't have managed without it.

We've stirred a hornet's nest up. God knows how we're going to live with them when this dispute is over.

They're politically active and that's very important. If I'd gone down to our welfare a year ago and asked for women to go down to Greenham Common, I couldn't have got a car load.

Now if you go and ask, there's a bus load wants to go, because they have recognised what the women of Greenham Common are

fighting for.

The tie up between what is happening in our dispute and what has been happening in Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly clear for us to see. People can also understand now the harassment that ethnic minorities have to put up with, and we can now see the reality of policing Northern Ireland for ourselves.

It's woken the lads up...

Paul Whetton,
Socialist Organiser October 11 1984.



The critics of the NUM leadership

Even competent and dedicated leaders can make mistakes. Did the NUM leaders? Many questions have been raised against their tactics. Some are scurrilous, some deserve serious consideration.

The chief charge against the NUM leaders during the strike from the Neil Kinnock wing of the labour movement is essentially that they were *too militant*.

Their demands were too extreme. To oppose all economic pit closures was to seem to fly in the face of iron laws: some more moderate formula should have been found. They didn't address themselves sufficiently to broad public opinion, and instead narrowed their appeal to the dwindling ranks of traditional industrial trade unionism.

Moreover — so the argument goes — the miners were too violent, and their leaders were at fault in not condemning the miners' violence. Besides, their picketing was too heavy-handed: it antagonised the Notts miners.

The whole argument is scurrilous. No doubt in the coming months the universities will resound with the din of typewriters, as academics fill expensive volumes and glossy magazines with attempts to render this drive more profound and deck it out with quotations from Antonio Gramsci: scurrilous it is nonetheless.

The miners' defiance of the 'iron laws' of Profit First actually *broadened* their appeal.

By arguing the issue head-on, they rallied Professors of Accountancy, editors of scientific journals, pop stars and bishops to come out against the Coal Board — and, more importantly, they helped to generate a mass working-class support movement.

Compare the oh-so-moderate, ever-so-humble approach of the steel unions, who have constantly argued in terms of the 'viability' of this or that plant. They get campaign meetings with Tory MPs and Chambers of Commerce: but these meetings, much though they warm the hearts of Popular Front enthusiasts, build nothing at all. The result is a degrading business of different plants vying to be the one to be spared, narrow-minded competition to promote "Welsh steel" or "Scottish steel", and defeat after defeat.

The *class politics* put across by the NUM leaders built a broader popular movement (and not only among 'traditional' sectors of the working class) than 'moderation' ever could. Indeed, if a valid criticism can be made of the NUM leaders, it is the opposite one to the Kinnockites': that they laced their class message with phrases about the 'national interest' and did not talk about a workers' plan for energy.

On July 18 NUM-NCB talks broke down over the Coal Board's insistence that pits must be closed unless they can be developed 'beneficially'. It would have been good if the NUM could have countered by asking,

beneficial *for whom*, and by spelling out a definition of 'beneficial' in terms of human need, not profit — instead of just saying no.

Nevertheless, the distinctive fact about the miners was the class content that came through the phrases imposed on Scargill and McGahey by their Stalinist and syndicalist training.

Violence? How could the miners maintain effective picket lines against massive police assault without self-defensive violence? How would it have helped if Arthur Scargill had condemned miners' violence? Who would it have helped? It would have been about as useful to the miners as nightly appearances on TV by Margaret Thatcher to denounce police violence would have been to the Tories!

Again, any valid criticism would be in quite the opposite direction: that the NUM did not manage sufficiently to *organise* its self-defence, nor to press home the arguments about police accountability and so on.

It does seem that some Yorkshire miners started off with a distrustful attitude towards Notts miners, and that didn't help on the picket lines. But the answer is not the sort of numb indifference that the TGWU leaders, for example, showed towards non-striking or weak ports during the dock strikes — but more pickets, better organised, better trained, better primed with the arguments.

The question of the ballot

On the same level was the argument that the NUM leaders were "undemocratic" because they did not have a national ballot.

The argument is disqualified by sheer hypocrisy. Nobody balloted on the Coal Board's closure plan or the massive police operation. No-one elected Ian MacGregor. None of the born-again "democrats" complained in 1977-8 when Joe Gormley manoeuvred the NUM into area incentive schemes in direct defiance of a national ballot. In October, when the pit deputies were set to implement their 82.5% ballot vote for a strike, those same newspapers which had been howling at the NUM for not calling a ballot were encouraging deputies to defy the ballot mandate.

The strike was called according to NUM rules and endorsed during the strike by seven national conferences of elected NUM delegates. Not many things in Britain are done as democratically as that.

In any case — this should be said plainly — it would not alter the fundamental rights and wrongs even if the strike were called undemocratically. The course of history is not determined by meditations upon the concept of democracy, but by class struggle. The NUM, and through the NUM the trade union movement as a whole, faced an assault which had to be resisted, democracy or no democracy.

There was not much point in the NUM seeking the most exquisitely democratic ways to decide whether to resist or not: for not resisting would mean no effective NUM, and therefore no NUM democracy of any sort worth having.

Obviously a national strike sanctioned by a ballot would have been better than an area by area strike. It would have strengthened the NUM and deprived its enemies of valuable weapons in the propaganda war.

Would there have been a majority for a strike if a ballot had been called? It is difficult to know. Opinion polls taken from March 9 onwards showed a steady 60% majority for a strike. The area ballots in March showed some shift towards strike action by comparison with the 1982 and 1983 ballots. NACODS had a majority for a strike. But the question is complex.

Consider South Wales. In March 1984 it voted two to one against a strike. Nevertheless, the pits agreed not to cross picket lines. Pickets were quickly put on — as the miners knew they would be — and South Wales became the most solid area of the whole strike. John Lloyd reported in the Financial Times:

"Mineworkers at the South Celynen colliery voted once against striking and twice for a national ballot; yet these same men later went off to picket pits in Staffordshire and Leicestershire..."

"Well, I'm against a strike, I just can't afford it, but once we're into it, well, it's a different matter then", said Mr John Harrison, one of the flying pickets. He has one son aged 22, who has not been able to get a job since he left school. 'I'm going to Leicester for him'." (FT March 17, 16).

Although North Staffs crumbled during



Photo: Andrew Ward, Report.

the summer of 1984, it had the same experience at the start of the strike: a vote against a strike but a vote for not crossing picket lines which was bound to mean the same thing.

Notts voted 73% against a strike in an area ballot; yet it was very difficult to find a scabbing miner in Notts who would not say that he personally had voted for a strike!

So don't miners know their own minds?

Or what? When a worker votes for or against a strike, it is not the same sort of thing as a comfortable middle class person choosing whether to put their cross opposite Tory, Alliance or Labour. The worker is not expressing a preference about something relatively remote; he (or she) is deciding whether to undergo risks and hardships (very large ones in the case of the miners' strike) for the sake of a principle. (Very rarely, and certainly for no miner during the 1984-5 strike, do the immediately foreseeable material benefits from a strike exceed the immediately foreseeable material costs).

The South Wales and North Staffs votes are thus perfectly plain: those miners preferred not to have a strike, but felt that if other miners picketed to demand solidarity, then on principle they must respond. Many Notts scabs felt the same: but they didn't do what on principle they saw as their duty. Therefore they pretended they had been in favour of a strike and hid behind the pseudo-principle of a ballot.

All that means two things. First, that there is nothing sacrosanct about the individual ballot as a form of democracy. The mass meeting, where the fear of hardship can be tempered by the confidence of solidarity, is generally a better form for decisions on strikes. And "voting with their feet" in response to picketing, as the miners did, is by no means inferior to a ballot. In fact the opinion polls actually showed a 57% majority of miners *against* a ballot.

Second: it is not certain that the responses given to an opinion poll (which didn't

immediately commit the miners who responded to anything, and which may have been coloured by a desire to stick by the union as against alien pollsters) would translate into the same figures in a ballot.

Yet not calling a ballot may have been a tactical error. If a ballot would have produced a majority, then it should have been called. But the decision whether to call a ballot — say, in April or the time of the first national delegate conference — was a matter of judgement which the leaders of the NUM were best placed to make.

Price worth paying

A ballot majority would not have guaranteed a 100% solid strike, but it would have reduced the initial number of scabs drastically. The tactic of picketing out collieries — which was the only possible one without a ballot — did not work fully, and its partial failure seriously weakened the strike from the start. Given the length of the strike, the fact that solidarity from other unions would be crucial, and the high profile role of political accusation and counter-accusation in the strike (all of which were partly foreseeable from the start), any temporary loss of momentum through a ballot would have been a price worth paying.

Socialist Organiser supported and publicly defended the NUM leadership in March and April when they rejected a national ballot, though by April we also felt that we should not criticise them if they went for a ballot: it was a matter of judgement and assessment, and they were better placed to know than we. (According to Peter Heathfield, speaking in Crewe on

February 19, 1985, Arthur Scargill personally favoured a ballot at that stage [SO 218]). In hindsight, the choice not to ballot may have been a mistake, but it is still not certain.

In March many miners were open-minded about a ballot, though many also were against one because of the bad experience over Lewis Merthyr.

In mid-March two Kent miners told Socialist Organiser: "I don't blame Scargill for not wanting to put himself out on a limb again after being let down in ballots twice before"; and, "we'll have a national ballot in our own time, not when the Sun tells us to".

Alex Hogg, delegate from Cardowan NUM, Scotland, told us "The national ballot is a difficult question. But the normal custom and practice in mining means that — rule 1, you assist your neighbours if they are in trouble and ask you to; and, rule 2, you don't cross picket lines.

"These unwritten rules supersede the parliamentarians' laws." (SO 171).

By April opinions were hardening, as the right wing and the media intensified their clamour.

Kent area NUM executive member John Moyle told a meeting in Birmingham that week: "At Baddesley pit there is a pond, and I am told that even the ducks there swim around quacking, 'ballot, ballot'." Steve Shukla (Armthorpe NUM) said: "The call for a national ballot now is a strike-breaking effort" (SO 174).

After April 19 the ballot was a dead issue — except for the Tories, the media, the right wing and the scabs.

A general strike could have beaten the Tories!

Were the calls for a general strike just empty words? Given the inability of the labour movement to deliver some of the most minimal forms of solidarity, wasn't talk about a general strike an exercise in futile wishful thinking?

Socialist Organiser campaigned for a general strike all through the struggle. Tony Benn, Denis Skinner, Ken Livingstone and Jim Slater all called for a general strike at various times. South Wales NUM president Emlyn Williams appealed for a general strike when his area's funds were seized. The initial NUM proposal to the September TUC congress ("industrial action involving all trade unions") and Arthur Scargill's demand after the receiver was sent in on November 30 ("the most massive mobilisation of industrial action our movement has ever seen") were the same thing in different words. The "big bang" of industrial solidarity which Ron Todd talked about in August could only have been something near a general strike.

But nothing happened. There was no

general strike. And, as always, in hindsight it all looks inevitable.

But suppose the NUM leaders had been as half-hearted and fumbling as the major trade union leaders. There would never have been a miners' strike. And in hind-

THESE are the times when the political soul of everybody in the British labour movement is being probed and tested — especially of those who claim to be on the Left. Anybody in the labour movement who is no good in the miners' strike will never be good for anything.

The titanic battle between the miners and the Tory government is moving into its sixth week. Nobody but a political

steelworkers, scared into using scab coal by the threats to shut their plants, could have been rallied by the prospect of an all-out struggle in which they as a particular group would not run the same risk of being picked off.

child or a political idiot can now argue that this is not a stand-up political fight between the Tories and the entire labour movement.

(...)
We are strong enough to beat them. That's why we must fight in the labour movement for a general strike.

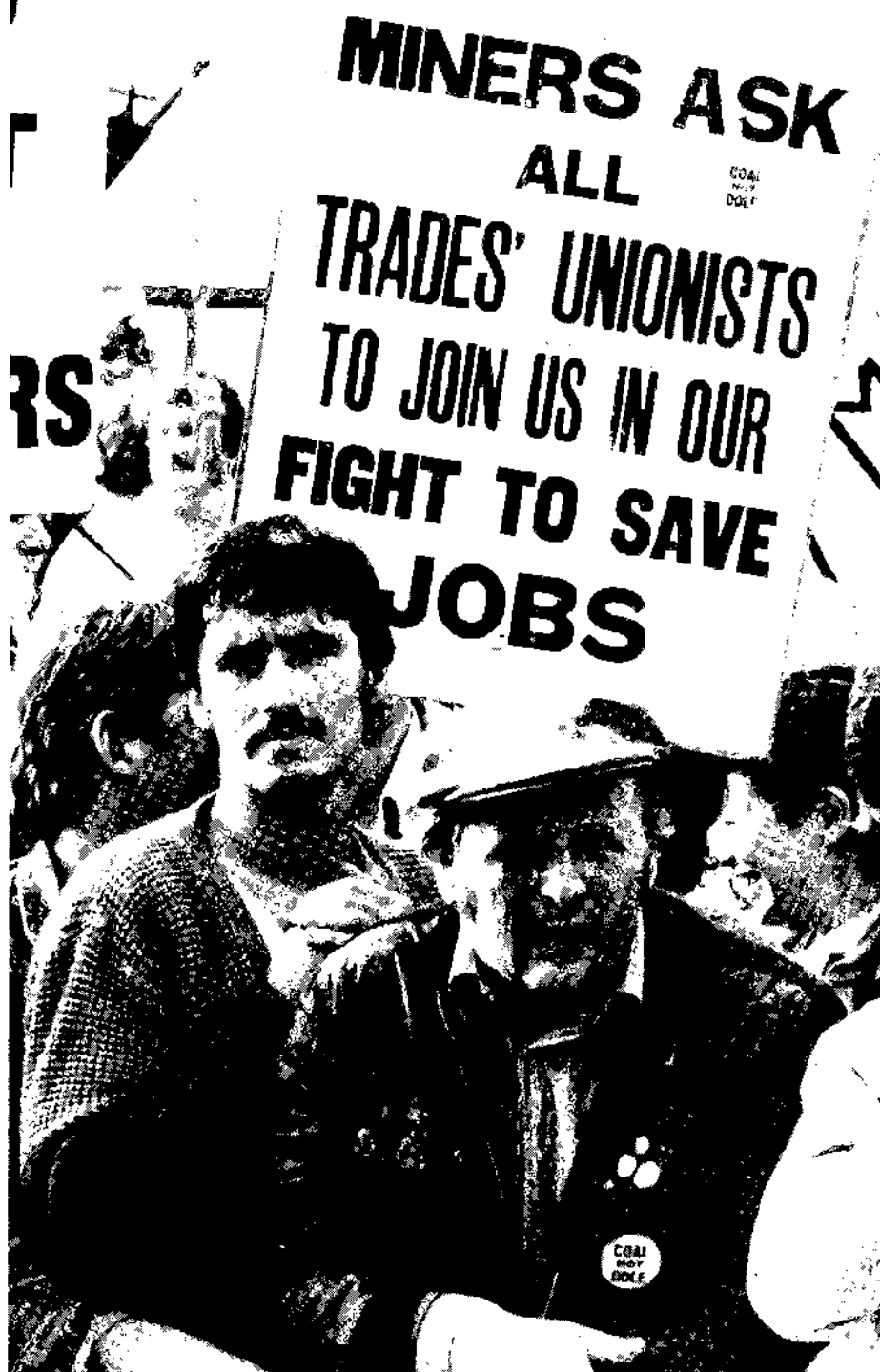
Socialist Organiser, April 19, 1984

sight, wouldn't appeals from Cortonwood and Polmaise miners for such a national strike have looked as utopian as the calls for a general strike now appear?

The failure, in many areas, of elementary solidarity, does not necessarily mean that a general strike would have failed. Even the

Fear weighed heavily on the steelworkers. But that does not mean that they had all become Tories. Far from it. Their treatment since 1980 had left a lot of resentment.

Working class history is full of examples of workers previously unwilling to mobilise



Miners lobby the TUC to demand solidarity. Photo. Andrew Ward, Report

on a minimal level joining advanced struggles. Take France in 1968: only three million workers had been willing to join trade unions. Ten million joined a general strike.

The miners' strike itself had an example of that pattern. In Scotland, the Polmaise miners had been campaigning in vain for an area strike to back their fight against closure. Then Yorkshire's initiative changed everything: within days Scotland's miners were solid in a strike against *all* economic closures.

Such a domino effect could have happened in the wider working class if, for example, the TGWU leadership had prosecuted the docks strikes more seriously. If it had stood up boldly against the law over the Austin Rover strike. If the rail unions had struck over pay and job cuts, instead of

twice doing a Grand Old Duke of York.

The issues were there to rally the whole labour movement: a halt to cuts and closures; trade union rights; civil liberties.

The Labour Party and the TUC refused to campaign on these issues. Labour leaders did not question fundamentally what the police were doing; they only asked for it to be done more softly: their most vigorous phrases were reserved for the condemnation of "violent" pickets. Labour's economic policy does not even promise to repeal all the Tory cuts — it is little more than an unconvincing plea for the possible good effects of more state borrowing. The TUC chose the September 1984 congress as its time to drop its commitment to industrial action in defiance of unions struck down by the Tory laws.

These failures of leadership explain well

"The time has come to say to other unions: Yes, we want your support, but not only financial contributions. When we are faced with Thatcher, MacGregor, the CBI, the Institute of Directors, we're entitled to say to colleagues in other unions: join us, come out with us in dispute."

Arthur Scargill, April 28 1984.

"I think it should be a general strike. Other workers should be supporting us. Why are TGWU drivers still crossing the line? Their union hasn't been doing its job properly."

MacGregor's doing to us what he did to the steel industry. I only wish we had supported the steel workers then. But it's no use looking at what you should have done in the past. We have to learn from these mistakes'.

Sheila Jow, South Yorkshire miners' wives' organiser

If we go under, then the trade union movement goes under. We want their support, but we also want positive action, including strike action. Eventually, it's got to come to a general strike to get rid of Thatcher's monetarist policies'.

Roy Barsley, chair of South Yorkshire NUM panel

'As the strike gains momentum the state will feel more and more threatened and will employ even tougher tactics against the miners. That should bring a lot of sympathy from other sections of the working class, and it could very well develop into a general strike situation'.

Steve Shukla, Armthorpe NUM.

Agitating for a general strike

The call for a general strike is winning more and more support in the labour movement. But 'general strike' is not a slogan that should be used lightly.

As Leon Trotsky put it in 1935: "But is the general strike possible in the immediate future? To a question of this sort there is no *a priori* answer possible, that is to say, none ready made. To obtain an answer it is necessary to know how to question. Whom? The masses. How question them? By means of agitation."

"Agitation is not only the means of communicating to the masses this or that slogan, calling the masses to action, etc. For a party agitation is also a means of lending an ear to the masses, of sounding out their moods and thoughts and reaching this or another decision in accordance with results."

Socialist Organiser, May 10, 1984

enough why a general strike did not happen. But they don't mean that the leadership could not be challenged, or that we were wrong to try to do that.

A general strike was necessary, so we made propaganda for it. It would have been wrong if, during the greatest British working class battle for half a century, we had made a cold *a priori* assessment in our heads that the working class could not rise to the level of action its objective interests demanded — and, on the basis of that assessment, given up on the job of propaganda for what was necessary. That would have been to let the setbacks and defeats

the movement has suffered in the last five years so oppress our spirits that we could no longer do the proper work of a socialist newspaper — advocate whatever the logic of the class struggle indicates and working class interest demands.

Some workers reading Socialist Organiser thought our talk of a general strike was

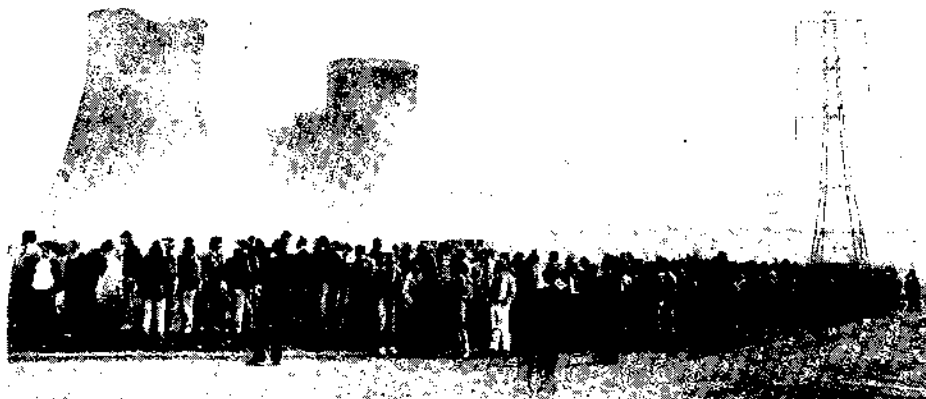
crazy. But most didn't. Most were sympathetic. They didn't think that a general strike would happen, but they thought it was right and proper that activists like ourselves should argue for one. They could see that we were in a fundamental showdown between the Tories and the labour movement, and that therefore the labour move-

ment should be mobilised 100%. Only they had no confidence about getting that mobilisation, and therefore they put very little pressure on the trade union leaders.

What could socialists do? We had to fight to raise confidence, to stress again that the issues were urgent and could not be dodged or postponed. Should we have followed the example of Socialist Worker, who explained that only collections could be argued for, not a general strike, or the example of Socialist Action, which campaigned for a national demonstration in London 'led by Neil Kinnock' instead of a general strike? Should we have copied Socialist Action in theorising that socialist revolutions are impossible in the advanced capitalist countries now, and for the next period ahead can happen only in the Third World?

If we did that we would make ourselves part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

There was no general strike. But even that does not mean that our arguments were wasted effort. Remember that the general strike of 1926 came just four years after the apparently crushing defeats of 1921-22.



Linking other workers with the miners

If the TUC had leaders like Arthur Scargill instead of the sub-grade office boys it does have, the TUC would organise now for a general strike.

But most of the leaders won't lead, so the rank and file must do it themselves. We need a general strike right now. What we ourselves can do is agitate, organise and prepare for it.

We must demand that the TUC calls a general strike. These people will only do that under great pressure, and then they would take the first chance to sell us out. But they are at the head of our movement.

In practice the way to a general strike is through the growth and escalation of solidarity action with the miners, and through other workers linking their fight to the miners'. Right now the Tories are weaker to resist working class action than at any time in the last five years.

One way to help the miners is to fight for your own claim. We know that Thatcher was mortally afraid of a rail strike coming together with the miners, and intervened to buy off the rail unions.

Socialist Organiser, June 28, 1984

This Friday's NUM delegate conference will be a very important one for the strike. We need to say clearly which direction we are going in.

I think we should be talking about going to the rest of the trade union movement and raising the issue of the general strike. We must get it raised from the rank and file to put pressure on union leaders. Many union leaders may well say: "Well, yes, we support you, but..." The pressure has got to come from the rank and file.

They should say to the union leaders "you bloody well support them". They must be put under real pressure so that the ground is prepared for the TUC conference when Scargill will be making his appeal for full support from the rest of the labour movement.

It's not just money we want but real support. That means action. Right now it means action being promised by rank and file trade unionists.

Paul Whetton writing in
Socialist Organiser, August 9, 1984





Yorkshire miners rally to defend their headquarters after NCB injunctions against flying pickets.
March 1984

The use of civil law

The civil law was used against the miners to an unprecedented extent.

A trickle of actions ended as an avalanche. The unfavourable balance of economic forces, the divisions within the unions, the lack of solidarity action, the consequent lack of any perspective for victory, and of course the deadening cumulative deprivation: these were the real reasons for defeat. Nonetheless, the legal apparatus — it is increasingly less useful to talk separately of the civil and the criminal law — played an important ancillary role in maintaining divisions, in obstructing the resonance of the union's case, in underpinning the Tory ideological offensive of 'law and order', 'democracy', and 'the right to work'.

It was clear at all points in this heroic strike, to Thatcher if not to those who overestimate the potency of her ideology, that her ideas, no matter how imaginatively and forcefully constructed and argued, could not win the day. It was the use of the law, not as confidence trick but as coercion, whether through police truncheons or through the state taking possession of the NUM's funds, that was in the end crucial to the strategy of capital and its captains.

Picketing

Mass mobile picketing won big strikes in the past. It could do so again. The dispute has seen the state assault on this basic civil liberty and essential tactic of class struggle — an assault developed through Grunwick, the steel strike, and Warrington — reach a new zenith.

If the right to work was to be utilised to

throw thousands of miners on the dole, the right to picket had to be rendered meaningless. A powerful stereotype of picketing, as inherently violent in all its forms, had to be constructed and propagated. The police must be seen to be acting to maintain a public order which was in the interest of all citizens by upholding the law.

The reactions of pickets to the police attempts to control law-breaking could be placed at the start of the reconstituted instant replay, so that the pickets' reaction appeared to come before the police action, not the police action before the response. The pickets, not the police, were the problem, the ignition key to the violence. 'Pickets attack police upholding law' replaced 'police attack pickets attempting to exercise a basic human right essential to save jobs and safeguard communities'.

Thus the law acted to close mines.

Kinnock and Willis joined hands with Chief Constables, magistrates, judges and Cabinet ministers to remake reality and add another warhead to the missile aimed at working-class communities.

The role of the state in guaranteeing capitalist political economy is illuminated in the interplay of police, criminal law, and the civil courts.

Chief Superintendent Holford stated in an affidavit to Mr Justice Lane: 'I have yet to attend a mass picket where violence and intimidation of working miners has not been the sole intention of those present'.

Taking the point, the Lord Chief Justice ruled that any mass picket is a criminal offence. 'Any suggestion of peaceful picketing was a colourable pretence... it was

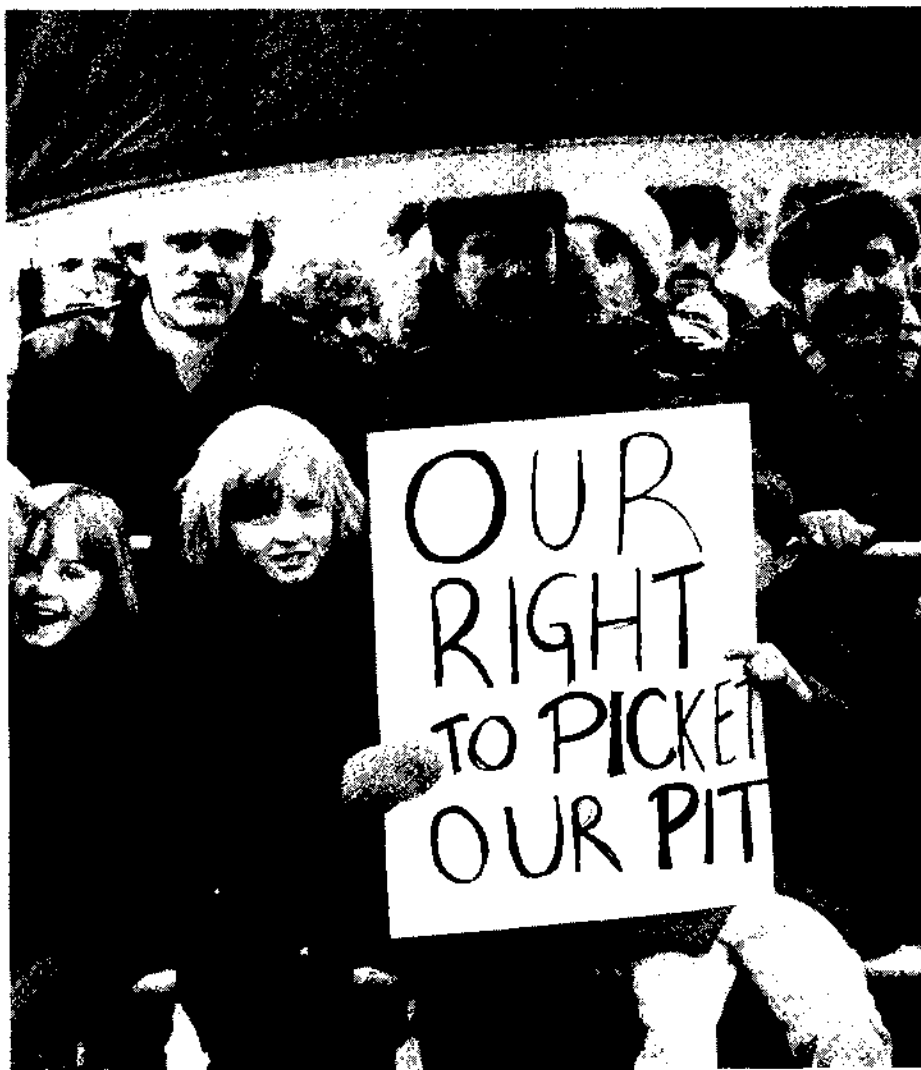
a question of picketing by intimidation and threats. It must have been obvious to all those participating in the picketing that their presence in large numbers was part of the intimidation and threat'.

These observations are then codified in the civil law. In February 1985 Mr Justice Scott issued an injunction banning mass picketing at five South Wales pits. The judgment was later extended to eleven Yorkshire collieries. Sheer weight of numbers, said Scott echoing Lane and Holford, was intimidatory even if pickets stood silent and inactive. The suggestion of the Department of Employment, in the Code of Practice, that six pickets might be a reasonable figure, was thus translated by Mr Justice Scott into a legal requirement.

Civil and criminal

And no distinction could be made between 'pickets' at the entrance and 'demonstrators' standing in the back-ground. The appearance of more than six pickets constituted a civil wrong. The union was to act as a PSU and police these rules, ensuring ineffective picketing, were complied with. The police would arrest those who resisted enforcement of the rules under the criminal law. Breach of the rules would attract an injunction against the union under the civil law. Refusal to comply with the court's order would lead inevitably to sequestration.

Yet if the court directives were to be complied with, it would be impossible to try to win the dispute. More broadly, the denial of the right to demonstrate by the



The community of Emsall village picket their pit, Frickley, in South Yorkshire, in defiance of the court ban on mass picketing there.

courts cruelly undercuts working-class self-activity in capitalist society.

"Thus", the Guardian commented, "do judges make our laws". Home Secretary Leon Brittan, they went on to report, had remarked on the very satisfactory state of the law on picketing. No change was required.

If throughout the dispute the main burden of obliterating effective picketing lay on the police, backed by the criminal courts, the civil law was always with us. The Coal Board felt that its use by the direct employer would be counter-productive. Its objectives could be met by other, better, means.

But the sequestration proceedings taken against the South Wales area by Reads Haulage in August can be seen as ending the first phase of the strike. The fact that union assets could be efficiently appropriated without any industrial action from other workers convinced the government that the strike was and would remain isolated. It also convinced scabs and their advisers that there was a way for hyenas to make a kill. The civil law process, if pushed to the limit, could (they now saw) constitute a powerful weapon against the national union and bring the organisation of the strike to its knees.

Contract actions

Unions have unfortunately long accepted that the courts should have the final right to adjudicate in disputes between members

and representative bodies. This idea not only erects a firm bulwark against union autonomy and democracy; it is a product of and a potent reinforcement of the conception that the state is neutral and the judiciary is objective and impartial, above class conflict.

In essence, the right of dissidents to sue the union is an attempt to de-collectivise trade unionism and to press its collectivised, active democracy into the individualised mould of the law of contract. As such it represents for Thatcherism the best possible mode of legal intervention.

If MacGregor suing the NUM might just have had the smack of partiality, who could

object to action taken against a powerful union by miners themselves, the victims of intimidation by their powerful and unaccountable leaders? Thatcher and MacGregor would just stand on the sidelines.

Of course, there was another way of looking at it, a way which saw rule-making by an unelected, unaccountable judiciary, independent of the people but of the state and capital, as an undemocratic means of thwarting the will of the majority of NUM members.

The repeated decision of the courts that the strike in Scotland was democratic and legal led to not a peep of approbation from a state which had made 'democracy' its basic touchstone. That it dealt in counterfeit coin, that the role of the judiciary was in essence strike-breaking, not democracy-creating, was highlighted in February when action was taken against the National Union of Seafarers, whose members were refusing to transport coal.

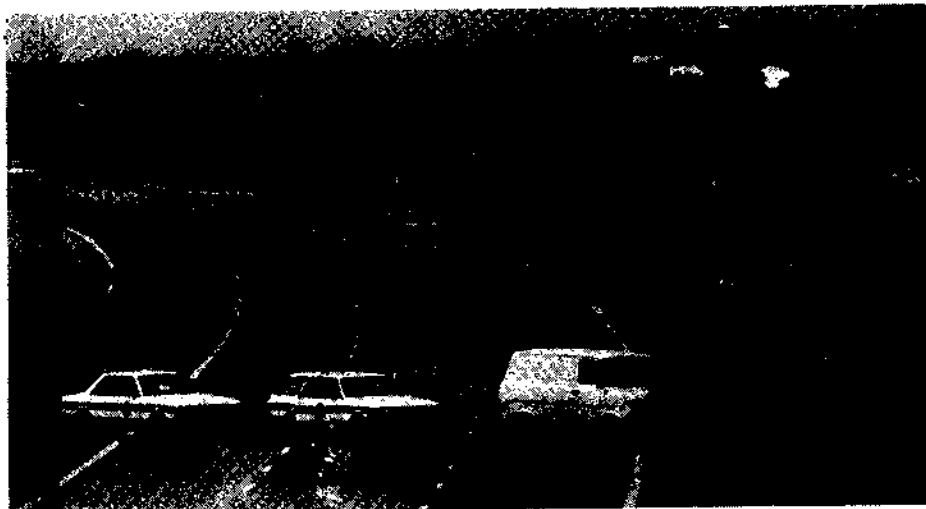
The judge refused resort to coercion. He would not grant the employers an injunction. Why, he pondered, didn't the union hold a ballot? They did. It was overwhelmingly in favour of a continued boycott. The judge swiftly issued an injunction ordering the union to do all in its power to make its members handle coal and scab on the strike.

In the early days of the strike the law was used by scabs to have the strike declared unlawful in area after area; to have the new disciplinary code declared inoperable; to have the special delegate conference outlawed. It was used to legitimise scabbing, build the confidence of Thatcher's fifth column, and construct the image of the hireling as hero.

By the late summer the second phase of the strike was opened via an intensive Cabinet propaganda offensive accompanied by a spate of individual rule-book actions by several scabs. The link between the two lay with people such as David Hart, adviser to Thatcher, MacGregor and the National Working Miners' Committee, and Tory lawyer David Negus.

It was Negus's masterminding of the impulse of the scabs to break the strike which led to the order for sequestration of NUM assets on October 25 and the appointment of a receiver to take over the NUM assets on November 30.

Having first attempted to appropriate democracy, only to have its aspirations foiled by the majority of miners, Thatcher's court now appropriated the union. In a falling-back on coercion in the ultimate inter-



ests of democracy, the union was taken out of the hands of its democratically-elected leaders, who for some reason still retained the active support of the vast majority of its members, and entered as a new item in the business portfolio of a Tory solicitor who was able to declare in all truth, "I am the NUM".

Thatcher's breakthrough

The experience of the civil law during the strike illustrates the limitations of Thatcherism as a set of ideas, and the stumbling block that state coercion constitutes for trade unionists in a period of general working-class retreat. The directive that they had no right to picket, the statement that the strike was unlawful, and the opinion delivered by the highest courts in the land that the NUM leaders were in breach of union rules — all of this had little impact on those who had committed themselves to the struggle.

Its impact on those who had taken up a stance of opposition through more obvious material factors requires careful tracing. It was certainly not determinant.

One ingredient in the failure to mobilise solidarity action was (it is argued) the lack of a national ballot, and the partly-legal offensive over democracy. In truth the most relevant fact was that a central NUM area was working — a situation which might have occurred even if there had been a national ballot.

But the lack of a national ballot, understandable in the light of the need for minority rights over an issue like the destruction of whole communities, or rather the inability of the national union to gain an understanding over this issue, provided the courts with an entry and with what resonance they had. This points to the need to reorganise the structure and democracy of unions.

The strike also signalled an important breakthrough by Thatcher in her attempt to

make her employment laws part of the fabric of industrial conflict. Initially the NUM boycotted the courts. Then they were represented. Then they appealed. Then they negotiated compromises. In February both Yorkshire and South Wales agreed to abide by High Court decisions and instructed their members to that effect. Finally, in March, South Wales area president Emlyn Williams told the court that he had purged his contempt by taking a lead in the return to work.

Whilst this process was going on we witnessed the disintegration of the Wembley strategy for opposing the anti-union laws, as union after union accepted injunctions against picketing and boycotts, held ballots on the closed shop and industrial action, and publicly declared that they would not advise their members to break the law or to ignore injunctions.

A programme of change

It is now clear that with the coercion available no one union can resist the law — and that in today's period of defeat and retreat, there is little possibility for solidarity action, which is the only sure way to defeat state coercion.

Like it or not, if we do not come to terms with this unpalatable position we will be denying the heroic effort of Britain's miners by failing to recognise the lessons of the strike.

This is not a recipe for giving up the struggle, merely an acknowledgement of its present constraints and the fact that the existing consciousness and the existing leadership of our movement are the products of decades and cannot — in today's circumstances — be changed in days.

We have to look at the question of the law in context. The strike was an important defeat, which has nonetheless created a constituency for socialist ideas and action. It showed the Left to be a weak force in

British society, incapable of rising by an effort of will to what was objectively needed. A study of the use of civil law in the dispute discloses the need not only to continue to press for opposition to the Tory law, but also to attempt to deepen our understanding of and opposition to the role of law and the role of the state in capitalist society.

We have to build on what thousands have learned in the past twelve months. We have to do this not merely by focusing on what workers can do now in terms of self-organisation, but also by working out a programme of change — a programme which can be carried out by a future workers' government, and which can strengthen the struggle here and now.

Recently Jim Mortimer, Labour's retiring general secretary, spoke about a future Labour government simply returning the unions to the legal position that existed in 1979. That's the legal position that allowed the NUM to be taken over. That's the legal position that has allowed the Coal Board to sack hundreds of miners and the police to cripple and jail thousands more.

We need to start discussing now how we replace the judiciary, how we transform the police, how we make magistrates' courts people's courts, how we formulate legal codes on dismissal, strikes, picketing and union membership and internal democracy.

It is time to move beyond polished critiques of the rule of law in capitalist society plus the vague statement that 'new forms will emerge after the revolution'. We need more concrete proposals for moving forward now.

Detailed blueprints formulated outside the struggle against Thatcherism may be elegant and arid. A socialist programme for legal change can play a role in strengthening workers' self-organisation and in deepening consciousness. We owe a responsibility to Britain's striking miners to make a start now.



Economics? Whose economics?

Capitalists produce coal for the same reason that they do anything else: to make a profit. Of course, coal production — as a source of energy — has an importance to capitalist production as a whole, too; so even if it is not directly profitable, the state may step in, like it did in Britain after World War 2, to keep the coal industry going for the good of capitalism *as a whole* (whilst paying out hefty compensation to the old owners).

But coal production in capitalist society is not based on people's needs. 'The Economist' magazine put the issue quite starkly from the bosses' point of view: "Coal is an extractive industry, not a social service." (March 9, 1985).

The NCB's planning is all based on such considerations. The coal industry is being drastically reorganised in order to boost its overall profitability.

Between March 1981 and the start of the strike, 41,000 jobs were lost in the coal industry. A pit-closure programme — for 23 pits — was withdrawn because of a threatened national strike in February 1981; but by October of that year, half the programme had in fact been implemented. In July 1982, the Board admitted to be undertaking a 'searching financial review' of 30 or so pits; by November leaked reports suggested that 75 pits and 50,000 jobs were under threat.

In mid-1983, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission claimed that 141 of the then operating 198 pits were unprofitable; the NCB proposed to lay off 70,000 men over the next five years.

This reorganisation was in part to be achieved by the introduction of new technology — like the extremely sophisticated MINOS system. MINOS (the Mine Operating System) is a computerised system for remote control and monitoring of activities in the colliery.

The NCB announced on March 6 1984 that 25 million tonnes of new capacity are to be introduced by March 1988. Half of this is to be the result of reorganisation of existing pits.

Half is to be produced by the high-tech development at Selby in north Yorkshire. By March 1988, Selby is to be producing 12.5 million tonnes a year, with a workforce of only 3,500.

South Wales and Scotland combined, with a workforce of 39,000, only produce 13.5 million tonnes.

That's the NCB's plan in a nutshell: expand the super-pits — scrap the South Wales, Scotland and Kent pits, and let the communities around them rot!

From the point of view of profit, it makes complete sense!

Throughout, the enemies of the strike condemned the NUM for the 'absurd' call for no pit closures. The law of profit was not to be challenged. Jimmy Reid went so far as to condemn the whole strike as 'reactionary'.

"In the long term this [the right to work] cannot be achieved by claiming a person's right to work at a specific job for the rest of his or her life. This would freeze the division of labour and would preclude any economic

or technical progress. If jobs had been frozen two hundred years ago, we would still have thousands of stage-coach drivers in Britain today, presumably driving stage coaches... To envisage people working down the pits for evermore is not just Luddite... but thoroughly reactionary."

Reid's argument is ridiculous. Closing down a pit is not like abandoning a stage coach. We will continue to need coal: but shutting a pit means abandoning presently recoverable and irreplaceable resources.

NCB policy would mean the reduction of recoverable reserves of coal in Britain from 300 years' worth to 50.

Pit closures do not, as Reid suggests, lay the basis for a bright technological future.

The history of coal

The British coal industry goes back at least to the Middle Ages. Until the late 16th century, there were only very shallow mines, with a maximum of a dozen workers.

By the end of the 17th century, there were many pits employing several hundred workers. These were by far the biggest workplaces of the time. Most were in Durham and Northumberland.

Many small pits were run as cooperatives. Some pits were worked by serfs; some had wage labour of the modern type; many were worked on a labour-subcontracting basis (this continued right into the 19th century).

In 1700 there were about 15,000 to 18,000 miners. The industry grew rapidly after 1800, with the Industrial Revolution. In 1841 there were 225,000 mineworkers (of all types, not just coal); in 1881, 612,000; in 1921, 1,249,000. In the mid 19th century Britain had been producing two-thirds of all the world's coal.

After 1920 the workforce declined steadily to 711,000 wage-workers [in coal-mining] in 1947. Nationalisation did not change the trend. In 1984 there were about 200,000 workers of all sorts in the coal industry.

They threaten to leave future generations without a useful source of energy. What technical progress!

With different economic criteria, it is the notion of 'uneconomic' pits or of closing pits with recoverable coal, which can be seen to make no sense at all.

Oxford economist Andrew Glyn has shown how the overall costs — of closing down pits, redundancies, dole, lost tax revenues etc. — are greater than the cost of keeping 'uneconomic' pits open.

He and others have also shown how the NCB's accounting for its costs are extremely questionable. Costs appear higher than they really are (in no small part because they include £400 million interest payments to the government) and profits appear lower.

And pits become 'uneconomic' because they have not received investment. Profit-

ability itself is often the result of particular decisions made by the NCB.

The essential point is this: from the standpoint of the capitalist system, based as it is on the search for profit, the NCB's pit closure programme is rational, good and necessary.

From the point of view of people's needs now and the needs of future generations, the pit closure programme is entirely irrational and disastrous. At issue are two radically different views of how society should be organised.

Or in other words, the profit system is — from the point of view of humanity as a whole — not a rational regulator of the exploitation of natural resources.

The profit system wantonly wastes natural resources. Closing coal mines is one example.

Even more graphic an example is the famine in Africa now. Drought has been able to spread and have such tragic consequences because of changes in land-use. In part of Ethiopia, for example, agricultural businesses started to produce cotton for export. To do so they had to take land from the cattle-herding nomads. The nomads were forced into lower-quality grazing areas; and over-grazing led to soil erosion. The result: cattle died, famine spread.

Throughout the Third World, agriculture has been reorganised by big agribusinesses so as to leave millions of people underfed, whilst producing food for livestock in rich countries. The meat we eat is an enormous waste of food energy for Third World peoples.

In many parts of the world, the basic fuel is still animal dung or wood. Often forests are chopped down to make way for export-oriented agribusinesses. The wood is then just burned where they are. The poor who depend on wood-fire energy then have to take it from the hillsides — resulting in erosion and loss of soil fertility.

Partly as a result of the crazy misuse, and inequality in use, of energy on a world scale, millions of people are currently dying of starvation.

Closer to home, while the Tories and the National Coal Board plan the closure of coal mines, young and old people die of hypothermia.

Capitalism also makes energy production quite often extremely unsafe for those working in the industry — coal is an obvious case. It is often reckless about pollution. The dangers posed by nuclear power are notorious; but coal leads to air pollution. Most of industry — within legal limits or not — pollutes the atmosphere and the countryside. Cars burning petrol result in terrible air pollution.

If the terrible by-products of energy production are the result of the profit system, the answer is to abolish that system and replace it with one in which different criteria — based on people's needs, and taking geological and ecological considerations into account — are the starting-point for conscious, rational planning.

And to be conscious and rational, plan-

ning has to be democratic. At stake in the strike also — as the NCB was so insistent — were the basic prerogatives of management.

In fact, the pit closure programme itself is part of a drive by the NCB to further dominate the work process in the pits. New tech-

nology plays a big part in this.

In the first instance, high technology operations like MINOS reduce drastically the number of workers, replacing them with less strike-prone machines.

Other systems like FIDO (Face Information Digested On-line) — dubbed 'the

watchdog' by face-workers — is designed to monitor delays by miners working on the face. Delays of less than 20 minutes cause workers to lose some of their bonus.

But new technology need not mean a worse life for workers. If it was to go hand in hand with *workers' control*, it could be a liberating force.



Workers' control- not NCB dictatorship!

Democratic workers' control, as the basis for developing a workers' plan for energy, could put an end to the inhuman effects of coal and other energy production.

In the coal industry in Britain, there is a long tradition of fighting for workers' control. 'The Miners' Next Step' published in 1912 declared: "That our objective be to build up an organisation that will ultimately take over the mining industry, and carry it on in the interests of the workers." A sequel to this pamphlet, 'Industrial Democracy for Miners', produced by the Unofficial Movement, argued for the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) to take control of the mines. It argued for direct control of the pit by rank and file workers.

Nationalisation, in 1947, did not bring workers' control. As South Wales miners' president Emlyn Williams has recalled, after nationalisation "it was the same management with the same aptitude for carrying out [the coal owners'] policy and not a socialist policy."

Developing rank and file control over production, and over the introduction of new technology, is still a dire necessity. An important part of that — one of the strike's demands — is for a shorter working week. That way, new technology could mean more free time — time to participate in politics as well as time for leisure.

The NUM's proposals go part of the way

towards such an objective. The union's Technology Agreement calls for: a four-day, 28 hour week with no loss of pay; early retirement at 55; longer holidays; radically-improved working conditions; an end to occupational disease; a dramatic reduction in injury from accidents; retraining in new skills; and the opening up of new jobs for young people.

Workers' control in energy really needs to be international. Some countries have lots of oil or coal or hydroelectric potential, others little; but people everywhere need energy. Rational energy planning — to deal with problems like famine — would have to be international.

International planning would have to attempt to rationalise and integrate different kinds of energy production, and deal with the problems they pose now.

All energy production raises a big problem. Most of our sources of energy are finite — that is, sooner or later, they will run out. To burn up energy that is not renewable, therefore, threatens to leave future generations with nothing but a return to the Dark Ages.

There's been a lot of scare-mongering even so. A study by a Yale University professor in the early 1970s presented the following picture of world reserves of energy resources. Recoverable coal reserves stand at six trillion tons, or enough to fill

all world energy needs at today's consumption rates, for 500 years. Total recoverable petroleum reserves stand at 200 billion tons — 60 years' worth. Reserves of natural gas stand at 150 trillion cubic metres, or 150 years' worth. Largely unexploited oil shale reserves are believed to be around 200 times greater than those of conventional oil.

Nevertheless, it is important to think of the future, and to find *renewable* sources of energy. At the moment the major source of energy being developed with the potential for indefinite production is nuclear power — which has big attendant problems.

Partly, nuclear power is being developed because it has some important *political* advantages for the ruling class. The Tories are deliberately developing a nuclear programme which, as one report put it "would have the advantage of removing a substantial portion of electricity production from the dangers of industrial action by coal miners and transport workers."

In other words, nuclear power is being developed in order to weaken the NUM.

The nuclear industry has a very authoritarian regime, which potentially threatens civil liberties more generally. The Atomic Energy Authority, for example, has its own police force.

Safety regulations enforced from the top down can be used to discipline the workforce. It has been known for workers to be

directed to work in 'hot' areas, where they will be exposed to more than the 'permitted' dose of radiation, and so have to be laid off.

And after banning unions at GCHQ, the Tories have set the scene for banning unions (or at least severely circumscribing them) in the nuclear power industry, on grounds of 'national security'.

Nuclear power is clearly not safe. There have been many cases of illness and death from radiation. The Windscale fire of 1957 undoubtedly led to cases of cancer. Areas around Sellafield and Sizewell 'A' are now showing increased rates of leukemia.

Safety precautions could, of course, be improved; and possibly, the danger of leaks and so on could be completely eliminated. The real problem with nuclear power is that of waste.

At present, no one knows what to do with this waste, which will remain dangerous for thousands of years. Environmental and trade union groups put a stop to sea-dumping, while burial underground has met with community opposition. Possible solutions range from firing the waste into outer space (presumably extremely expensive and itself wasteful of energy), to burying the waste in gold containers, which do not corrode and also hold in radiation.

Present Labour Party policy does not deal with the issues at all. It is committed to the British-produced Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactor (AGR), condemning PWRs for being American! AGRs have been years late in completion and have barely managed more than a few months of continuous operation.

And the Labour Party has little to say on the scandal of Britain's uranium imports from Namibia, never mind the appalling conditions that uranium miners work under.

It may or may not prove possible to make nuclear power safe: it presently seems very unlikely. For sure, a government committed to capitalism could not be trusted to make it safe.

It is possible that nuclear fusion, if it is developed, might be safer (it has no comparable waste problem). But for now it has not been developed, and many argue it will have its own problems.

Apart from nuclear power, there are many other actual or potential sources of renewable energy. Wind is already being harnessed as energy — in some cases as big business. Hydro-electric power has been developed in many parts of the world.

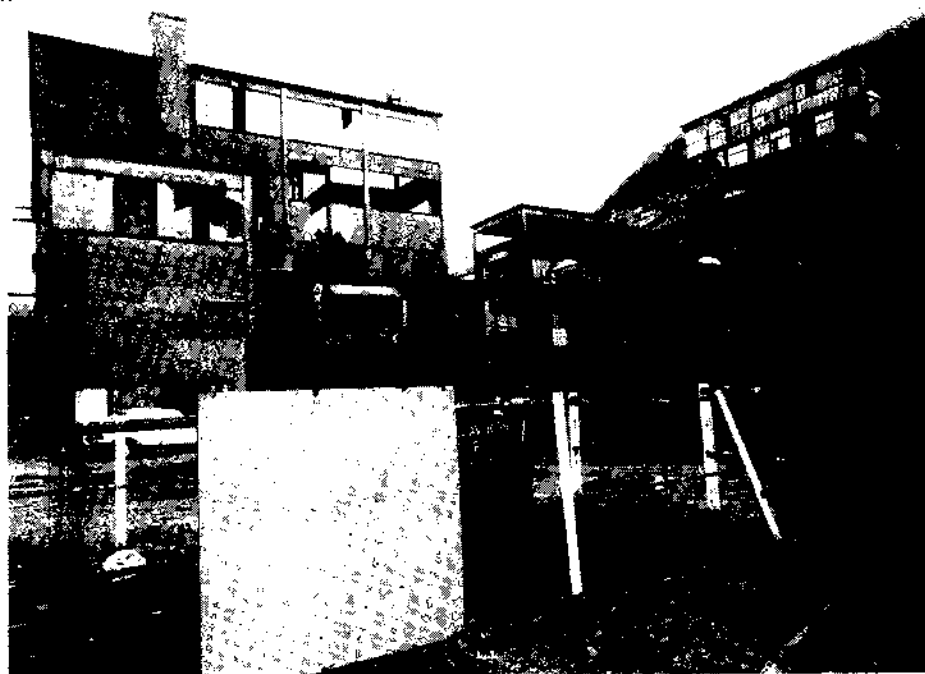
Other ideas for renewable energy sources include solar energy, geo-thermal energy and wave power.

Coal was one of capitalism's earliest sources of energy. It has been displaced by oil and gas (and nuclear power) more recently as the main source of energy; but as its reserves are greater it is likely to make a come-back.

Various techniques that would both increase the present reserves of exploitable coal (coal gasification *in situ*, i.e. underground), and reduce air pollution, are not being developed because of cost. In fact more money is being spent on researching nuclear power.

Some people — not always hostile to the miners' strike — have argued that coal production should be put to an end. Renewable sources should be used instead, they argue; and mining is such a hard and dangerous job that no one should have to — or be allowed — to do it.

If the jobs lost in coal were going to be replaced by new ones, more would be wanted



those new jobs and it did not mean destroying whole communities; then there might be some sense to this argument. No such arrangement is on offer under capitalism!

And it is still not at all clear that coal would be abandoned in a rational energy plan, even if new, renewable energy sources are developed.

Coal is a basic raw material which, with new technology, can be processed to replace both oil and gas ('liquefaction' and 'gasification'). It contains all sorts of valuable chemicals, and is useful as an input to the petrochemical industry as well as for burning.

Various new technologies for using coal are available now but are not being developed. These have the advantage of being environmentally sound — or at least far less harmful than present techniques. 'Fluidised Bed Combustion', for example could reduce pollution by 89%.

Mining can be made safer and less arduous. New technology can potentially reduce necessary face-working to a bare minimum. If this does not lead to job loss, its advantages are obvious.

Workers' control is therefore the key to providing for the rational use of our energy resources. Workers' control over energy: but based on fundamentally different criteria to those of the profit system.

Michael Tanzer, in his book 'The Energy Crisis' put the basic issue very well:

"Within the capitalist world, not only is there vast inequality of income, but basic mechanisms exist to ensure that the gap between needs and resources, between poverty and opulence, both within and among countries, will never be budged. Only a genuine social revolution within each country can make possible the rational use of its own economic and energy resources. And only a genuine social revolution in every country can make possible the rational use of all resources on a worldwide basis."

Linking together workers throughout the energy industry on an international basis would be an important step. We need to develop basic forms of organisation and solidarity to make it possible for the working class to take on the energy monopolies, defeat them, and set about reorganising the world's energy.

History of the NUM

The first miners' union of any strength was in Northumberland and Durham in the early 19th century. It fought a 2½-month lockout in 1831, despite marines and cavalry being drafted in.

That union soon collapsed; but by 1844 a Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland claimed 70,000 members. A four months' strike by it in Northumberland and Durham in 1844 was eventually defeated by the eviction of the miners from their tied cottages and the recruitment of scabs.

In 1863 a National Miners' Union was formed by Alexander Macdonald, who in 1874 was the first worker to become an MP — as a Liberal. The slump of 1878-9 severely weakened both this union and the Amalgamated Association of Miners, formed in 1889.

Finally, in 1888, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was set up, the direct forerunner of the NUM.

The MFGB was not always left-wing: it refused to join the Labour Party when it was founded, backing the Liberals until 1909. But in 1912 it fought a tremendous and victorious strike which established it as by far the strongest union (or rather, federation of unions) in Britain. In 1914 the MFGB counted more than one quarter of all TUC trade unionists: 762,000 out of 2,682,000.

The MFGB reached its peak in 1920, with 945,000 members. The South Wales miners, in July 1921, voted to affiliate to the Communist International: Lenin hailed this as maybe "the beginning of the really communist mass movement" in Britain.

But defeats in 1921 (Black Friday) and 1926 weakened the miners. When the MFGB was transformed into the NUM, on January 1 1945, the new union was one of the bastions of the right wing in the labour movement. It had 548,000 members in 1947.

The National Power Loading Agreement of 1966, making wages a national issue, was the basis for a revival of militancy shown especially by the Yorkshire strike of 1969. In 1972 and in 1974 the miners defeated the Tories over pay, and in May 1974 the right-wing regime in the Yorkshire NUM was finished off as Arthur Scargill was elected area president.

Rule of law? Whose law?



Maltby, South Yorkshire, September 1984. Ian Wright from Hammersmith miners' support committee lies battered by police truncheons. His 'crime' was to be caught up in a police charge and not be quick enough to escape. Photo. John Sturrock, Network.



Riot cop (minus identification number) attacks picket, Maltby, September 1984. Photo: John Sturrock, Network.

A national anti-picket police

During the miners' strike, all sorts of existing laws — dating from 1361, or dating from 1982 — were interpreted with great ruthlessness against the miners. Shouting 'scab' became threatening behaviour; a foot on the road became obstruction; presence at a mass picket became a breach of the peace.

Old laws on 'riot', 'unlawful assembly' and conspiracy — carrying five year sentences or more — were dug up from legal graveyards. Civil laws and guidelines enacted in Tory trade union legislation were treated like criminal law as grounds for police action. New 'laws' were created by the police, supported by an uncritical judiciary and government, without any parliamentary debate or consultation.

A national anti-picket police operation was coordinated at the National Reporting Centre at Scotland Yard by the Association of Chief Police Officers — despite the fact that neither this centre nor the ACPO had any legal status. The police in Britain are supposed to be regionally controlled, but local police authorities that tried to restrain

or curtail their local force's participation in this national operation discovered that they had no power to do so. While the NRC collaborated closely with officials from the Home Office and with the Home Secretary, their secret deliberations were subject to no

Parliamentary or public scrutiny.

Roadblocks were set up, turning Nottinghamshire in particular into a no-go area for striking miners and many other citizens, especially in the early weeks of the strike.

A total of 290,000 picketing miners (in

A class-war government

There has been a great deal of hypocrisy about the government not intervening. They are deeply involved. The police are preventing peaceful picketing. They have set up road blocks, introduced curfews in the villages and provoked on the picket lines. There have been cavalry charges against unarmed pickets. That is a disgrace to the British police for which the government are responsible.

(...)

The magistrates have come in and introduced bail conditions that amount to a sentence — a sort of exclusion zone —

for those who have been convicted of nothing. Much has been made of the crudity of the way in which the government have turned off every source of funds, including social security, to starve the miners back to work. They have "deemed" that the miners have been getting strike pay when in fact they have not. They have cut maternity grants and excluded from strike pay workers who have been only indirectly involved and were never employees of the NCB.

Tony Benn, speaking in the House of Commons, June 7, 1984

England and Wales) were turned back on legally far-fetched grounds, mainly that if they continued they might cause a breach of the peace. Most miners who refused to return were harassed, roughed up, or arrested.

By September, 4,000 miners had been barred from picketing away from their own pit, or sometimes even curfewed, through bail conditions. They would be arrested — mainly on small charges on which a police officer's word is almost always enough to secure conviction and then served with these 'standard' bail conditions.

In other words, the courts, in conjunction with the police took the power to put a curfew or semi-curfew on any miner whom they chose to single out.

Arbitrary

Arrests at picket lines and demonstrations were often plainly arbitrary by legal standards. Snatch squads would plunge into the miners' lines to seize selected individuals — who could then be sacked by the NCB on the grounds of their arrest.

Once arrested, miners were forced to give fingerprints, be photographed, and face questions about their politics. They were not given the chance to refuse, though legally they had every right to do so. Their only redress would be an official complaint, which is entirely useless, or a civil suit, which might give them satisfaction at a hearing in some months' time, or more likely might not, since it would often be their word against the police.

The police used great violence on the picket lines and in pit villages. Frequently when they went into action their first concern was to drive away photographers sympathetic to the miners — by force if necessary.

Squads

The police were organised into militaristic riot squads, grouped around special police support units, backed by a cavalry and given a go-ahead by the courts and the government for the exercise of force. Numerous cases of assault on strikers have been documented. Many were severely injured.

At all levels the police and the courts revealed strong and often explicit partiality in favour of those exercising 'the right to work' (i.e. to break the strike) against those exercising a right to picket (i.e. wave good-bye behind a mass of police to a speeding coach or lorry). Chief Constables likened pickets to terrorism. On the ground, no police cited 'breach of the peace' to prevent a small minority of non-strikers walking through the pickets of the vast majority.

Criminalisation

Taken together these measures meant a virtual criminalisation of pickets and a deep erosion of the hard-won liberty of workers to display their collective strength and persuade peacefully others to join them.

A series of other events during the strike brought the whole state machine, not just the police and courts, into question.

Sarah Tisdall was jailed for leaking to the Guardian documents about the government's political management of the installation of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common. At Molesworth 1500 Royal Engineers went in, with military police, to clear a peace camp. Clive Ponting, a civil servant who leaked documents that embarrassed

the Tories over the Belgrano affair, was saved only by a courageous jury from a vindictive government and judge. Ex-agent Cathy Massiter revealed that MIS was watching CND and trade union activists; and the authorities banned these revelations from television.

Police versus democracy

The official view of the police is that they serve the interests of the community as a whole.

In both theory and practice, however, democratic accountability of the police is restricted in the extreme. The general rule is that the more democratic the body to which the police are accountable, the

fewer powers that body has.

To put the matter bluntly, real power over the police is kept well away from ordinary citizens or their elected representatives. Democracy and the police are at opposite poles of social life.

Socialist Organiser, August 2, 1984





Scargill arrested at Orgreave, Wednesday May 30 1984



State power: Who rules?

Britain appears to be democratic. Everyone has a vote, and all major decisions are taken by our elected representatives. But appearances are deceptive.

Who ever voted for the police operation against the miners, and the long process of planning, going back at least twelve years to 1972.

Who ever elected the chief constables who directed this operation?

Parliament is only one face of the system by which we are ruled. The body of that system is the permanent state machinery — civil service, armed forces, police, prisons, courts.

This machinery shapes the decisions of parliamentary governments far more than those governments shape it. And it takes many decisions and does many things with no reference to Parliament at all.

The police build-up for anti-strike operations — which continued steadily under both Tory and Labour governments, with never any parliamentary decisions — is one example.

Some state forces, like MI5, are not even in theory accountable to Parliament. It is likely that during the last Labour government MI5 was actually spying on some ministers.

But the state machine is not a completely independent force. It rules in the interest of the capitalist class — the top five per cent or so who own and control industry, commerce and finance.

This is for three reasons.

*The top ranks of the state machine are closely tied to the capitalist class personally.

Four judges out of five, for example, went to public schools. 90% of army officers of the rank of Lieutenant-General and above, and two-thirds of civil servants of the rank of under-secretary or above, went to public schools.

Police chiefs are generally less upper-crust in their backgrounds. But none of them could get where they are without being firm supporters of the present social system — or without becoming fairly well-off.

In 1984 the Chief Constable of Derbyshire was suspended for having spent tens of thousands of pounds improperly on his 'executive suite'. That tells us something about the style in which they live.

*The bankers and bosses, having immense power directly through their economic position, are much better able to influence the state machine than any other group.

*Even apart from the personal background of the top people, and the influence of big business on them — and these things vary from country to country — the state machine is a machine for administering, stabilising and reconciling society as it is.

Its most basic structures and rules of functioning tie it to the defence of private

"An appeal to more than 100 leading British businessmen has raised over £30,000 in the past three weeks in support of a fund for miners who want to go back to work..."

A written appeal for money to help the anti-strike miners is being circulated among chairmen, chief executives and managing directors of major companies."

Financial Times, August 1984.

property and of the 'good' — that is, profitable — functioning of the economy.

So the state is not neutral. It serves the ruling class. How it serves the ruling class — through what forms and procedures — varies.

The Tories' regime is not a fascist system, or a police state — not like Nazi Germany, where even the Kinnocks, Murrays and Willises were thrown into jail, or Argentina where tens of thousands of trade unionists disappeared without trace.

A more accurate description of what has been happening is that the Tories are shifting Britain towards the capitalist norm of violent class battles.

In other countries — even the prosperous USA — bloodshed and even gunfights on the picket lines have long been routine.

But the police operation against the miners did exceed anything seen in Britain for a long while by its brutality, and by the openness with which it was proclaimed that the state, the umpire in the class struggle, was in fact on the side of the scab against militant trade unionism.

On the side of the scab meant, in fact, on the side of the bosses whom those scabs serve.

What is the ruling class? A hundred different definitions could be given of the 'top people', by different aspects of their privilege and power, but underlying all those aspects is their wealth.

Although the inequality of wealth in Britain has decreased somewhat this century, the top 1% of the population still own 23% of all private wealth and the top 5%, 45%. At the other end of the scale, 75% of the population owns only 16% of the wealth.

These figures, however, understate the real inequalities between classes. The top 5% have not only more wealth than the bottom 75% but a different sort of wealth.

The top 5% account for 96% of all personally-owned shares (according to the most recent overall figures: the British Telecom sale will have altered this percentage, but not much).

They also own all the 'family firms' except the tiniest.

Now compare 1000 people who each own, say, a house, some household equipment, and a car, totalling £30,000 each; and on the other hand ten people each with a wealth of £1 million. The ten people — the top 1% — own "only" 25% of the total wealth: but they own all of the sort of wealth that gives power and access to further wealth.

The top 5% monopolise the means of production.

The division between the bottom 75% and the top 5% is not just a division between less wealthy and more wealthy. It is a division between those who live by selling their labour power, and those who live off their ownership of the means of production. It is a division between the worker and the boss.

The question of violence

The miners were right to defend themselves against the police violence. The Labour Party conference in October 1984 was right to condemn police violence and not to condemn violence by picketing miners.

The miners faced a national riot police, organised outside the control of Parliament or the local authorities, making up the law as it went along.

Through roadblocks, arbitrary arrest by snatch squads, and bail conditions, the police hit against the miners without any due process of law. The police are trained, highly paid, heavily equipped and tightly organised.

The miners tried to defend themselves as best they could. Were they right to do so? No, if you believe that the working class should not resist whatever is decreed by a government in office. Yes, if you believe working class livelihoods should stand above profits and the profit system. Yes, if you believe we have a right to resist the government and its scab-herding police force.

If rash or inappropriate tactics were used in the struggle, then that's a problem that

Initiated by the police

People should stop to examine exactly what they mean by violence on the picket line. Nobody can convince me that four miners sat in a car are being violent to such an extent that coppers have got to take truncheons out and smash the windows and drag them out the car in order to stop violence.

It seems to me that when we're talking about violence, we need to be very careful and say where that violence is coming from. When we sum up the question of violence on the picket line, the score is Police 2 Pickets 0. We've had two of our comrades die on the picket line and I don't see how you can get much more violent than that.

A certain amount of violence has always been there and it is bound to be there in a situation like this. But the violence is initiated by people who carry sticks and organise themselves in such a fashion as to intimidate. And by that I mean the police and not the pickets.

From Paul Whetton's Diary, Socialist Organiser, August 30, 1984

the miners — who are sober, serious, responsible people — will sort out among themselves.

Pious even-handedness, condemning 'violence on both sides', is a sneaky way of helping the Tories.

Usually it is quite hypocritical. Neil Kinnock said that he was against *all* violence "without fear or favour".

If he seriously meant that, then he would propose to scrap *all* armed forces and police. For armed forces and police are certainly no use unless they employ violence.

In fact Neil Kinnock wants *more* conventional armed forces. He supports British troops in Ireland. He supports NATO. He supports the police. He *accepts* violence for



Orgreave, June 1984

British national defence or defence of the established order. All he doesn't accept is violence in defence of working class interests.

No ruling class and no police force was ever won over by speeches against violence. They are bold, confident and immovable in their use of violence to defend the rights of property.

The only effect of preaching against 'all' violence can be to weaken the self-confidence of working people who are already pushed towards submission, subor-

dination and deference by thousands of pressures.

Rule of law? Yes! But whose law? All law, ultimately, is class law. And there is no force standing above classes to administer law impartially or to settle disputes by giving prizes for good behaviour.

Democracy? What sort of democracy? Democracy, for the Tories, means a cross on a piece of paper every five years for most of us, and between times rule by 'the people who know best' — the judges, police chiefs,

Those people who condemn miners for violence — they want to realise what they are doing. They are condemning the finest class fighters this movement has seen for many a year. All they are appealing to, all they are fawning to, is scabs, blacklegs and strike-breakers. That's who they are appealing to.

If you want to back us, show this by firm commitment — the resolution has that firm

commitment, 'This conference condemns the police violence used against the miners'.

That is clear, unequivocal, out-and-out commitment to the miners, not walking past the bucket, dropping a fiver in and saying 'we like the miners'.

Paul Whetton speaking at Labour Party conference, Socialist Organiser, October 3 1984.

bankers, and top civil servants who run the state machine while Parliament talks.

The rule of law, in the Tory version, means that the only people permitted to use violence are the police and the armed forces — special forces, separated off from the community, and trained in unquestioning allegiance to the established order.

For the Tories, when Ian MacGregor tries to take away the livelihoods of thousands of miners without any voting or even consultation, it is quite democratic. It is 'the right of management to manage'.

The miners' strike was a head-on clash between the rights of property and the

rights of labour.

The police upheld the 'right to work' of scabs, by violence. The miners defend the right of every worker to a livelihood, as something more important than the claims of profit.

And between equal rights, as Karl Marx put it, force decides.



Fighting back pickets try to break through police lines to stop the movement of coke from the Orgeave works. Photo. John Sturrock.

Workers' self defence

The pity is that the miners' force was not more organised.

'The Miner' advised (June 30) that because of "increasing concern at the spectacle of heavily armed police confronting unprotected miners in tee-shirts and jeans" "miners at risk should take a leaf out of the police book and take elementary precautions by wearing headgear such as pit helmets to protect themselves from truncheons. Arm and leg padding is also

recommended and cricket boxes".

However, mostly this was not done. A few groups of miners did get themselves more organised on an ad hoc basis, but mostly the pickets faced the police with nothing more than their bare hands, native wit and individual initiative.

In the US where industrial disputes have long been more violent than in Britain, a tremendous example was set by Minneapolis coal yard and warehouse workers and

truck drivers during a strike in 1934. They organised hundreds of strikers — trained, disciplined, and armed with clubs — to defend themselves. They took on the police and: "In less than an hour after the battle started there wasn't a cop to be seen in the market and pickets were directing traffic in the now peaceful district."

British trade unionists will have to think about organising in this sort of way if picketing is to be effective in future strikes.

Police versus democracy

By the end of the strike, tens of thousands of people in the pit communities, previously conservative on such questions, were saying that they hated and feared the police and distrusted the courts. Many people started thinking critically about the state machine as a whole for the first time.

During the strike we saw the emergence of a new type of police, dismissive of democratic inhibitions, arrogant in its assumption of power, politically charged against the labour movement. The roots of this policy preceded the strike itself; there is little chance that with the end of the strike this new police will simply disappear from sight.

Self-defence against the police is a first step. But obviously it is not enough. What policies can we propose for a future Labour government? What should we demand of Labour representatives on police committees?

We cannot be indifferent to the forms in which the state machine serves the capitalist class: centralised or decentralised, arbitrary or accountable, secret or open to scrutiny, militaristic or civil. Such apparent ultra-radicalism would leave the state machine untouched until the revolutionary day when we can sweep it all away anyway — and thus save the Chief Constables, the judges and their colleagues from any immediate challenges.

Millions of workers still think that the police are more or less impartial. That is why the Tories were able to get away with their scab-herding operation. Reform campaigns can help convince them otherwise.

Mealy-mouthed

During the strike, most of the labour movement was shamefully mealy-mouthed and evasive on the issue of the police. Neil Kinnock, who denounced picketing miners for 'violence', took it for granted that the police had the right to use whatever tactics they thought necessary and to employ as much force as "keeping order" — quelling the miners' pickets — required them to.

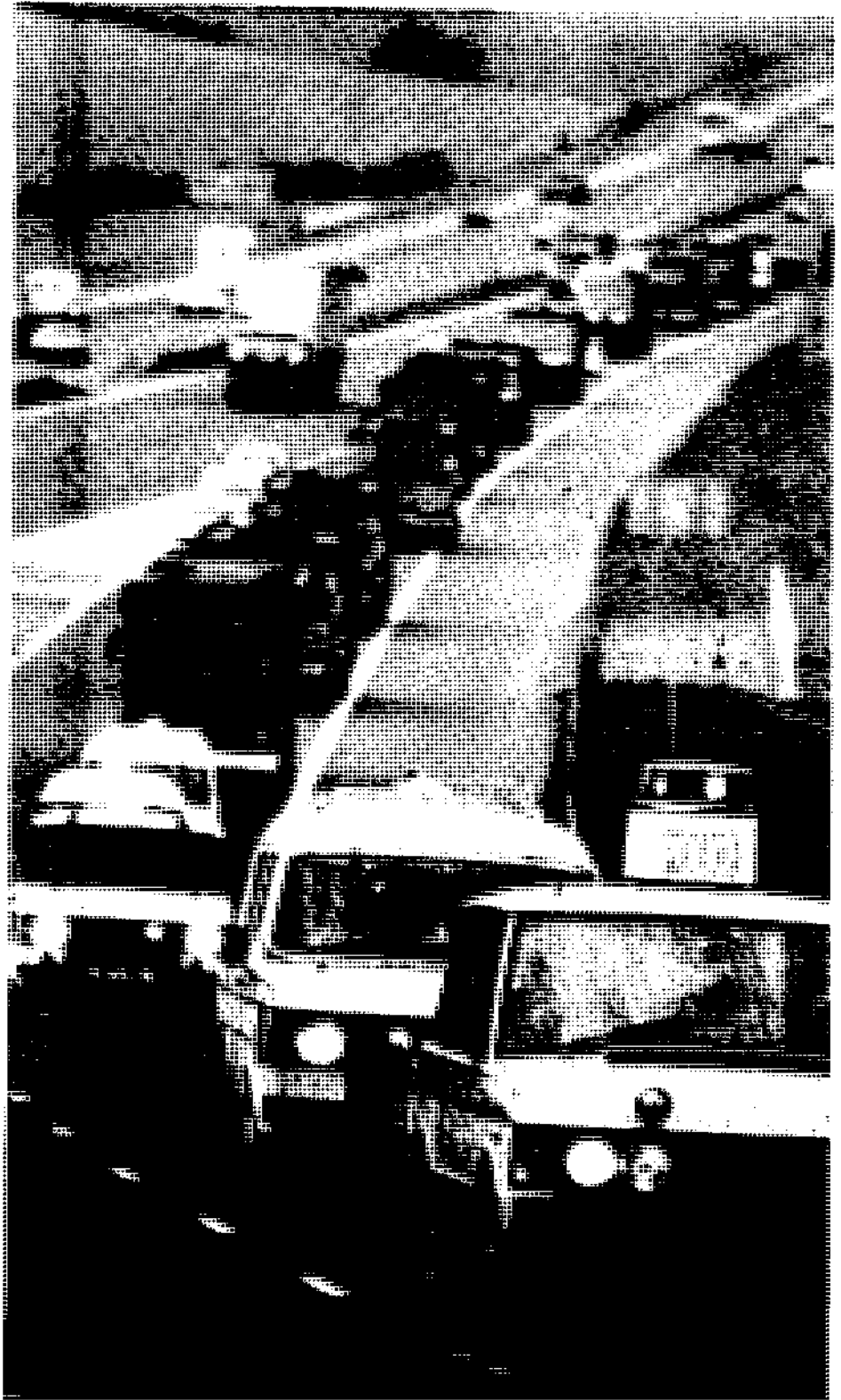
At most, Labour leaders would advocate milder police methods, while stressing that they did not question the fundamental command structure and objectives of the police. They did not argue for an *alternative* law and order, but simply for softer enforcement of established law and order.

To many people those Labour leaders must have seemed simply soft-headed.

The police are supposed to represent the general interest of society as a whole, as against the individual criminal.

But the very fact of establishing a hierarchical force, carefully kept separate from the community around it, reveals a contradiction. The police are supposed to serve the public interest: but the ordinary public are forbidden to interfere or inquire too closely into the police! The public interest becomes the police force's own private domain.

For 'society as a whole' was and is a fiction. In a society torn by class conflict the police, like the state machine as a whole, serves the ruling class. It represents the 'general interest of society' as constructed and interpreted by that ruling class.



A convoy of scab trucks on the road from Orgreave

We should not be deluded by the claim of the police that they represent the public interest and stand above politics.

A democratic programme of reform would need to increase massively the powers of local police committees and Parliament to oversee police policies and operations. This would entail, for example, opening the Home Office to effective parliamentary scrutiny and giving police committees real

power to hire and fire chief constables.

Operational control of the police should be put in the hands of *elected* bodies.

Judges and magistrates should be elected. Access to the law for ordinary people, not backed by the kind of wealthy pressure groups behind scab miners, should become cheaper and simpler. The arcane mysteries of courtroom procedure should be democratised. The power of the police to inter-

fere in the labour movement should be minimised.

Elected tribunals, completely independent of the police, should hear complaints against the police and possess effective sanction against them.

The police should have the right to unionise in real unions committed to accountability and demilitarisation, not the yellow management 'union' called the Police Federation. They should have the right to negotiate for their members and to take industrial action as they did in 1919. The democratic police union in Italy has fought on these issues since the war. It expressed solidarity with the British miners!

Similar reform demands should be developed for other sectors of the state machine: election of top civil servants, freedom of information, trade union rights for troops, disbandment of MIS, etc.

Reforms — or pseudo-reforms — can lead to incorporation. Instead of subordinating the police to the will of the people, the will of the people finds itself subordinated to the police. This is the current danger associated with the establishment of toothless liaison committees between the police and unrepresentative members of the community; or with Neighbourhood Watch Schemes which perform surveillance functions on behalf of and under the direction of the police; or Multi-Agency Liaison which, under the guise of co-operation between the police and other state agencies, enables the police

to secure a foothold on their own terms in schools, social work institutions and the like. Reforms may be subordinated to ideals of improving relations between the police and the community, which in effect gives the police a veto over changes which it does not favour.

The answer to this danger is to couple the fight for reforms with a fight for self-organisation and with a battle for socialist ideas.

The 1984 Labour Party conference passed a resolution moved by a Notts striking miner, Paul Whetton, to demand no police intervention in industrial disputes. In Nottingham itself, where support for the strike was difficult to mobilise, 7,000 people turned out on April 14 to demonstrate for 'Police out of the coalfields'. (The initiative for the demonstration had come from Socialist Organiser).

Such moves present a challenge to the labour movement: how to 'police' ourselves, how to develop our own 'law and order'.

While policing — in the sense of internal regulation — is a function of every social organisation, the police as a particular institution is not. Hierarchy, bureaucracy, authoritarianism and unaccountability are not inevitable. There are many ways in which the function of policing can be performed.

The community patrols of 'no-go' areas in Northern Ireland in the late '60s and early '70s are one recent example near at hand.

Likewise, defence is necessary, so long as different states exist: but it need not be by a nuclear-armed standing army rather than a people's militia. Courts are necessary: they need not be presided over by unelected, ageing, wealthy, male, white Tories.

Administration is necessary: it need not be done in secret by highly-paid officials who shuttle to and fro between civil service jobs and top posts in industry and banking.

An elected legislative assembly is necessary: it need not be capped by a Monarch and a House of Lords, deadened by medieval mumbo-jumbo, dominated by a strong separate executive, and insulated from popular accountability by elections only once every five years with the choice of polling day in the hands of the government. It could be superseded by a "workers' parliament" based on delegate democracy, right of recall, elections not just of the legislature, but also of the executive, workers' wages for state officials and a massive education programme to empower workers with the same knowledge possessed by their leaders.

How Labour should have campaigned

IT IS miners who are standing up to the massed ranks of semi-militarised police.

But it is the entire labour movement which is now being probed and tested.

The brutally candid Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, put the issue squarely: "The trade unions are on trial". The trial is a trial of strength, which the Tories and the police are turning into a trial of naked force.

Neither the Tories nor their centralised gendarmerie are invincible. They are seemingly strong only because of the divisions in the ranks of the NUM and because of the general depression in the labour movement.

They are strong only because of the miserable quality of the TUC leadership, who do nothing to mobilise support for the miners and their picket lines.

* No coal should pass the ports or travel on rail.

* No miners' picket should be left isolated to face the police. Rally to the picket lines!

* Trade union branches should demand that the TUC organise a general strike against Tory anti-union laws, against cuts, and in support of the miners.

* The Labour Party should come off the fence. Neil Kinnock's weaselling in the middle of the road is a disgrace to the Labour Party. Kinnock should do like the Labour Party chair Eric Heffer, and stand on the line with the miners.

* Labour councils should follow Sheffield's lead and object on Police Committees to the deployment of local police on Tory police-state duty in the coalfields. They should refuse to pay them.

* The Labour Party should take the issue to the country. The Tories are creating a centralised national police force, and without any popular mandate or popular licence to do so.

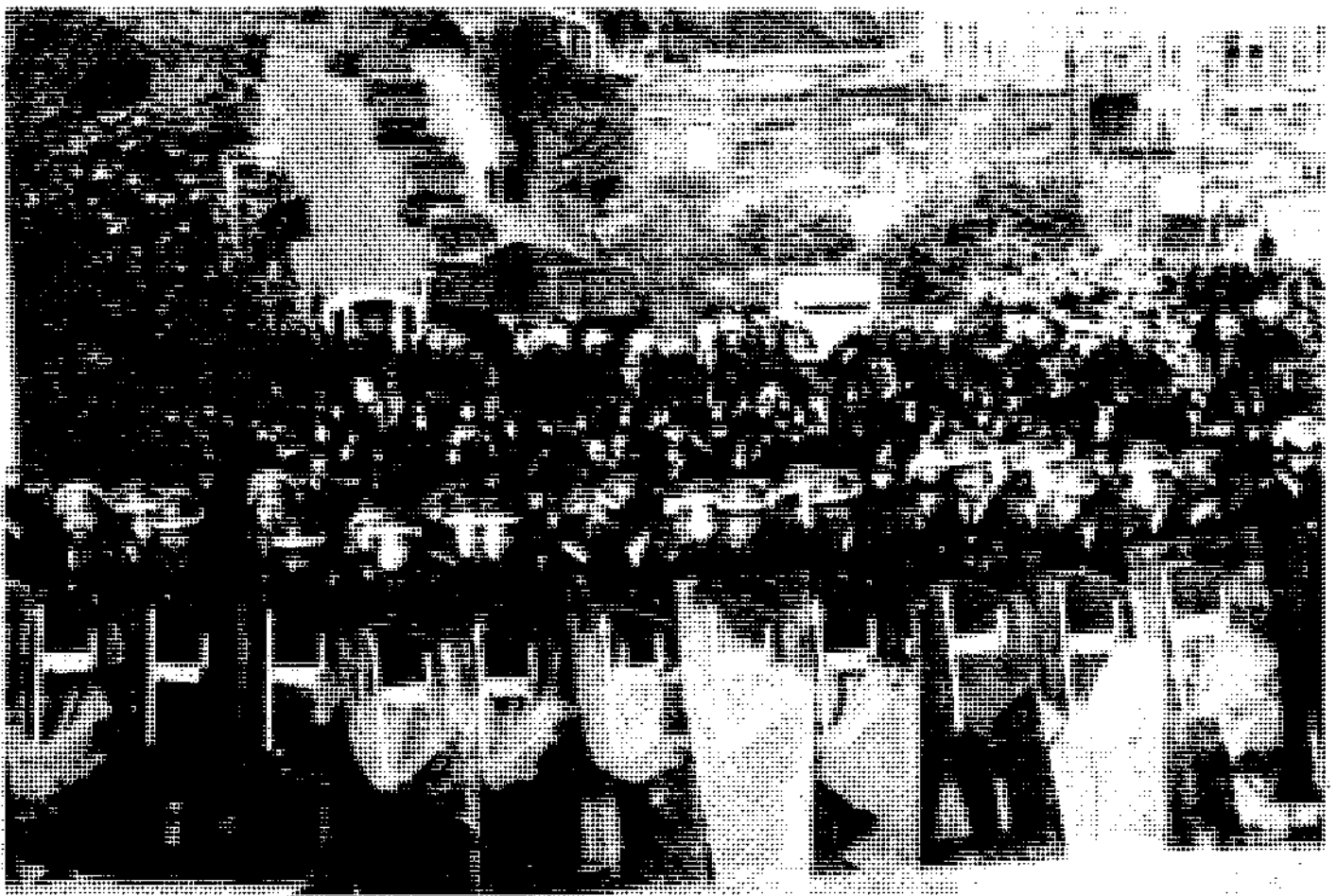
It is part of the same drive as the abolition of major areas of local government.

If the labour movement throws itself into this fight, the miners can win.

Socialist Organiser, May 10 1984



June 27 in Jubilee Gardens Photo. Paul Mattsson.



The road from Orgreave

A peaceful road to socialism?

The top leaders of the labour movement look with horror at the notion of trade unions organising their own defence squads, or working class communities setting up their own street patrols. They would say that this leads to chaos and violence.

But the miners' strike showed that we already have chaos and violence — only it is chaos and violence *in uniform* and is directed against us!

Leon Trotsky put it like this: "The reformists systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed."

Blind faith

But working class self-defence, and a fight for democratic controls over the existing state machine, are necessary. Otherwise the police will simply ride over us more and more roughshod.

It would be good if the present state machine could be gradually, quietly transformed into a system really serving the majority. It would be good if all industrial disputes could be satisfactorily resolved without strikes and conflict! But only blind faith can cling to such pleasant dreams.

All the experience of history tells us that no ruling class ever leaves the stage peacefully, to slink quietly away into its historical grave. A threatened ruling class fights. Look how the Tories fought the miners, and

they weren't threatened with losing everything. A ruling class facing the threat of socialist takeover would fight without rules and without scruple.

Yet not only the mainstream reformists like Neil Kinnock — *who do not want to replace capitalism with socialism* — but also the Communist Party and Militant, preach the dogma that the ruling class can be persuaded to peacefully let the workers overthrow capitalism.

After the experience of the miners' strike anyone who thinks that, should think about it a bit more! There can be no peaceful road to socialism!

If the labour movement is going to fight

for something more than a softer administration of capitalism, then we must be prepared for violent resistance from the ruling class. The miners' strike is only the latest addition to a mass of historical evidence confirming this conclusion.

The miners' strike was a limited challenge to the ruling class. They could have agreed to leave pits open without a disaster to themselves. Yet they met even that limited challenge with brutal force: and during the strike Thatcher (in a speech on November 12) made it clear that as much extra force would be used as was necessary to win. "We shall introduce measures to give [the police] what they need."

'The same methods as Ireland'

Tony, you were in the army. Do you think the police have learned any lessons from Ireland?

Tony: I was in the first regiment that went into Northern Ireland in 1969 and we trained what were then the B Specials in riot control. And the police here now are using the same methods that we trained the B Special police in Northern Ireland for.

The only thing missing is the gas masks, and I don't think they're far behind — I bet they're parked at the back in the wagons somewhere. I don't know about rubber bullets, but they'll certainly bring in tear gas.

In Ireland, kids used to taunt us to fire rubber bullets at them because they hate the Brits. They're brought up to hate the Brits.

They've seen what the soldiers do — it's natural they're against them. They have seen them arresting their fathers, they have seen them flooding the villages. So kids are bound to turn against the police.

Tony Thewlis, Keresley Colliery, interviewed in *Socialist Organiser*, June 7 1984. Tony later cracked under the pressure and started scabbing, but the truth of what he said about the police still stands.

Justice, democracy and moderation fly out of the window when the ruling class feel that important interests are at stake.

After the October 1984 Labour Party conference voted to condemn police violence against the miners and for reforms to restrain the police, Police Federation chief Leslie Curtis said that the police might feel

unable to serve a future Labour government.

In 1974, during the big upsurge of strikes that brought down Edward Heath's government, (so former army chief Lord Carver has revealed), "fairly senior officers were ill-advised enough to make suggestions that perhaps, if things got terribly bad, the army would have to do something about it..."

When Tony Benn declared that Labour was seriously going to implement its policy of abolishing the House of Lords, Lord Denning said that the courts should intervene to rule such abolition unconstitutional.

Now, Curtis was slapped down by senior policemen. Carver had told his officers who talked about a military coup — some of whom are probably today at the top of the military hierarchy — that they were "ill-advised". Other judges have deplored Denning's attitudes.

So long as the class struggle remains low-key, moderates win out within the ruling class.

But will they *always*? Only blind faith could say yes, especially in view of the recent terrible lesson of Chile. All the people who say that a peaceful road to socialism is possible in Britain (and therefore we should leave the monopoly of violence in the hands of the ruling class) said that Chile proved their point. It had long democratic traditions. Allende would

bring about socialism peacefully, in a parliamentary way.

Yet the facts spoke otherwise. As soon as the Chilean ruling class (in collaboration with the CIA) decided that the workers' and peasants' mobilisation encouraged by the Allende government had gone too far, they forgot all about the long democratic traditions and went for a bloody military coup.

After the miners' strike, the labour movement must gear itself up to the fact that we face a violent, ruthless enemy — and there is no umpire standing above the classes.

Socialist ORGANISER

Northern Ireland

TORY POLICE STATE!



Belfast today-Britain tomorrow

The millionaires' media

The mass-circulation press used the vilest distortions against the miners. The 'heavier' papers and the TV backed them up with more subtle twists.

Papers like the Sun repeatedly tried to portray Scargill as a dictator, as a threat to democracy. Almost all the media joined in portraying the strike as a matter of one individual, even though Scargill was only carrying out union policy.

Alleged incidents of strikers' violence against scabs and police were highlighted. Where the violence was later found to be nothing to do with strikers, that was usually not mentioned. The most horrific violence against the strikers was not newsworthy.

TV news, less crude than the mass-circulation press, nonetheless constantly portrayed the strike as a 'problem' for the nation created by the miners — violence as a problem created by the pickets. 'Balance' often meant that a hard hitting Tory or NCB representative was matched by a mealy-mouthed Labour front-bencher or TUC bureaucrat.

The scab miners got massive publicity. To see the bias of the media it is only necessary to think about how they would have covered attempts by an equally small minority to get a strike when official union policy was to stay at work.

Sun printworkers twice struck blows at the Fleet Street millionaires by refusing to print issues which insulted Arthur Scargill and the miners: one of them portrayed Arthur Scargill seemingly giving the Hitler salute, and the other called striking miners "the scum of the earth".

Inside the media unions, a campaign has developed for an established Right of Reply for defamed trade unionists and others.

That campaign needs to be boosted. Another campaign should be for a labour movement daily paper. A lot is said about financial difficulties. But the real reason that we do not have such a paper is that the leaders of the labour movement have nothing much to say. The style and editorial line of a paper geared to their politics would be so bland, so evasive, so mealy-mouthed that no-one would be interested. So they don't want to take the risk!

To change the media fundamentally we will have to change society. We will have to take the presses and the TV transmitters out of the hands of the millionaires, and share them out among political or other groups having a minimum of proven support. That way we could really have a free press, not just an array of millionaires' mouthpieces.



A picket injured at Thoresby colliery, Notts, on March 15 1984, when police charged in during a two minutes' silence for the death of Davy Jones at Ollerton that same day

LESSONS FOR OUR MOVEMENT



THE STRIKE IN PERSPECTIVE

Yes, they should have fought!

A major event like the miners' strike can have the effect of propelling the labour movement and the left forward, as it has politicised many miners and their families. But it can also throw political people backwards, depending on what conclusions they draw. A defeated strike is likely to do that. Faint-hearted and quitters are going to say: 'They shouldn't have fought' or 'They shouldn't have fought in that way'.

What lessons has the left learned from the miners' strike? What are its conclusions for the future?

Tribune has concluded from the strike that mass picketing is an outdated tactic.

"It is no longer enough to beat manly hewers' chests and expect governments to quake in their boots".

The Communist Party has taken a similar view.

There is a glimmer of truth behind these arguments. Mass picketing was not enough. Mass picketing is very difficult when workers are wary about responding because of the threat of the dole queue, and when thousands of specially-trained police are mounting a big operation against you.

But then the whole strike was difficult. Struggle is difficult when you face a ruth-

less, entrenched enemy. But there is no substitute for struggle.

Without mass pickets the strike would never have got off the ground. Without mass pickets it would never have got the support it did outside the main coalfields hit by closures. Without mass picketing the government's scab-herding operation would have cracked the strike long before March 1985. Without mass pickets the coke from Orgreave would not have been stopped even for one day — and with more mass pickets steel production might have been seriously brought down.

The difficulties actually made mass pickets more important than before. When workers' confidence is high and solidarity is easy, a few people with a union placard may be enough for an effective picket. When confidence is not so high, the strength of numbers is more important.

The answer is not to scrap mass pickets but to make them better-organised and to supplement them with other activities.

The CP's alternative to mass pickets seems to be an appeal to broad public opinion. Thus, CP industrial organiser Pete Carter sums up the lesson of the strike like this:

Socialist Organiser

NSUK
Page 1: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 2: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 3: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 4: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 5: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 6: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 7: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 8: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 9: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference
Page 10: Report from the 1985 Mining Union Conference

TUC: back the miners!



Strike to defend our unions

"In the present political and economic crisis, even the best organised and most militant sections will face considerable difficulties if they cannot present their demands in terms capable of winning wide support." (Focus, March 7, 1985).

Asked about solidarity for the miners (Focus, February 7), George Bolton, chair of the CP and vice-president of the Scottish miners, devoted one column inch to trade union action and collections, 2 1/4 inches to how difficult trade union solidarity is, and six inches to the churches!

"We have had Liberals on our platforms and the SNP, obviously... We recognised the

Get ORGANISED!



Become a supporter of the Socialist
Organiser Alliance — groups are estab-
lished in most large towns. We ask £5
a month minimum (£1 unwaged)
contribution from supporters.

I want to become a Socialist
Organiser supporter/I want more
information.

Name

Address

.....

Send to: Socialist Organiser,
214 Sickert Court, London
N1 2SY.



Norman Willis — promises but no action for the miners



Pickets at Orgreave — yes, they were right to struggle!

need to approach the churches very early on. We leafleted the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in June, and we got the response..."

But "broad democratic alliances" of (as they put it) "bishops and brickies" are no answer to the problems of mass picketing. They mean that CPers being ultra-moderate in order to win over their Liberals, SNPers, bishops or Chambers of Commerce and thus fail to give a fighting lead to the working class.

The Ravenscraig workers' notion that their survival depended on proving "viability" had been fostered by months of CP-dominated campaigning to get an alliance of Scots of all classes to oppose closure of the works. And for all the leaflets the Scottish NUM put out to Church Assemblies, they did not do a leaflet to the workers of Ravenscraig with the message that Arthur Scargill spelled out in the 'Miner' of June 30:

"Join with us. Do not be misled. Once the pits have been butchered, attention will once again be turned to your own industry, creating more dole queue fodder. And when that day dawns, who will be left to fight together with you?"

The opposite pole to the CP and Tribune is the Socialist Workers' Party. The SWP's

line throughout the strike was to call for "much more picketing". The cause of the defeat was too few mass pickets.

"Much more picketing?" Up to a point it is hard to disagree. We can always benefit from more militancy and more activity. For sure this message is better than the CP's and Tribune's.

But there is something very peculiar in the sight of the SWP standing on the fringes of Britain's most tremendous workers' struggle ever, shouting monotonously, "Not militant enough! Not militant enough!"

The SWP do not get to the roots of the problem about mass picketing and solidarity. The other side of this coin is that the SWP completely missed out on the *political* issues of the strike.

Issues of democratic control over the police; links between the police operation against the miners and state violence in black communities and in Ireland; civil liberties issues; the four-day week and the economics of human need versus the economics of profit; workers' control versus NCB dictatorship — all these issues through which workers might have been convinced of a link between their concerns and the miners' strike, and the basis could have

The problem in 1974

John O'Mahony, editor of *Socialist Organiser*, asked the miners in the meeting to consider why it was that after their crushing victory over the Heath government in 1974 they were having to fight Thatcher under such difficult circumstances ten years later.

"The problem was that in 1974 there was nothing effective to replace the Tory government with. The bitter experience of the Wilson/Callaghan government which resulted from the miners' victory brought Socialist Organiser into being as a part of the fight to take control of the entire labour movement by and for the working class."

Although Britain's workers' movement is tremendously strong, it does not have the politics it needs to make it capable of taking power in society. Socialist Organiser fights for the necessary socialist politics in the mass movement, and for the widest unity in action among those who commit themselves to that fight.

Socialist Organiser, June 14, 1984

been laid for broader action, were scarcely mentioned by the SWP. Instead they repeated their message again and again: "Not nearly enough has been done to organise the picketing..."

Firstly, the facts. Socialist Worker argued that far fewer miners were involved in picketing in 1972. But that is probably not true.

It is estimated that in 1972 some 8,000 miners were involved in picketing in the first week and 40,000 altogether.

Various figures give us a rough idea of how many pickets were involved in 1984-5. Over 11,000 miners were arrested. So if one picket in four was arrested, that makes over 40,000 pickets. On 290,000 occasions miners were stopped at police roadblocks (up to September, in England and Wales alone). If each picket was stopped an average of ten times at roadblocks, that makes about 30,000 pickets.

In 1972 there were about 3,000 miners at Saltley, and about 1,000 on the other big mass pickets in East Anglia. In 1984-5 there were dozens of pickets of that size.

Overall there were probably at least as many regular pickets in 1984-5 as in 1972. The difference is that in 1984-5 a lot of miners had to picket pits instead of power stations and coke depots; and that in 1984-5 it was much more difficult. The 1972 pickets in East Anglia and at Saltley shut their targets within a few days. The mass pickets in 1984-5 often failed to shut their targets.

More pickets would have helped. And, though Socialist Worker's claim that the

area NUM leaders were "sabotaging mass picketing" and "more worried about preserving their [union] machine than winning the strike" (SW, July 21) is overstated, doubtless the CP influence among NUM officials did hinder mobilisation. 'The Miner' on May 9 said: "The NUM position is clear: the [steel] plant[s] should tick over, but not produce any steel" — yet NUM area officials allowed massive supplies of coal and coke. Arthur Scargill often seemed to be on his own in appealing for miners to turn out to mass pickets, as at Orgreave. Scotland was notably sluggish about picketing.

But why could sluggish officials get away with it? (The NUM official structure was a lot more conservative in 1972 than in 1984). Why did officials who were militant picket organisers in 1972 become cautious and sceptical in 1984?

The repeated message, 'Be more militant', is not much of an answer to these questions. Doubly so, because the SWP rejects (as 'integration into the bureaucracy') any struggle to transform the official structures and replace conservative leaders. Socialist Worker lambasted the "militants' mistaken belief that betrayals can be avoided by winning control of the union machine. The reality is very different. Once in office, one-time rank and file leaders become prisoners of the machine they supposedly control" (SW, July 21).

Of course militant rank-and-filers do often become conservative once in union office. Just fighting for an 'alternative

leadership' is not enough: we need to fight for clear policies and to democratise the whole structure. But the SWP's view replaces any strategy to transform the labour movement by an iron law of bureaucracy. Any organised official leadership will always be conservative; *therefore* overall political strategy for the labour movement is always empty talk, and all socialists can do is champion rank and file revolts — urge the rank and file to be more militant or (as more often with SW these days) complain that it is not militant enough.

Political links with steel and power workers; political arguments about workers' self-defence which could have helped the pickets more effectively to counter the police — these were more useful contributions from socialists than just the cry "More picketing! More picketing! More picketing!"

And they could have helped to make more picketing possible, by getting to the roots of the problems with picketing.

There were problems with mass picketing: but both the CP/Tribune, and the SWP got them wrong. The CP/Tribune find direct-action militancy inadequate, and look vainly for something else to take its place; the SWP find it inadequate, and stridently and rather peevishly call for more of it. The real job is to unite direct-action militancy with a working class strategy.

We need to build a rank and file movement, uniting workers in different unions round socialist policies, and to commit the labour movement to workers' self-defence.

Build a rank and file movement!

Students of British labour history will compare 1984-5 with 1926. The comparison will serve up to a point, as long as the aftermath of 1926 is studied soberly and accurately. It was not so unrelievedly black as is some-

times painted. Nor was everything lost when the General Strike failed — militancy continued into 1927. By 1934 trade union membership increased again; in 1936 there were more strikes than in any year since 1920.

The damage, moreover, would have been much less if not for the fact that the most advanced element in the labour movement then — the Communist Party, at that time still a revolutionary party — went on a self-isolating, self-destructive ultra-left binge after 1928, emerging from it in 1934-5 only to swing towards reformism. What the organised, active socialist minority does can make a huge difference to the effect of defeats on the whole working class.

In the wake of their victory in 1926, the ruling class strategy was to push through a policy, started years earlier, of splitting the militants and socialists from the rest of the movement, while embracing the trade union leaders and building up their positions against the shop floor.

The anti-union law of the day — the Trade Disputes Act — had as its guiding principle to "demand support of the great mass of public opinion, including moderate trade unionists". Just a few months after the end of the strike, top government ministers were proposing talks with Labour leaders using "reliable men" from the TUC and Labour Party.

This conciliatory attitude was also reflected in the press. Yesterday's Bolshevik agitator became today's responsible trade union leader.

Subscribe!

Get SOCIALIST ORGANISER each week delivered to your door by post.

RATES: £8.50 for 6 months. £16 for one year.

Name

Address

Please send me months' sub. I enclose £

To: Socialist Organiser, 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.

Kinnock and Thatcher compared

Mrs Thatcher is tough, nasty, brutal, spiteful, single-minded and very hostile to the labour movement — but a good, tough, committed fighter for her own cause and capable of being an inspiring leader for her own side. Mrs Thatcher knows how to lead.

There is no double-talk from Thatcher about the miners' strike. She is out to beat us down and crush the NUM. She leaves her supporters in no doubt about it.

When Thatcher denounced "violence" she doesn't feel obliged to be "impartial" and denounce the police as well as the pickets who stand up to them. She denounces us — she praises, lauds and defends the army of police thugs she sends to beat us down. She knows a bitter class war is being fought — and she knows which side she is on.

The contrast between Thatcher's conduct during the miners' strike and yours, Neil Kinnock, is a devastating one.

You have rightly blamed the Tories for the strike. But your backing for the NUM has been vague and equivocal at best. You have added your voice to the vile chorus of Tory orchestrated propaganda against the picketing miners who are, in fact, victims of police thuggery. You denounce us for defending ourselves against the police and for trying to stop the police herding scabs to break our strike.

Whatever your intentions you thereby help Thatcher and MacGregor in their war to beat us down. You boost the Tory propaganda campaign which is designed to stop other workers giving miners the solidarity action that would make such a difference to our strike.

Thatcher is a Tory pig, but I find it impossible to compare Thatcher's performance on her side with yours on ours, without feeling a deep disappointment in you.

One reason why Thatcher knows how to lead is that she does know which side she is on.

From an open letter to Neil Kinnock by Paul Whetton, a delegate to Labour Party conference, September 1984

Inside the velvet glove was the iron fist. The shop floor worker was on the receiving end. Blacklists, sackings, speed-ups, settling of 'old scores' by management, were the reality for the workers.

The Tory government could not have pursued their policy without the support of the Labour leadership. Just as these people had rushed to betray the strike so they fell over themselves, too, in their scramble to support the government's policy.

At the 1927 TUC Congress the former 'left winger' George Hicks declared: "We should not be deterred by allegations that in entering into such discussions we are surrendering some essential principle of trade unionism". The "new realists" of the '20s were pushing through their policy of open class collaboration.

The "new realists", in their turn, got away with it because the lessons which many thousands of workers had learnt from the strike were squandered.



Kent pickets out Cortonwood. March 5 1985

Our comment when Len Murray announced his retirement

Forget for one moment the miners' strike, the local council elections, Liverpool, even the future of the TUC. There is something far more important: the future of Len Murray.

After all, Len has given more than a decade of selfless service leading the trade union movement. For much of that time he's been forced to eke out some kind of existence on a miserable pittance of £30,000. Now is the time for all of us to show our gratitude; now is the time to give Len some real gravy. He should go to the House of Lords.

Lord Len of Warrington? Earl Murray of Cheltenham? They both have a firm ring about them. In fact, we could hold a secret postal ballot to decide what we should call Len, as some will have other, perhaps cruder, suggestions.

But I want to go further. I want to propose that Len should not be created a mere Lord for life, those are ten a penny

but a Hereditary Peer. This would have tremendous benefits for workers from Lands End to John O'Groats, and far further afield. It would show them that socialist statisticians are damned liars: social mobility is not dead, but even in this day and age the humble scion of the proletariat can still reach the very top.

All workers would feel that little bit better, clocking on at eight on cold mornings, knowing the Shropshire lad, still comfortably in bed, would soon be donning his mink and ermine underwear, hobnobbing with the toffs.

Most important of all, Len's entry into Debrett would show him in his true colours, the bend sinister, with a yellow stripe, crowned with a grovelling cart-horse: the colours for betraying his movement and being a traitor to his class.

Socialist Organiser, May 10, 1984
Len Murray became a life peer in the New Year Honours List of 1985

The best militants of the day were in the Communist Party. Between 1926 and 1928, derailed by the misguidance of Stalin, the party moved from a rather 'soft' attitude to the TUC leaders to one of self-isolation, forming breakaway unions and reserving their most vehement criticism for the most left wing leaders, whom they called social fascists, such as the miners' leader A.J. Cook (the Arthur Scargill of the 1920s).

So the chance of building a political opposition was lost. The way was cleared for the right wing in the labour movement, and thus for the bosses and the Tories. But it was not all inevitable.

1921-2 is an instructive comparison, too.

In those years the British working class suffered defeats probably more serious than the one we have just had. The miners were locked out from March 31 1921; the rail and transport unions, on 'Black Friday', refused to honour their pledges of support; and the

miners were forced to accept defeat on July 1.

The engineers, in those days, were the second central militant section of the union movement. They had created and sustained the shop stewards' movement during World War 1. From March 11 to June 13 1922 they, too, were locked out and defeated. Militants were victimised wholesale. The shop stewards' movement was broken. From 1921 to 1926 TUC membership fell by one million — more than it was ever to fall in the aftermath of 1926.

Yet the movement managed to regroup after those defeats. In 1924 a Miners' Minority Movement was initiated by the Communist Party, and in August 1924 a cross-union National Minority Movement. The first Minority Movement conference had delegates representing 200,000 workers; by March 1926, MM conference delegates represented a total of one million trade unionists (the TUC at the time having only four million affiliates).

The Minority Movement linked together the rank and file, coordinated the battle for militant policies in different unions, and paralleled the fight of the CP for affiliation to the Labour Party. Without its work, the general strike of 1926 would probably never have happened; if it had not been derailed by the conservative Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow into softness towards the TUC 'lefts' (the 1926 equivalents of Buckton and Todd) at the crucial time in 1926, it could even have been the driving force taking that general strike to victory.

During the 1984-5 strike, the miners' leaders, for all their heroism, were hog-tied by the lack of any equivalent of the Minority Movement. They clearly found it difficult to

relate to the TUC: after they had coaxed the leaders in private and appealed to them in public, what else could they do? They had no mechanism for a campaign to stir up the membership of other unions, to prepare, for example, for a general strike.

This was not just an organisational oversight, but a matter of politics. The Minority Movement would never have emerged without the Communist Party as its backbone, strategist and coordinator. The modern Communist Party, a sad caricature of the 1920s CP but the most influential party in the miners' leadership, has abandoned projects like the Minority Movement as a matter of conscious policy. They prefer to work for niches in the bureaucracy.

To build a rank and file movement now we will need a political initiating minority — a group capable of incorporating the lessons of the miners' strike into a coherent socialist strategy. We need to build Socialist Organiser. Round that core we can then organise militants as broadly as possible.

Back in July Paul Whetton told a Socialist Organiser meeting:

"The fight has got to go on after this dispute is over, and it is vitally important that we get ties between rank and file members, from the pits to the docks to the railways and into the factories...The Triple Alliance fell flat on its face because it had been organised and conducted by full-time officials, and the rank and file did not get involved. I would hope that after this strike is over, we try to organise rank and file members in the pits, docks and factories, and take the arguments about a workers' government and workers' control and all that sort of thing forward..."

That is the task now.

The Ridley Report

In an annexe to this report, Mr Ridley and some of his co-authors have been pondering how to counter any 'political threat' from those they regard as 'the enemies of the next Tory government'. They believe that in the first or second year after the Tories' election, there might be a major challenge from a trade union either over a wage claim or over redundancies. They fear it may occur in a 'vulnerable industry' such as coal, electricity or the docks and have the support of 'the full force of communist disrupters'. Behind the scenes, they would like a five-part strategy for countering this threat:

- Return on capital figures should be rigged so that an above-average wage claim can be paid to the 'vulnerable' industries.
- The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories, in a field they think could be won (railways, British Leyland, the civil service or steel).
- Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry.

They would like a Thatcher government to:

- a) build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations;
- b) make contingency plans for the import of coal;
- c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary;
- d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.

• The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be "to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the union finance them". But strikers in nationalised industries should not be treated differently from strikers in other industries.

• There should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. 'Good non-union drivers' should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection.

The Tories' 'Ridley report' on strategy, as reported in the 'Economist', May 27 1978.

Their leadership and ours

The Tories set their plans for the miners' strike as long ago as 1978 (see box).

They carried out these plans ruthlessly. Some of the preparations — for example, for the police anti-picket operation — had been underway since 1972.

They did the public side of their preparations as well as the behind-the-scenes work. Week after week, from 1979 through to 1984, they banged out a clear, hard-edged message: there was No Alternative to the laws of market economics. More police and more profits were necessary to save Britain from moral and economic decay.

So the Tories prepared well. They had a leadership dedicated to their class.

And us? The top leaders of the labour movement prepared for 1984 by five years of dismal floundering.

In 1979 Labour fought a general election

on the uninspiring promise of the mixture as before.

In 1980, after the steel strike, the TUC quickly abandoned any real notion of mobilising against the Tories. From time to time TUC leaders would bluster about a fight back: they scarcely even bothered to conceal the escape clauses and provisos which made it all empty clamour.

They prepared for the miners' strike by betraying ASLEF (in 1982) and the NGA in 1983. They proclaimed the 'new realism' — in other words, their eagerness to surrender to the Tories, if only the Tories would please sign a surrender treaty with them.

Meanwhile, what were the Labour leaders doing? Witch-hunting their left wing. Replying to the Tories' crisp message with vague, unconvincing waffle.

The Tories have just inflicted a serious

defeat on the working class. They didn't outfight the heroic miners — they starved them back to work. But they outfought, outgeneralled, intimidated and ran rings around the rest of the labour movement. In the miners' strike the Tories gave the British working class movement a bitter lesson in serious class struggle politics. They will give us other bitter lessons, inflict other avoidable defeats on us, if we don't draw the proper conclusions from this one.

Before the strike many people argued that the young miners — with mortgages, cars, videos — would never fight. In fact, those young miners (the workforce in 1984 was younger than it had ever been before) were the vanguard of the struggle.

The same people will now tell us that the strike proved the working class no longer capable of solidarity. For sure solidarity was inadequate. But why? It was very *difficult*. Solidarity was possible, but only with a determined leadership that would link other issues to the miners' and show workers a coherent strategy for class mobilisation for jobs and democratic rights. In fact the leadership was cowardly and had no strategy. The rank and file solidarity, in the circumstances, was heroic.

There has never been a golden age when workers would risk their jobs and wages for solidarity at the drop of a hat, without organisation and leadership. Before 1972, the miners had *never* had national agreement from rail and transport workers to boycott scab coal except in 1925-6: and in 1926, when the TUC called a general strike to support the miners, it called it off after nine days.

Solidarity

Solidarity in 1972 and 1974 was stronger than in 1984-5, but it was also easier. For solidarity against the odds, in the face of harassment by the bosses, the action during the 1984-5 strike of Leicestershire and Notts railworkers and of many seafarers and power station workers has few parallels in British labour history.

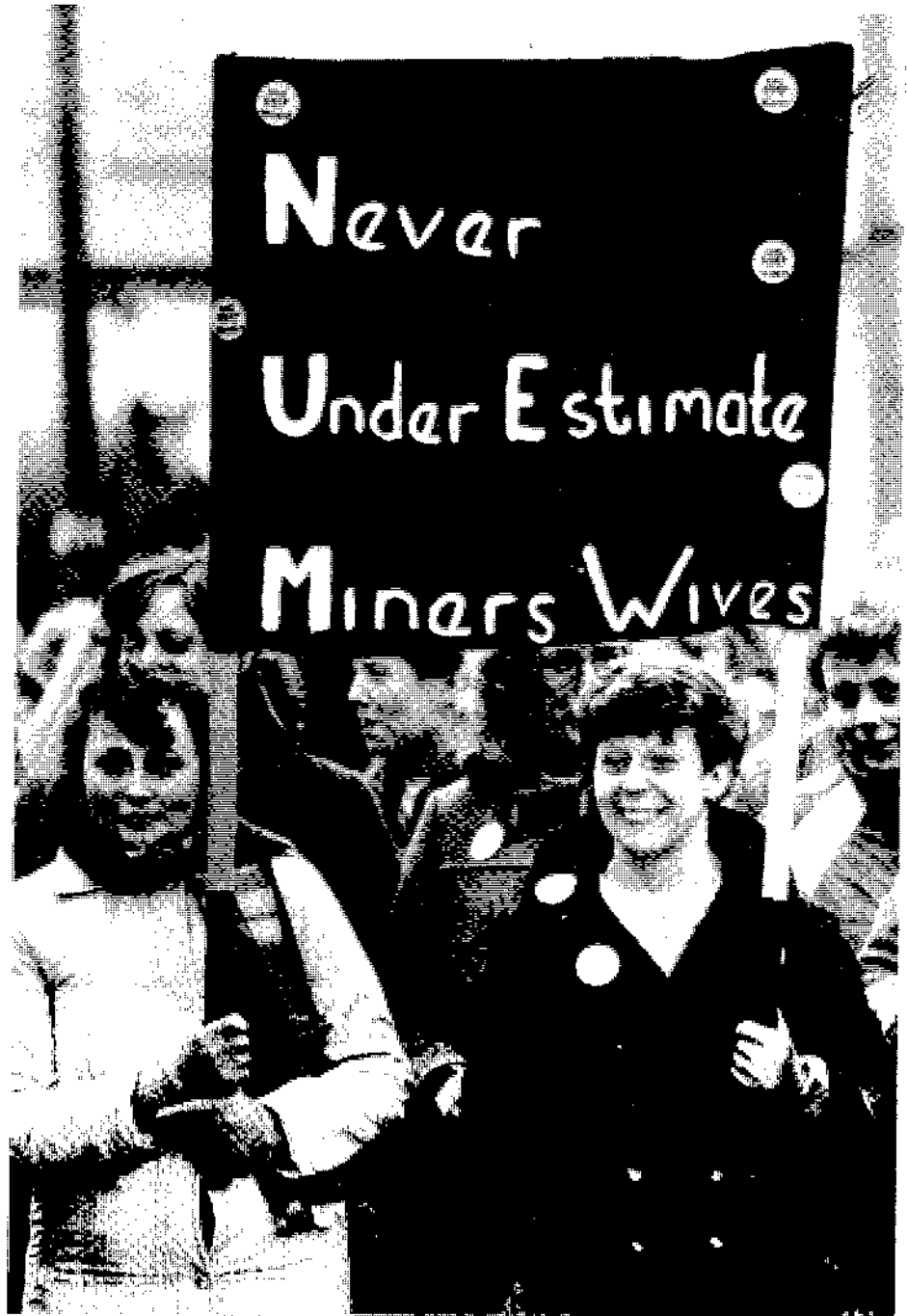
Far from showing the impossibility of solidarity, the strike showed the tremendous potential — given leadership.

'A leadership which fights for our class like the Tories fight for theirs' — the demand is obvious, but not easy to implement.

Poor leadership does not drop from the sky. And equally an adequate leadership cannot be got just by battles to replace sluggish officials by tougher militants. Many of today's sluggish officials were tough militants in their day: lacking perspectives and strategy, they have been overwhelmed by the day-to-day business of acting as a broker between workers and bosses. And where individuals keep their combativity and dedication, even that is limited as long as they are just individuals.

It is not just a matter of fighting this or that battle harder, but of transforming the whole labour movement — or at least a sizeable enough section of it — so that it operates according to a worked-out strategy against capitalism, rather than reacting blindly.

Industrial battles should be fought according to a strategy: why did we let the Tories batter the steelworkers in 1980, then isolate the miners, and now take on Labour councils and council workers separately too?



How deep is the defeat? That depends partly on us

Industrial militancy must be tied with a fight on the political front: why did we let the miners' industrial victory in 1974, forcing the Tories into an election which they lost, lead to such a wretched Labour government, with its IMF-ordered cuts and incomes policies?

Both industrial and political militancy must be reinforced with socialist ideas.

Battle of ideas

Otherwise everything we do will be moulded by the ideas of the ruling class — the ideas which represent capitalist 'normality' and are reinforced by the media every day.

Throughout its history the British working class has generally let the industrial and political aspects of its struggle run without coordination, and neglected the battle of ideas almost completely. It has reacted, sometimes militantly, to the assaults of capitalism; it has never launched a coherent

offensive.

Thus for 14 years — from 1969 ('In Place of Strife') through to 1983 — the trade unions repeatedly beat back efforts to impose new legal restrictions on them. But they never did more than beat back the attacks. Each time the capitalist class had a chance to regroup and to come back more skilfully next time.

We cannot afford to continue like that. A new approach requires a new leadership, but it also requires more than that: a top-to-bottom transformation of the labour movement, both unions and Labour Party, in its ways of thinking and modes of operation.

And that, in turn, requires an instrument to carry through the transformation: a left wing coherent, organised, clear in its ideas but not dogmatic, and able to conduct a coordinated effort on all three fronts, industrial, political and ideological.

That is why Socialist Organiser exists and organises.

Facts and figures of the strike

Statistics for scabherding

Bent statistics were a weapon for the Tories and the Coal Board in driving the miners back to work.

As early as July 2 the Tories claimed that 60,000 miners were working. This wild exaggeration probably did them more harm than good. But from August the Coal Board started using figures more carefully and more effectively. Day after day, the television news would lead with apparently ultra-precise figures from the NCB on returns to work.

The NCB's own auditors refused to confirm these figures: but the media gave no prominence to that fact.

And the NCB was careful. It exaggerated, but it exaggerated within limits. When it said there had been a big return to work, in fact there had been - if not so big as the NCB said. Given the pressure put on the miners by the TUC's failure to deliver solidarity, the NCB figures thus tended to become self-confirming. If they said that there had been a big return to work, then that would help produce a big return to work.

In November, when the NCB was making a big push in North Derbyshire, they boosted their figures by including Bolsover colliery, which is geographically in Derbyshire but comes under the Notts NUM.

The July figure of 60,000, it seems, was reached by including not only safety men and apprentices working with the NUM's permission, but also BACM, NACODS and APEX members.

Later figures may also have included safety men and apprentices. Miners on the sick were counted as breaking the strike. The NCB also took no account of miners who returned to work but then came back out on strike.

On top of all this, the NCB's *national* figures frequently clashed with its *area* figures. For example, in late February when the NCB was claiming 91,000

Date published	NUM figures		NCB figures	
	Out	Working	Out	Working
May 9	160,000	25,000		
July 31	153,000			
August 23	147,000		120,000	49,000
November 13			124,000	56,000
November 17	146,000	49,000		
November 19	NCB auditors' report shows 51,000 working			
November 24	140,000	48,000	126,000	63,000
January 8			118,000	71,000
January 17	140,000	56,000		
January 19			115,000	74,000
February 7	138,000			
February 28	116,000	80,000	91,500	94,500

miners breaking the strike *nationally*, its *area* figures only added up to 78,000.

When all these tricks are taken into account, the NUM and the NCB figures for the strike both give the same broad picture.

The biggest number of strikers was probably on March 16, when Notts struck briefly and the NCB only claimed 11 pits open. By the end of March the situation had settled down with the majority of Notts scabbing, but some 160,000 miners - over 80% nationally - on strike.

There was a slight increase in strikers after the NUM conference on April 19, and a slight decrease over the summer. The situation in early May was:

Scotland, Yorkshire, North-East, South Wales, Kent: 100% solid.

Notts: 12,000 striking, 18,000 working.

Lancashire, Staffordshire: great majority on strike, but sizeable scabbing.

Warwickshire: mostly scabbing, but sizeable numbers on strike.

South Derbyshire and Leicestershire: great majority scabbing.

Over the six months May-October, some 14,000 miners went back to work, according to NUM figures, in dribs and drabs. Staffordshire had weakened con-

siderably, Lancashire slightly; the numbers on strike in Notts had declined. But all the major coalfields except Notts were 100% or 99% solid.

A serious breach in the strike opened in November, though returns to work were then very slow in December and the first half of January. NUM figures show some 6,000 going back between mid-November and mid-January.

After mid-January, with the TUC openly abandoning the NUM, the return to work became worse. NUM figures show 24,000 workers lost to the strike between January 17 and February 28.

Even then, 116,000 miners were still not working - over 70% of those who had come out at the start.

The NCB figures actually confirm this broad pattern. Underneath all the ballyhoo, the NCB's figure for strikers on February 28 was still 76% of their figure for August 23.

One major element in the apparently huge gaps between NUM and NCB figures for particular dates is that they disagree about how many miners there were altogether, strikers, scabs, and others (off sick, apprentices, etc.) Even if they did agree, each would still have a choice of a number of different totals to give the striking/working figures as a percentage of.

As the table above shows, a confusing variety of totals were used - from 170,000 (the NCB's figure for the total number of miners), through 182,000 (NUM figure for total number of miners), and 186,000 (NCB figure for total NUM members including coke works, workshops, etc.), to 196,000 (NUM figure for total NUM members). The NCB claims that the difference between its total and the NUM's is accounted for by voluntary redundancies, retirements, deaths and sackings since March 1984.



Police escort scabs at Silverwood, Yorks.

The cost

The cost of the strike to the government was equivalent to the entire housing budget. The total loss of income throughout the economy was equivalent to 5% of industrial production. The extra imports of oil and coal were more than double Britain's car exports.

The cost to the government (up to the end of January) is analysed as follows:

Cost in power industry
(extra oil, etc.) £719m
Policing £189m
Loss of income tax which

miners would otherwise have
paid £271m
Social security payments
to miners' families £47m
Cost of lost production
in British Steel £189m
Losses to NCB £952m
Total of above items £2367m
Other costs to the government in the
form of nationalised industry losses due
to the miners' strike but less easily
identifiable could be an additional
£2300 million.

(Figures from Labour Research)

Coal imports

Britain imported 9 million tonnes of coal in 1984 to try to beat the strike.

Major sources were:

USA 3 million tonnes
Australia 2 million tonnes
Poland 1.5 million
South Africa 0.25 million

(Financial Times, February 2)



Police occupy Houghton Main, February 1985

11,000 arrested

Over 11,000 miners were arrested during the strike. Up to February 15 (February 1 in Scotland) there had been 11,013 miners arrested.

Something near 1000 other people - collectors, supporters on pickets, etc - had also been arrested.

By February 12, 145 miners had received jail sentences and 25 had been sent to detention centres. Other miners were jailed awaiting trial. These figures cover only England and Wales, not Scotland.

Terry French is in Wandsworth Prison for five years for allegedly attacking a policeman. In Derby one miner has been given three years, and eight others 2½ years, for setting fire to an (empty) scab bus; in Stoke-on-Trent four miners have got two years' jail, another two years' youth custody, for the same.

Some 2600 miners were still awaiting trial as of February 12 (England and Wales, again). Many of these face heavy charges (including conspiracy) on which they could be jailed.

Most of the jail sentences so far handed down have been recent - over two thirds of them since November 13. The police and civil-court offensive against the miners in the last months of the strike was matched by vindictive criminal courts.

In the earlier period of the strike the police concentrated more on minor charges (obstruction, breach of the peace, etc., on which people can be convicted on the sole evidence of a police officer). In later months, these minor charges dropped to 58% of the total (October-January), as against 79% in March to May.

The minor charges were used to intimidate miners, to drain strike funds through fines, and to impose bail conditions which prevented them from picketing.

2424 miners got fines (up to February 12, in England and Wales). Most were large fines: half were £82 or more.

Standard bail conditions imposed on miners stopped them picketing anywhere else than their own pit. Up to

September some 1650 people had received such bail conditions at Mansfield (Notts) magistrates' court alone.

Throughout England and Wales, 3,800 miners were on bail conditions by October 2.

Kent miners' president Malcolm Pitt was jailed in May for defying such bail conditions, even though the charge that he was bailed on drew only a fine.

Up to September (according to police figures for England and Wales), 290,000 miners had been turned back at police roadblocks (some miners, obviously, are counted twice or several times in this total). Figures for Notts show two high points: from April 25 to May 25 (after Easter and the April 19 NUM conference), when an average of 1500 pickets were stopped each week-day; and from June 25 to August 10 (as the NCB did its first back-to-work drive) an average of 2200 stopped daily.

(Figures from: Labour Research; New Statesman; and articles by Nick Blake and Louise Christian in 'Policing the Miners' Strike', ed. Fine and Millar).

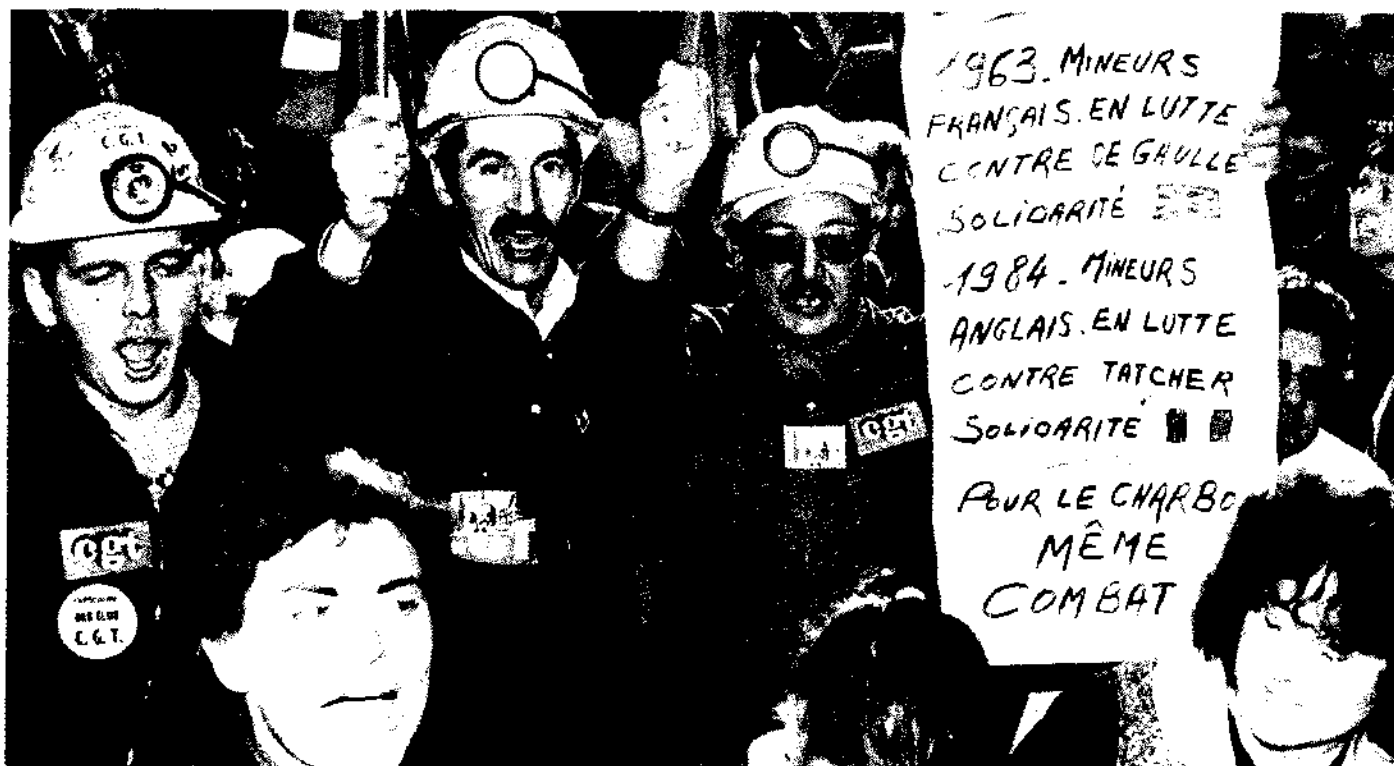


Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report.

International solidarity

Workers in many countries showed solidarity with the British miners, by trying to stop extra coal exports to Britain or by contributing to collections. Above: miners from France on a solidarity visit to Aylesham, Kent. The placard reads — 1963: French miners in struggle against De Gaulle. Solidarity. 1984: British miners in struggle against Thatcher. Solidarity. For coal — same struggle.

The Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc also sent messages of solidarity, while explaining that because of the martial law it was not in a position to take industrial action. The self-proclaimedly 'socialist' government of Poland sent large quantities of coal to help Thatcher defeat the British miners.

Socialist Organiser reported: "The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner. British miners . . . in the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in a position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain . . . that we are in solidarity with you."

Silesian miners, some of whose comrades were shot down when they struck in protest against the declaration of martial law in December 1981, broadcast this greeting to British miners over the underground radio in Upper Silesia on June 17:

"The Underground Provisional Coordinating Committee of Solidarnosc miners sends you fraternal greetings and full support and solidarity for your struggle for the right to work . . . we will do everything possible, including in action. The protest we have sent to the Polish government and parliament is an initial measure taken in support of your struggle."

NUM militants must see to it that the union throws its full support behind

Solidarnosc and against the bureaucratic dictatorship. The NUM should back the persecuted pioneers of independent labour movements in the USSR and other Stalinist states.

The British labour movement must support other workers against police state oppression wherever it occurs, whether in Chile, South Africa and El Salvador, or in the USSR, Poland and Cuba.

Another message from Solidarnosc read:

For four months the British miners have been on strike against a programme of mass closures of mines for economic reasons. The miners are threatened with unemployment. The government has rejected compromise solutions and has resorted to severe police methods against the strikers. Thousands of miners have been arrested; hundreds have been hospitalised and one has been killed.

The government of the Polish People's Republic, despite hypocritical condemnations of the activities of the British police in the columns of the regime's press, by the regime's pseudo-trade unionists, is profiting from the export of coal to Britain. It sells dirt cheap coal which has been mined in scandalously neglected working conditions and with reckless exploitation of the labour force and the coal field. The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner.

British miners! The true sentiments of Polish trade unionists towards the authorities of the Polish People's Republic and their practices was shown in the recent electoral farce which was boycotted by the workers. In the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in a position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain that as you have supported and are sup-

porting our struggle, so we are in solidarity with you.

We strongly oppose every case where force is used against workers struggling for their rights and interests.

Long live trade union solidarity!

Resolution of underground Solidarnosc, Mazowsze Region, June 26, 1984

In the past Arthur Scargill had opposed Solidarnosc (calling it 'anti-socialist'), and had maintained links with the state-run official 'unions' of countries like Poland. The experience during 1984, however, moved him to declared (on June 5):

"I think I owe Lech Walesa an apology".

In a letter to the Polish ambassador in November, Scargill spelled out his disgust:

The Jaruzelski government has dramatically increased the amount of coal imported to Britain and has totally ignored repeated requests from the NUM to stop exporting coal into Britain during the period of the miners' strike.

In doing so, the Polish government is giving direct assistance to Mrs Thatcher's government as it tries to defeat the miners' union.

The NUM has no intention of even considering the 'offer' to receive 100 striking miners' children for a holiday in Poland because we are aware that at the same time as such an offer is made the actions of the Polish government are directly assisting the Tory government in Britain to do all in its power to smash the NUM and the miners' strike.

Please convey to your government and trade union movement our absolute disgust and — even at this late stage — convey to them our request to stop all exports of Polish coal either directly or indirectly into Britain."

Letter from Arthur Scargill to the Polish ambassador in Britain:
Socialist Organiser November 15 1984.

150 MINERS IN JAIL



**FREE OUR
CLASS WAR
PRISONERS!**

