

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-

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

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.

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).

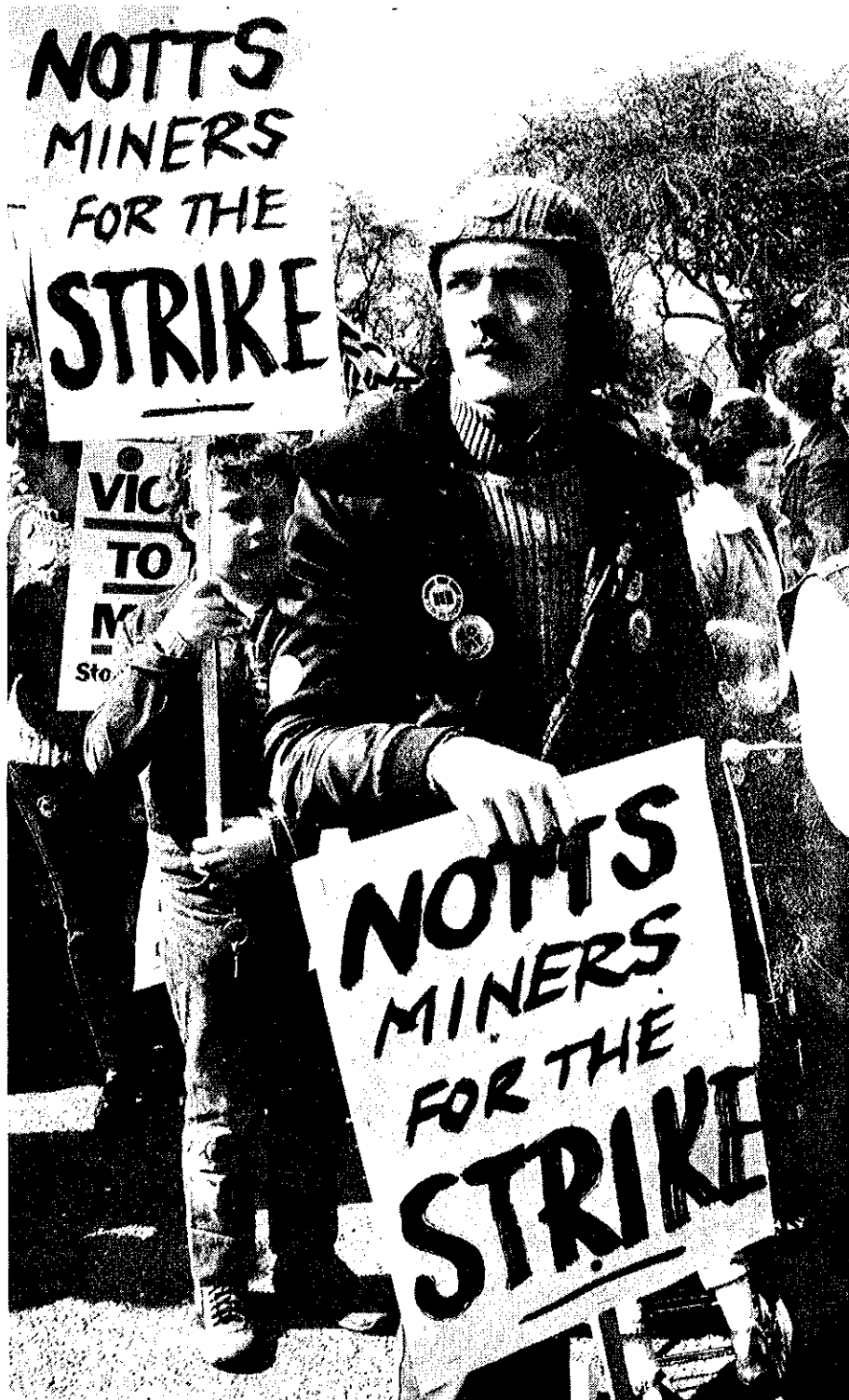
There was also clearly hostility. Frank Slater reckoned that the disgraceful role of most local and Area officials was decisive. More concerned with getting re-elected in June than with the fight against pit closures, branch officials either equivocated or openly encouraged strike-breaking.

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 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**

--- Inside
Page 1: ...
Page 2: ...
Page 3: ...
Page 4: ...
Page 5: ...
Page 6: ...
Page 7: ...
Page 8: ...
Page 9: ...
Page 10: ...

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



Kent miners outside Nottingham Town Hall. Photo: Mark Salmon

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

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.

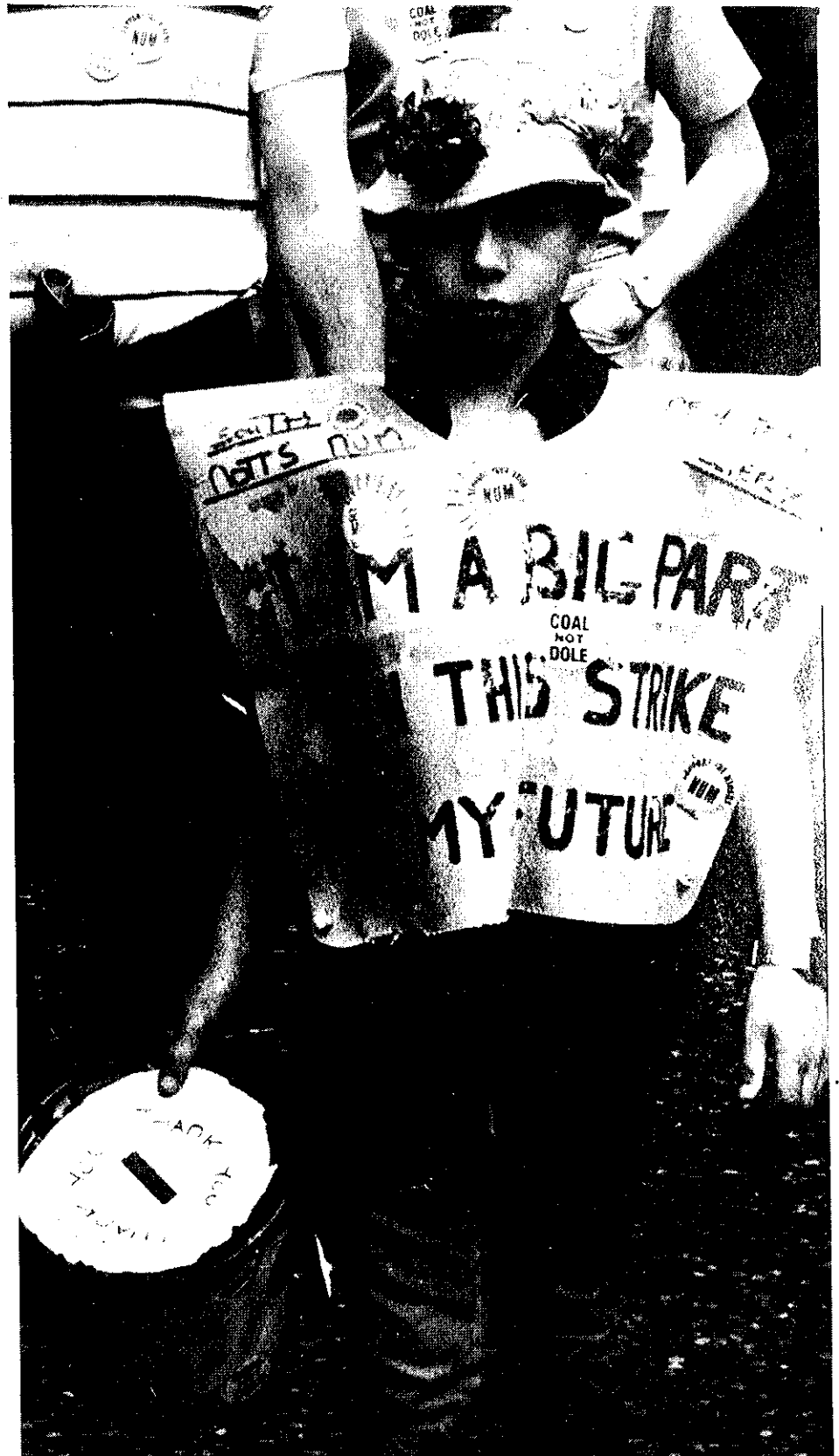


Photo: Paul Mattsson

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 fundraisers, 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.

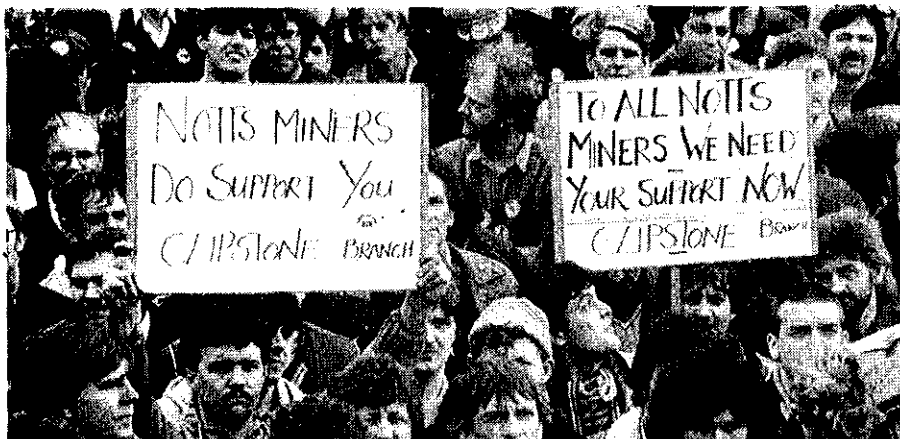
10. The Labour Party

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 drivel 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

steelworker, 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.

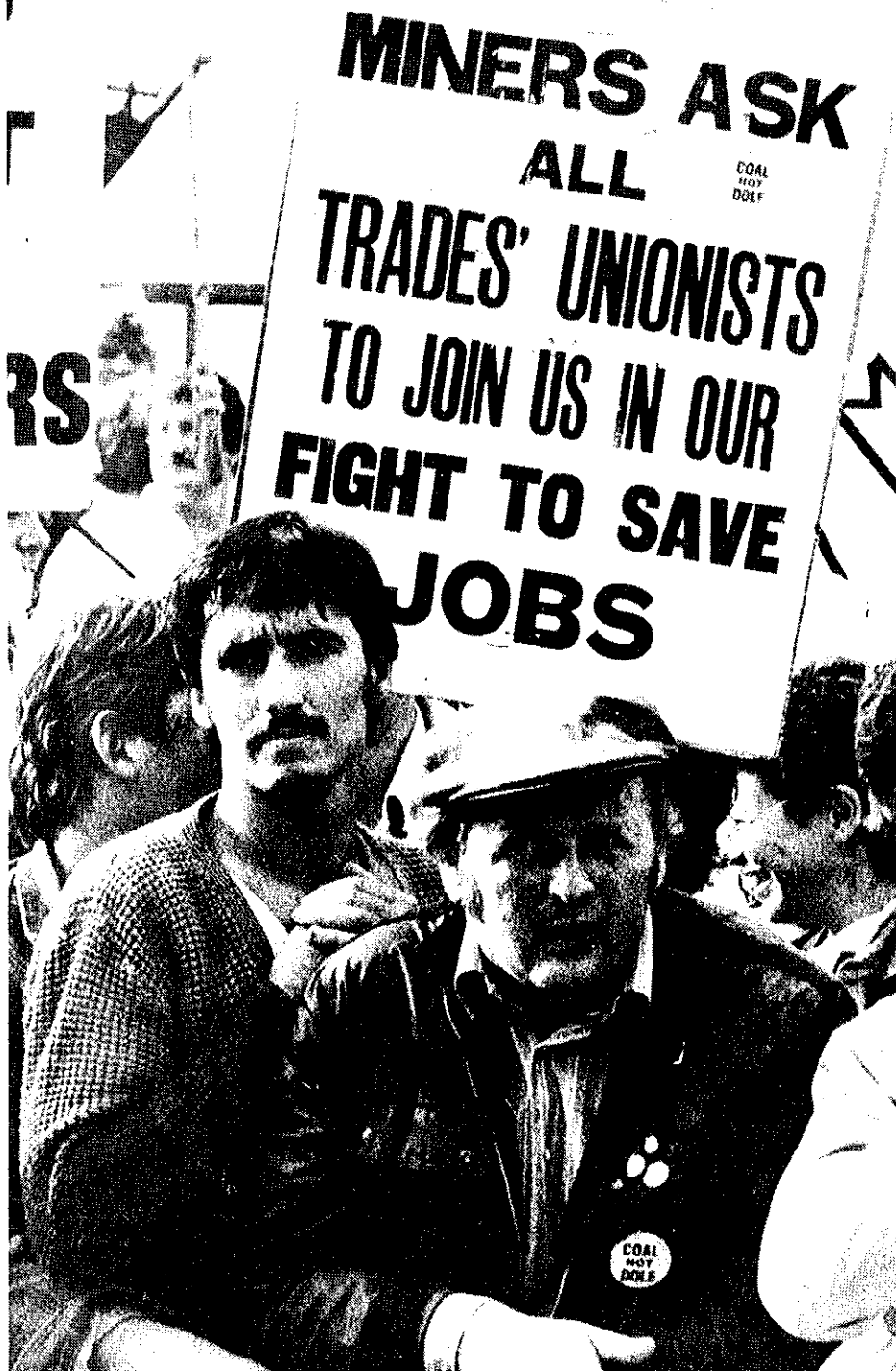
Socialist Organiser, April 19, 1984

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 Wiard, 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

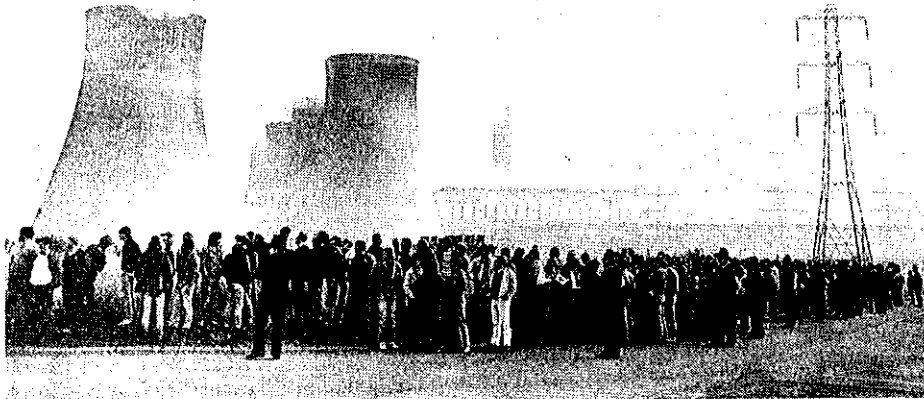
This Friday's NUM delegate conference will be a very important one for the strike. We need to say clearly which direction we are going in.

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

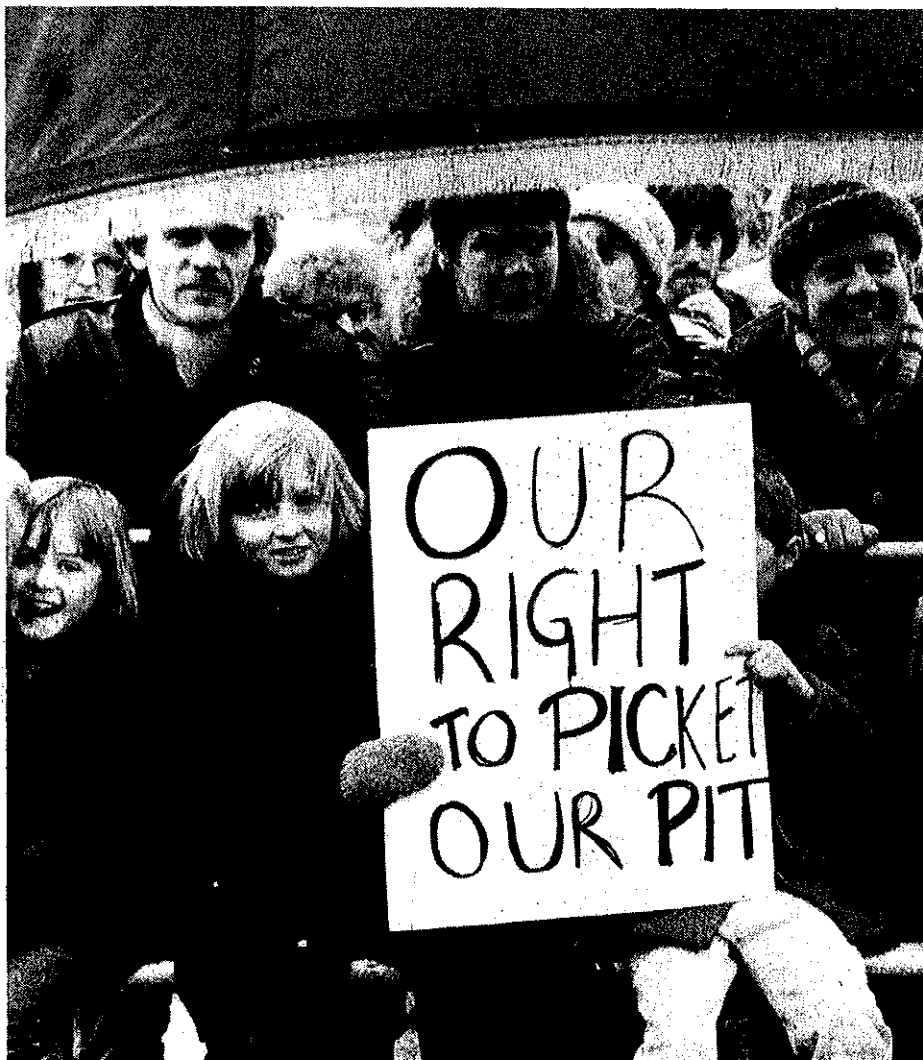
a question of picketing by intimidation and threats. It must have been obvious to all those participating in the picketing that their presence in large numbers was part of the intimidation and threat".

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 background. 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.

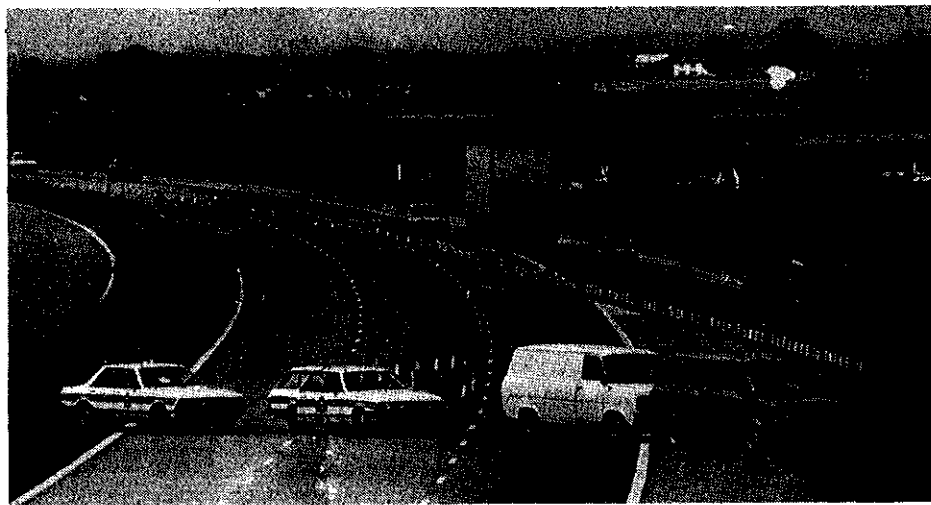
The judge refused resort to coercion. He would not grant the employers an injunction. Why, he pondered, didn't the union hold a ballot? They did. It was overwhelmingly in favour of a continued boycott. The judge swiftly issued an injunction ordering the union to do all in its power to make its members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

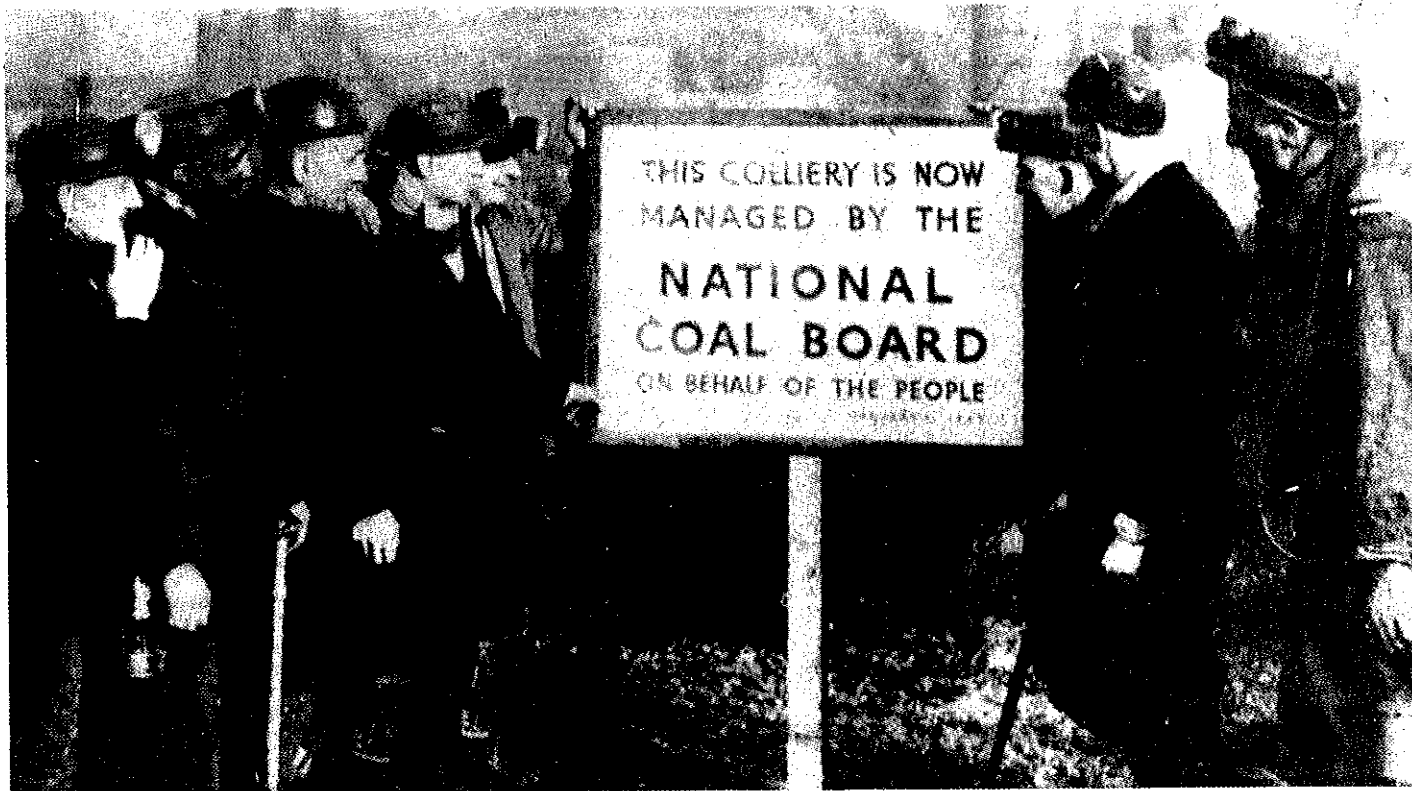
nology plays a big part in this.

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 leukaemia.

Safety precautions could, of course, be improved; and possibly, the dangers 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; and if miners 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 bridged. 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 1869.

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?



Malby, 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.

In each case it was shown that the 'public interest' represented by the state machine is one constructed and interpreted by a small ruling minority. The concerns of the State were identified with the narrow interests of the government or of the inner cabinet.

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 can be 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.

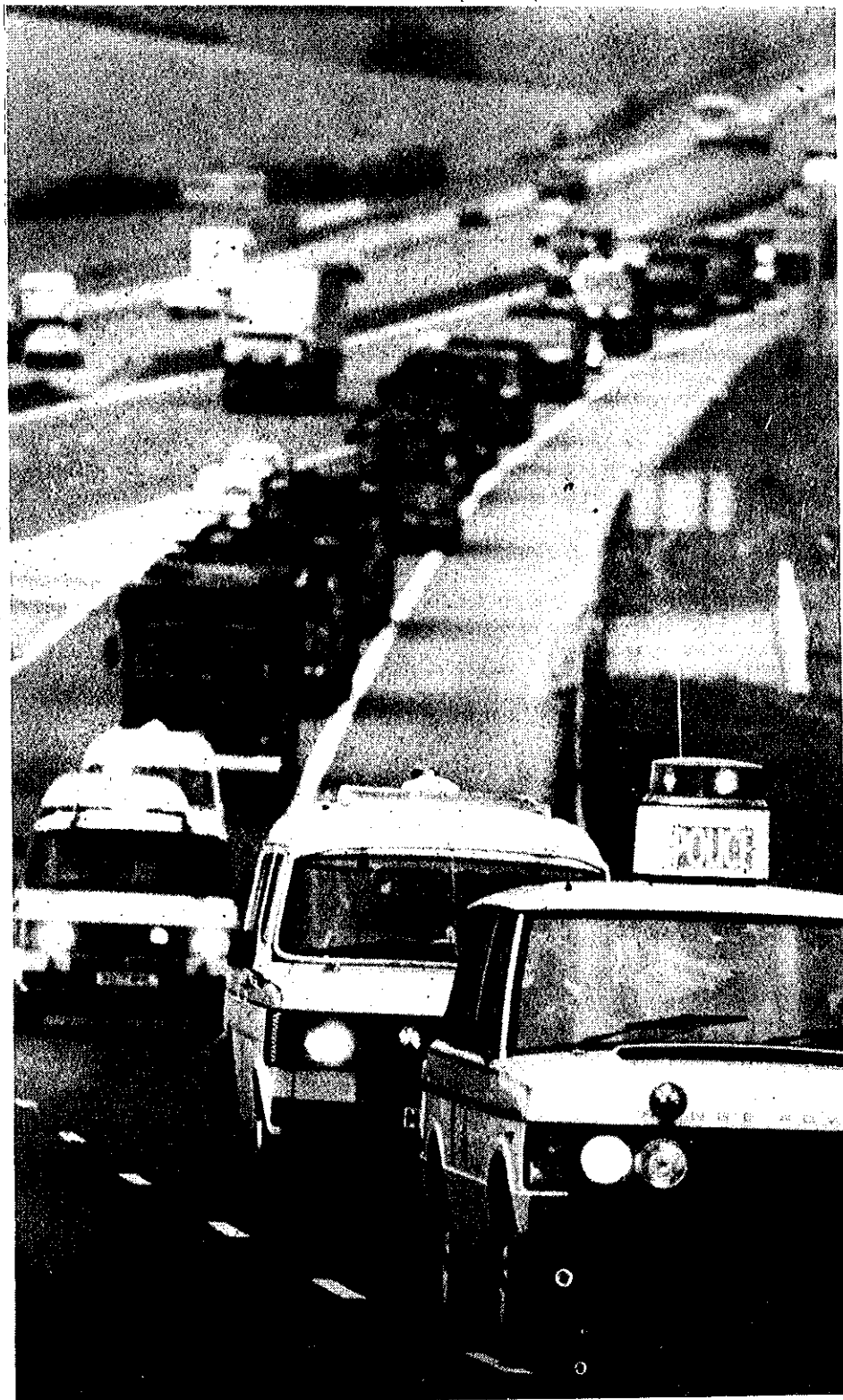
At most, Labour leaders would advocate milder police methods, while stressing that they did not question the fundamental command structure and objectives of the police. They did not argue for an *alternative* law and order, but simply for softer enforcement of established law and order.

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-

ferre 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 weaseling 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 Thewlls, Keresley Colliery, interviewed in Socialist Organisation, 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

Socialist ORGANISER

In view of what happened in Northern Ireland at the weekend I want to warn the mining community here that the police tactics that we have described and used in Northern Ireland would represent the next stage in Britain.



Northern Ireland: TORY POLICE STATE!



Thoresby June 15

Belt of August 12

Belfast today-Britain tomorrow

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.

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