

Socialist Organiser

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Support the miners

ANSWER Scargill's call!

THE TIME has now come for a major political campaign in support of the miners.

The solidarity shown, and the



**By Tony
Benn**

financial support given, have been much appreciated, but it is not enough. The movement must do more, and do it urgently, if we are to sustain the miners and their families.

We need to win acceptance of the principle that you do not cross a picket line and to extend industrial action into related activities — especially power stations and road transport of coal and oil.

We need to step up the financial support and make it

systematic, perhaps by regular levies, or the contribution of a day's pay, by those at work, on a regular basis.

We must also provide an effective political campaign to get the miners' case across to the general public, and link it with other attacks on working people including unemployment, health and education cuts, privatisation, reductions in the living standards of the old and the young, threats to women's interests, to civil liberties and to the democratic role of local authorities.

What are needed are political campaigns with public meetings, rallies, canvassing, collections and street-corner gatherings exactly as is regularly done in general election or by-

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"We are not getting the support we want.

"Our people have suffered hardship the like of which you cannot begin to comprehend. A section of the working class, the miners, and their families, have been bludgeoned by this government and their supporters.

"How much longer are you going to stand at one side and see us continually battered?"

Arthur Scargill

LOBBY THE TUC JANUARY 23

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election campaigns...

To be effective they need to lead up to a particular day of action so that those who take part will have something to look forward to, those who are invited to take action will know, in advance, why they are doing it, and the miners will know that they are getting support in the critical weeks that lie ahead.

It may be that the best way to launch this programme would be by arranging a public meeting at which all those who had indicated their readiness to assist could explain what was to be done and seek support from

everyone in the area.

Ideally we should aim at a general stoppage of work as this would be the most effective way of establishing the extent of support, but this is by no means the only way of bringing pressure on the government...

To be effective, work on such a campaign and day of action must be set in hand at once.

Firm proposals would have to be formulated by a small and representative steering committee and circulated to all those individuals and groups, especially in the Labour movement, who might be ready to co-operate, with an invitation to each of them to think out urgently what part they would like to play and how they would propose to pay for it.

The NUM and the women's support groups have taught the Labour movement many lessons in the last ten months, of which the most important are that you do not need to wait for permission from anyone before you defend your rights, and secondly that there is a need for strong and clear leadership.

It must be our task to take the initiative now and offer the leadership that will be necessary if we are to protect the interests of those whom we represent...

Halting the Notts breakaway?

THE decisive response of the NUM leadership to the unilateral change of rules in the Notts Area has put the rank and file scabs up against the gun. Do they really want to split the NUM? Early evidence suggests that many don't.

It has been widely reported that at least 300 scabs at Ollerton colliery have signed a petition saying they want to remain in the NUM. On Sunday, at the Ollerton branch meeting, a majority (70 strikers and 47 scabs) voted against Roy Lynk's new Spencer-type union. 94 votes for it. The scab chair then ruled that the vote needed a two-thirds majority.

Saturday January 19
March and Rally - Victory to the Miners!
Assemble 12.30 p.m., Islington Town Hall

Wednesday January 23
Lobby the TUC
9.00 a.m. onwards
Great Russell Street
Called by Broad Left Organising Committee
and Mineworkers' Defence Committee

National Miners' support demo called by the
Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions
Supported by the Mineworkers' Defence Committee
Sunday February 24

Stop Deportations!
Muhammed Idrish must stay!
NALGO National Day of Action against
Deportations January 30
Assemble 12 noon at Booth Street Recreation
Ground, Handsworth, Birmingham
March to Central Hall, City Centre, for rally

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Jailed by the police, sacked by NCB

Jimmy Lees, a Bevercotes (Notts) striker, spoke to John Bloxam.

A month after the incident took place, in early July two CID men called on me. They said that I broke the windows of a working miner's house.

They took me to the police station to interview me but I wasn't having any of that. They said people had seen me doing it, but I told them that was impossible as I wasn't there that night.

They let me go the same day, on police bail, to reappear at Mansfield Police Station in August.

When I went back they charged me with criminal damage and intimidation.

They locked me up that night and the next morning took me to Mansfield Magistrates Court. I was remanded on bail to reappear three weeks later.

The bail conditions included a curfew between 8 pm and 8 am which meant I could only go picketing on the afternoon shift.

This lasted for several months before I actually got to court.

I went to court with five witnesses to say that I was elsewhere at the time of the incident, but they still found me guilty on both charges. They put me on conditional bail for three weeks for reports. When I went back they sentenced me to a month in jail. I banged in an appeal and asked for bail while my appeal was being heard, but they wouldn't grant it.

I was sent to Lincoln Prison. I did eight days in all because the appeal judge decided that the sentence was

too severe and he reduced it to twelve days, so with four days remission, I was released.

It was more a punishment for my wife and children than it was for me. If the original sentence had stood, I would have been in prison over Christmas.

I have also been sacked by the pit management. I was sacked before I was convicted. They called me in for an interview. I told them what I told the court, that

I was elsewhere at the time. He said it was nothing to do with the court, he was the judge here and in his view I had done it.

George Brookes, the other miner from Bevercotes who was sacked didn't go for his interview, and the scabs said afterwards that if he'd gone they would have fought for his job. So I had a word with Paul Whetton and told him that I was going to put them to the test so I went with one of the scabs from

the local union, and I gave them the chance to fight for my job, but of course they didn't.

When I was in there I had no source of information, apart from TV - I know now how those who are on strike but don't get involved must feel. My words to them are - get yourselves up to the strike centres, get yourselves to meetings, find out the facts rather than sitting in the house relying on the TV and newspapers.

'Bring scabs to their senses'

Dene Braidley, Pye Hill strikers' delegate, South Notts strike committee, spoke to John Bloxam.

It's not really the membership I blame, it's the leadership. There's been some very poor leadership at branch level.

The next two or three weeks are going to be crucial for the strike. The Coal Board are really going to go to town on propaganda. If we can keep the numbers going back to a reasonable amount over the next month, then it's going to put it home to them that no way are they going to break this strike through blackmail and bribes.

At my own pit, we're picketing, but we've had no successes there, really - we're down to the hard core now, 16 out of 600, even though Pye Hill is due for closure this year.

But we've kept that small number very solid. We've kept everybody involved, that's the top and bottom of it. We send lads fund-raising, we send them on a pit picket one day, a power station picket the next - we keep them all actively involved. If

you let them sit at home moping all day, that's when they start thinking about going back to work.

At the power station we have hardly had any success either, but this week some of the lads told me that they had managed to turn round three tankers and a coal lorry. We've got to get back to mass pickets. They're a great morale booster, but they've stopped, really, since the sequestration of the funds.

Everybody realised that funds were low, so they couldn't afford the same sort of thing as before - but even if you could get a couple of carloads from each pit, especially now that it's not a police state around here any more, it'd be a fantastic boost.

Fund-raising has dried up a bit as compared with before Christmas, but not as much as I thought it would.

But people I've spoken to have been very disappointed at, the response from the TUC.

Expel Reid from the Labour Party!

By Frank Higgins

SINCE THE miners' strike began, Mr Jimmy Reid, the one-time Communist Party leader who is now a journalist, has been working very hard at being Britain's no.1 scab.

His speciality is ideological scab-herding, and his main stock in trade Scargill-baiting. Arthur Scargill was recently voted 1984's 'man of the year'. If there had been a contest for the title of 1984's 'mega-scab', Reid would have been way out in front of the field. For sheer effort in the anti-miners cause he is in a class of his own.

He has contributed a virulent stream of attacks on the NUM to such newspapers as Maxwell's Scottish Daily Record and the Observer. Renegades are useful in the middle of a bitter class war.

Last Sunday Reid was given half an hour on Channel Four to deliver a sustained diatribe against the striking miners and their leader Arthur Scargill. The word is that the Independent Broadcasting Authority bosses had expressed 'concern' that Channel Four - which has sometimes been an island in the stream of anti-NUM filth poured out by the rest of the media - was being too friendly to the miners. So Reid's half-hour polemic was put out to 'redress the balance'.

Reid did not just imply support for the Coal Board against the miners. He openly and explicitly supported the NCB. The NCB had been reasonable, he said. But Arthur Scargill was 'impossibilist', demanding something that "no government, not even a Labour government", could deliver.

Reid's impressive performance was a shameless piece of incitement to scab, and of the NCB's claimed 1200 new scabs

the following morning, some will surely have been persuaded to rat on their class by Reid's eloquent denunciations of Arthur Scargill.

For Reid is no ordinary scab-herder. He led the famous Upper Clyde shipyard sit-in in 1971. He was secretary of the Young Communist League and then of the Scottish district of the Communist Party, before joining the Labour Party in 1977. Presenting himself as an honest no-nonsense trade unionist, he attacked the NUM as a labour movement insider.

He pulled out all the stops and left few tricks of demagoguery unused in his denigration of Arthur Scargill and of 'Scargillism'.

Giving off a strong impression of malice and personal jealousy, he poured vicious personal abuse on Scargill. The ten-month strike of well over a hundred thousand miners has been a product of... Scargill's vanity!

Then, contradicting himself,

Reid said it was a product of "the insurrectionary road to socialism" - an attempt to bring down the government and to degrade Parliament. Everything bad that has happened to miners in the last ten months flowed from the NUM's failure to have a strike ballot.

Either way, the Tories, MacGregor, and mass unemployment were not the problem - Arthur Scargill was!

Reid said that Scargill was like "the Trotskyists", ultra-left. Using arguments he learned as a Stalinist, he said that the Left - "the Leninist sects" - always joined hands with the hard right! One step more along that road, and he would have accused Arthur Scargill of being in the pay of Thatcher - as he once accused Trotskyists of being in the pay of Hitler or the Pentagon.

Hypocritically calling on miners to 'save the NUM before it is too late', Reid in fact is part of the drive by the government and the Coal Board to crush the miners. He must know that. Reid's performance is proof of the truth of the old say-

ing: "There is no malice like the malice of the renegade".

For a long time Reid was considered to be putting into shameless public words the private opinions of Neil Kinnock and his entourage. Neil Kinnock has recently - if tepidly - associated himself with the miners. Kinnock should be asked to dissociate himself from the scab-herding Reid - clearly and in public.

And what is this filthy little scab-herder doing with a Labour Party membership card anyway? It is a scandal and a disgrace that he is allowed to continue in the Party.

Most left wingers rightly refuse to countenance the expulsion from the Labour Party of people who call themselves socialists. Whatever they call themselves, scab-herders should be expelled.

After his 'party political broadcast for the NCB', Reid should be sped on his way to the SDP or the Tory Party with the tip of the Labour Party's boot.

Expel this dirty scab from the Labour Party!



Jimmy Reid's half-hour of venom against the miners and Arthur Scargill was presented on Channel 4 as a counter-balance to Ken Loach's documentary "Which Side Are You On?" (see last week's Socialist Organiser). Here, Ken Loach comments on Reid's polemic.

"Nobody is more welcome to the people who run TV than a Communist who recants. Reid is obviously following in the footsteps of Chapple in his virulent attack on the miners. It's interesting that he uses the Tory trick of attacking Scargill, trying to separate him from his membership.

The level of personal abuse really disqualifies it from serious attention. Let's hope that people treat it and him with the contempt they deserve."

Organise for Feb 11!



John Harris

THE government says it can stand up to the miners indefinitely, but that's just part of the propaganda war. The sterling crisis is one proof that the miners' strike has done more damage than the Tories are willing to admit.

A Vice-president of Barclays Bank admitted last Monday on the 5.45 edition of the ITN News. "The other major reason, I'm afraid to say, is the long term effects on the economy of the miners' strike". But by the 10.00 p.m. edition, ITN had cut that section from the interview!

Fords at Dagenham has had a power cut and last Thursday, the Financial Times reported that the plant is now facing a coal shortage. The company has warned the unions there of "serious inconvenience" if more coal is not delivered "within a week". But the joint works committee is blacking any new coal.

Despite its confident public face, the pressures on the government are inevitably multiplying. Though they

By John Bloxam

have staked their credibility against any power cuts, they are very vulnerable in this area. The government will be forced in the near future to attempt to move coal stocks from strike-bound pits. Exactly when will be determined by the level of solidarity, breakdowns and on the weather. This will massively escalate the war between the miners and the government.

They can have little confidence from the prospects in other areas. Their highly-publicised 'back to work' drive continues to cause fraying at the edges, but after eleven months, two-thirds at least of all miners are still out.

Last week four Shirebrook miners were given savage jail sentences. From next week miners arrested at the Battle of Orgreave will be tried on the serious charges of riot and unlawful assembly. More savage class justice sentences are likely. But all the evidence to date is that the

vicious sentencing policy against strikers has only strengthened the resolve of those out.

If the government and employers are so confident, why then do they so desperately need to break the limited solidarity action that exists? They are doing it to wipe out solidarity on the railways.

The union has replied by calling a one-day strike action in certain areas for Thursday (17th).

It is still only a threat, however, forced on an hesitant and unwilling leadership by widescale rank and file pressure, and many militants fear a sell-out. But if the official call sticks, it gives rank and file militants a major new opportunity to strengthen the solidarity action on the railways. Branches like Totton, which has recently voted to start moving coal again because of isolation and lack of leadership, can be turned around and brought back into the fight.

The indifference and, in many cases, the open hostility of local union leadership remains the major obstacle to spreading the solidarity action and making it more effective.

The NUR leadership has one of the best records of verbal and financial support for the NUM. But where industrial solidarity action is concerned their attitude has led Roy Butlin, chair of Coalville Traffic LDC, (i.e. equivalent of shop stewards committee), to comment bitterly that he often feels things now are little different from the days when Sid Weighell was in charge.

Of course the leaders of the NUR are among the best supporters of the NUM.

Arthur Scargill commented on the role of trade union leaders in an interview last week in the Guardian.

"I did ask the leaders of the major power unions if they would arrange meetings of shop stewards in the major power stations. Although there was no rejection of this idea, it has not been put into operation.

"When people say they have not been able to deliver, I do not accept that workers simply don't respond. It's a question of conducting the

correct kind of campaign and showing to people that what's happening to the miners at the moment will happen to them."

He reported: "I've been asked to speak for the very first time in 10½ months to all the leading shop stewards in the power stations in the North of England."

In fact, other forms of action - mass pickets outside power stations; meetings with power station workers; labour movement conferences to boost action - are picking up. Many more such events are now scheduled than have happened in the previous 11 months. All of it is being organised on a rank and file level, not by the union leaders.

The official union movement has always had the power to call decisive action for the miners. Most of the leaderships have scabbed on the miners by refusing to use it, but they can still be pressurised.

What direct action and pressure has achieved in the NUR could be achieved in other unions. But it must be organised for. The solid and inspiring action of the Coalville NUR branch which triggered the decision for next Thursday's strike didn't drop out of the sky.

The February 9 delegate conference called by the Mineworkers Defence Committee could play a significant role in this. (Roy Butlin is one of the platform speakers).

But some miners' comments about the February 9 conference put even this into context. Yes, they said, the idea of a conference is a good one, but we're not interested in coming unless it's about organising action.

Fund-raising is still irreplaceable fuel for the strike to pay for a new round of flying pickets and mass picketing.

Lobby the TUC. They should get off their knees and start fighting. We need a recall Trade Union Congress to either force them to do that or call them to account for failing to fight for the decisions of last September's Congress.

We need all out action on February 11. Organise for a General Strike!

Back the miners



Expel the scabs

Paul Whetton's diary

Paul Whetton is the secretary of the Notts Rank and File Strike Committee, writing here in a personal capacity.

LAST Thursday the NEC arrived at a point where it had no choice but to take some action against the Nottingham Area. This wasn't action against scabs but action against an Area that had broken the rules.

That action is a recommendation that the Nottinghamshire Area be expelled. I dare say that the national delegate conference will endorse that decision. Events over the last two days have made that inevitable.

They've been lashing out in all sorts of directions since day one, so their reaction to the NEC decision wasn't unexpected.

An alternative union based on the scabs in the Notts Area is doomed to failure before it starts. It will have to be a condition of commencement of work that the Coal Board recognise no other union than the National Union of Mineworkers. So that's them up the Swanee.

There's no way the TUC will recognise them. The Labour Party won't recognise them and the Coal Board won't recognise them. Of course the Coal Board will recognise them in the interim period, they'll bend over backwards to support them, the same as with the Spencer Union when it was first formed. For the first year, they were given anything they wanted.

We will end up recruiting them back to the NUM. That will be a hard thing for some members to accept - recruiting scabs into the NUM, but ours has got to be seen as a growing union and theirs as a declining union.

Once we've got our own organisation we will consult the rank and file as to the best way to go about this.

When the Notts Area is expelled on February 1 the NUM will impose branches on Nottinghamshire. We have got registers and they'll be used to establish a membership, we'll have branch elections and so on.

In the initial period we shall concentrate on making sure that we've got all the strikers on the register of the NUM. Then at some later stage, and when that will be I don't know, it will be left to the rank and file to decide, we will raise the question of recruitment.

Invalid

Once the Notts Area is expelled from the NUM, its members will no longer be members of a trade union and their membership of the Labour Party becomes invalid so any of the scabs who have been trying to build themselves a career in the Labour Party are going to find themselves in a very tricky position.

It won't, however, be a condition of membership of the NUM that they join the strike.

There are many men around the branches, who would not want to go with the scab union. Many of them have a great deal of loyalty to the NUM and want to stay in it.

We will be telling them that they are welcome to join our organisation, but we will be urging them to come out on strike.

The tough action against the Notts Area should, I hope, make any other Area that is thinking of changing its rules think twice, because now they know that they won't be able to do that and remain in the NUM.

As for Roy Lynk saying that Arthur Scargill couldn't negotiate his way out of a toilet, well this guy was our agent at Bevercotes and he never won a case for us, and some of them were pretty cast-iron.

Henry Richardson was sacked as Area Secretary but remained as the agent, provided he gave an undertaking not to try and act as the Area Secretary. He refused to give that undertaking so he's been sacked as agent as well now, and they've placed a loyalty pledge on all the other employees at the Notts Area Headquarters at Berryhill.

I am not bothered by the decision to enlarge the negotiating team to the full union executive. In the first place, it was the Coal Board who insisted on limiting the size to three. And Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey have got nothing to hide.

I think it will show the full executive just what intransigence the three have met with in negotiations with the NCB.

The NCB obviously hope that the strike will continue to crumble around the edges but time isn't entirely on their side. The crisis with the pound is an indication that the government is under extremely strong pressure. Small businesses are folding in mining areas. It is all added pressure. It may well be that her friends in the City will turn on Thatcher and say "Look, when we said we were prepared to pay any price, we didn't mean this lot".

I only wish that more trade unionists would take advantage of the pressure the government are under to benefit both themselves and the miners by stepping up their demands and threats of industrial action.

We are in regular contact with railway workers in the NUR and ASLEF. We have told them that if they want miners out with their banners on Thursday's industrial action against victimisation of railway workers supporting the miners, we will be there.

Some power station shop stewards have said that they will come out and see our lads on the picket line. That would be a tremendous step forward for us in the Trent Valley. It would open up a dialogue and enable us to make some links.



John Harris

Mary Hallam is a miner's widow and the mother of a Thoresby striker, who lives in Edwinstowe, Notts.

Two weeks ago Mary went with a friend for a game of bingo to nearby Warsop and got involved in an argument about the strike with a scab - who punched her. "When he hit me it lifted me right off my feet, I went flying through the air and my head hit this stone wall." She ended up with five stitches and a bruised shoulder. It's not the first fight involving a scab, but Mary says "I don't think I've heard of a man hitting a woman before. It's made me feel even more bitter against them. The first thing I thought was, 'I'll live to fight another day. They'll not put me off'."

Mineworkers' Defence Committee
National Conference
SOLIDARITY WITH THE NUM!

Octagon Centre, Sheffield
Saturday February 9, 11 am - 5 p.m.

Delegates: 2 per trade union organisation
1 per other organisation.
£3 per delegate, strikers free

Confirmed speakers include:
Peter Heathfield, Betty Heathfield, Tony Benn
John Tocher, Phil Holt, Roy Butlin, Paul Whetton

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Back the miners



How many times since the miners strike began have we heard so pompously and hypocritically trumpeted by the Tories and the media — not to mention some Labour Party and trade union leaders — that “the law is the law and must be obeyed”?

Well, local authorities are ignoring anti-pollution laws, the Clean Air Acts, enacted some 20 years ago; turning a blind eye to the use of ordinary bituminous coal with, it appears, the full backing of the government.

Until now the NCB's domestic smokeless fuel factory — the Homefire plant at Keresley, near Coventry — has not been operating at full capacity,

Tories' double standards

ity, resulting in a national shortage of smokeless fuel, despite increased imports from East and West Germany.

However, even now with 80% of the workforce scabbing and operations back at near full capacity of 4,500 to 5,000 tonnes a week, the output is too little and too late to reverse the shortfall.

Some Labour controlled local authorities are waking up to this deliberate flouting of the laws and are now beginning to insist that the Tories should come out into the open and take responsibility for the waiving of the Clean Air Acts and thus acknowledge their double standards.

Scots LP fight

By Stan Crooke

WITHOUT doubt, the most important resolution in the recently published agenda for this year's Labour Party Scottish Council conference in March is number 64, from Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale Constituency Labour Party.

The resolution “applauds the magnificent struggle of the striking miners” and “condemns the violence inflicted on the miners and their families by the state” through police harassment, the use of the courts and the denial of state benefits.

Describing “any condemnation of ‘miners’ violence’ as a ‘betrayal of the working class and a deliberate attempt to bring about a miners’ defeat’”, it “condemns the statements and actions of the leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock, and calls for his immediate resignation and replacement with a socialist leader who is prepared

to lead the labour movement on socialist policies and support workers in struggle”.

The Scottish Labour Party bureaucracy has been quick to condemn the resolution, and will certainly be pulling out all the stops to prevent the resolution even being discussed, most likely by compositing it out of existence.

Constituency Labour Parties should:

*Send resolutions to the Scottish Party conference standing orders committee (c/o the Secretary, J. Allison, Keir Hardie House, 1 Lynedoch Place, Glasgow G3) demanding that conference have the right to discuss the resolution in full.

*Send messages of support to Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale CLP (c/o the Secretary, A. Hotchkiss, 27 Ladyschaw Drive, Selkirkshire, TD7 4HT) for submitting the resolution.

*Mandate delegates to Scottish conference to vote for the resolution.

Confused help

DAVID HARRIS

A controversy is going on within the Dutch union movement about what help the Miners' Union wants it to give. According to the small OVB union federation, the NUM has asked for a complete boycott of coal exports to Britain. The Transport Union of the largest union federation, the FNV, says the NUM only wants the amount of coal exported reduced to normal proportions.

It is clear from this controversy that the NUM urgently needs to establish closer contact with the Dutch labour movement.

In Rotterdam the leader of the PvdA (Party of Labour) group in

the council, J. Henderson, is calling for the council to ensure that exports are reduced to normal proportions.

The amount of coal going from Rotterdam to Britain increased to about 192,000 tons in September 1984 compared with about 32,000 the previous September. (In October the figure was “only” about double that of the previous year).

According to one of the Rotterdam harbour employers between seventy and eighty percent of the coal is going into Britain not through small obscure harbours but through the usual coal harbours. In other words unionised British workers are apparently unloading it.

Standing firm

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Industrial Action, Thursday
January 17th

As you know the Rail Federation has called for industrial action next Thursday to support Coalville and other freight depots where NUR and ASLEF members are being victimised.

We welcome this decision at Coalville. It comes at a time when BR management and the NCB are stepping up the pressure to break the action taken by railwaymen. We believe the Federation should carry through its responsibility to the miners which began when they issued the directive not to move coal last April.

We also believe our members should be defended against the dirty tricks and victimisation carried out by BR management.

Management brought in signalmen from outside the area to get coal trains moving on December 17 between Bagworth and Drakelow power station.

In order to complete the chain of signal boxes on this line, one of the Coalville men, loyal to the union directive, was removed from his box, offered paid leave to stay away from work, which he refused, and then accused by the area manager of being “mentally unstable”, and told that he had to see the medical officer at Derby.

When he went up for the interview no medical appointment had been made, and he was offered a job sweeping



platforms at Burton-on-Trent, which he refused. He was finally offered a job in a signal box outside the Coalville area which he accepted.

We regard the victimisation of the signalmen as the most serious in a long line of harassment which has included police raids of men's homes; sackings for alleged theft; disciplinary charges; the spreading of evil rumours; cancellation of Sunday and essential maintenance work; and a threat to close the depot from the area manager himself.

In spite of all this we have stood firm, and rail traffic in the Leicestershire coalfield has been sealed off for 38 weeks.

We are demanding the following from the British Rail Board: no movement of

coal trains; no more scab labour at Coalville — withdraw the signalmen from outside the area; no more victimisation — reinstate the Coalville signalman who has been sent to another area. We want the right to sign on and be given alternative work, which is the practice in other freight depots.

We were at the Federation meeting on Tuesday January 8 to ask for national industrial action. Unfortunately it was decided to have only limited industrial action with some depots in the Midlands and Eastern regions being called out.

The Rail Federation has threatened action twice to stop the pressure on members at Shirebrook and Coalville. Each time, the action was called off because the

management made a few concessions. Management then regrouped their forces and began fresh attacks on us.

If the Federation retreats once again, then the BRB will hit us even harder, and there will be more sackings and more harassment.

We are very grateful for all the support and money given us by branches and district councils. But we know the only action that will get the BRB off our backs is national industrial action. We are therefore calling on all branches to back the freight depots and stop the victimisation by taking industrial action on Thursday January 17.

Yours fraternally,
Roy Butlin,
Chair, Coalville Traffic LDC

I could write you a book

People going about their business are clouted and abused by these thugs in blue; no badges are worn, and some wear NCB donkey jackets to confuse people.

Last week they burst into a club one dinner time, knocked a poor old man to the ground, breaking his arm and ribs, then walked out. This man hadn't worked for over 20 years with a bad heart and he had no connection at all with the strike. Now he is in intensive care.

Women out shopping are subjected to various insults, degrading suggestions and disgusting language.

Some of these thugs are soldiers from Germany and Ireland; they keep taunting people, saying what they did to the Irish they'll give to us.

In spite of what the media say, the strike is still solid; at my old pit there are two scabs, one is a clerk, one is an engine driver. They sit in the manager's

office from 9am to 11.30am after having an escort of roughly 100 police to get them in. After 2½ hours they are then taken, one to Doncaster, one to Nottingham.

They are social outcasts, that's the situation at all the pits up here.

How the country has allowed this woman and her ‘crawlers’ to bring everyone to their knees, I cannot understand. And as for some of the other unions and so-called Labour MPs who keep coming on the box and talking

about law and order and democracy but never mentioning police violence — they must all be seeking a pat on the head from the Godmother. The Mafia can't be half as bad as she is.

The old Kings and Queens used to give the barons land for the loan of their private armies. I wonder what she will give to all the brave police chiefs.

Saltley was bad enough those few days, but these lad have faced tremendous odds and never shirked it, T shirts and

trainers facing cavalry charges, riot squads.

I could write you a book about life up here. Villages have been cut off and isolated by police road blocks, people stopped on the streets shopping, asked where they were going, their names and addresses taken and then turned back.

Letter sent by retired miner to an old friend in B'ham just before Xmas

Going nowhere fast

A NEW Scottish TUC/Labour Party Scottish Council leaflet has just been produced for mass distribution. It does not call for any form of industrial solidarity action or increased solidarity

with the miners.

Echoing the Scottish TUC's earlier appeals for “an amicable resolution of the outstanding difficulties between the NUM and NCB”, it merely calls for “a negotiated settlement of the dispute, urgently”.

A demonstration has also been called for the afternoon of Friday January 25, in Glasgow. It is not linked to the call for a Day of Action, and even less so to calls for solidarity strike action. The demand of the demonstration is that Thatcher should agree to meet the Scottish TUC...

Resolutions for this year's Labour Party Scottish conference have also just been published. The conference presents the opportunity for the Scottish NUM, as an affiliated union, to appeal to the rank and file delegates over the heads of the soft-left Labour Party Scottish Council.

But the Scottish NUM leader-

ship, dominated, like the Scottish TUC, by the Communist Party, has not done so.

Neither of the NUM resolutions on the agenda even mentions the miners' strike. One calls for “peace, disarmament and detente”. The other calls for “protecting our Scottish mining industry...protecting this important sector of the totality of our Scottish economy...maintaining our mining industry...” — but makes no reference to the miners' strike!

Whilst the higher echelons of the Communist Party continue to sit on the dispute and plead with Thatcher to meet them, the lower echelons are blocking support for the Mineworkers' Defence Committee recall conference on February 9.

Their argument that the conference is on a Saturday (when everybody should be out collecting) and that the conference is irrelevant (because everybody should be out collecting).

Scab Polish coal

IMPORTS of Polish coal to Britain, which have risen dramatically during the miners' strike, seem likely to come to an abrupt, though unfortunately only a temporary, end in the next few days.

The planned moving of 100,000 tonnes of household coal last weekend by one trader has proved impossible because of the severe arctic weather on the Continent. In Katowice, a town at the

heart of the Polish coal industry, temperatures are as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius, freezing mining and loading equipment, and halting trains which move the coal to ports.

This is likely to cause difficulty for the NCB who are only managing to supply 40% of the UK household coal trade, and customers, particularly in Northern Ireland may find coal deliveries drying up.

Hatfield Main Women's Support Group

Rally and picket

Monday January 21 at 9.30 a.m.

Rally at Duncroft Miners' Welfare, Broadway, Dovescroft, Doncaster with Peter Heathfield and support group speakers followed by march and picket to Hatfield Colliery, Pit Lane.

Details, ring Doncaster 844446

Support the Miners Rally

Central Hall, Coventry.

Friday January 25 at 7.30 p.m.

Speakers include Peter Heathfield, Ken Gill, Jim Mortimer, Kath Chaplin, Womens' Support Group

US hands off Nicaragua

THE Federation of Conservative Students have a funny joke. In fact they have two funny jokes.

One is a picture of a vicious-looking National Guard in El Salvador, with the legend "Victory to the government and people".

The other is a picture of an equally vicious-looking armed Nicaraguan 'contra' sporting the slogan "Victory to the democratic resistance".

The jokes, of course, are pretty sick. And it is doubtful that too many people in El Salvador or Nicaragua would laugh. If your family has been murdered by a right-wing death squad, or if you have been shot at by a CIA-backed 'contra', you wouldn't think the Federation of Conservative Students were all that funny.

In fact, the 'electex, US-backed government in El Salvador is widely opposed by a guerrilla movement that has liberated large areas of the country.

And in Nicaragua, the ruling Sandinistas were shown massive support in the elections last year. Right wing newspapers have tried to make a lot out of the fact that the main capitalist opposition party didn't stand in the election.

In fact, opposition parties — right wing and left wing — did stand, and didn't get very much support. Independent observers thought the elections were fair.

But the US continues to make threatening noises. In the past, the US has been ready to invade countries in Central America — and elsewhere — to defend its interests. The possibility of a US invasion of Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinistas remains a real one.

All socialists should campaign against the threat of invasion, and be ready to get out on the streets if an invasion takes place.

CLASS FIGHTER

10p if sold separately from Socialist Organiser

VICTORY TO THE MINERS

INSIDE: Women Against Pit Closures; Their violence and ours: Newham 7. YTS

WOMEN making history

Probably the single most important and revolutionary development in the miners' strike has been the emergence of a network of women's action groups throughout the coalfields. Judith Bonner looks at the groups and their place in the history and struggles of working class women.

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

Alexandra Kollontai wrote this in 1920, yet it could be about today. Alexandra was writing a history of working class Russian women with

whom she fought, as a socialist and sister, against the Tsarist tyranny. The development and organisation of those women then is comparable to the spirit of the women today, organising in Women Against Pit Closures groups.

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

Fighting

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

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

Pickets

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

"On early pickets, 2.30 am, 4.30 am, too early to go to bed. Back in an hour, or two or three. Stay up to see the kids up and breakfast. Food parcels to go out 11 am — 3 pm. Back for the kids coming home. Tea time. Meeting, social security problems to sort out. Someone needs shoes for the picket line. Someone is depressed.

Clearly the strike could not have got this far if it were not for the dynamic, forceful organisation of women in the pit villages. The level of solidarity they have provided has been unrivalled by any other section of the organised labour movement. Crusty socialists still maintain that the self-organisation of women is by nature divisive and what is more, working

Real jobs and a decent future for youth

12 months ago, Class Fighter reported that the government wanted to make YTS compulsory.

"No to Conscription" we said. All over the country Class Fighter supporters organised pickets of MSC offices and demanded that Labour Councils told their careers officers not to report refusals to the DHSS who wanted to cut their supplementary benefit for six weeks.

The Yorkshire YS Regional Conference passed our motion from Harrogate YS, moved by Regional Committee member Mark Osborn which called for days of action against conscription. Now the government has decided to go all out for conscription. If they have their way, then it's quite likely that all 16 year olds who can't find a job and whose parents can't afford to keep them on at school or college will have to go on a scheme.

Underneath it all is the government's belief that youth under 18 shouldn't be allowed to sign on. They want to abolish supplementary benefit for school leavers. Thatcher says that youth have priced themselves out of a job. We say that our wages and supplementary benefit should be the same as for the over 18s. Making YTS compulsory fixes the unemployment

figures. It also makes it look like the government is doing something to help unemployed youth. That's a lie. The schemes are a rip-off. The bosses get a trainee for next to nothing and they don't have to bother about the safety and discrimination laws which protect employees. When it suits them the government says you are a worker. When it doesn't suit them and the class they represent, you are an 'unemployed' person.

played trainee'. We demand full rates for the job and the employed status necessary to give us protection. Many people wouldn't mind a year on insulting wages if it was a real training and led to a proper job. But that is not what YTS is about. For the vast majority of trainees, all they have to look forward to at the end of the year is the dole office. We demand real jobs, a guaranteed job at the end of a scheme and a decent future for youth.

Thatcher hates the unions. They stand in the way of her drive to make more profits. But she had to concede that the unions have a say in YTS. Now no scheme can go ahead if the union won't allow it. Even schemes with non-union cowboy firms have to be approved by the Area Manpower Board which has union representation on it. But the TUC only agreed to YTS on condition that it was voluntary. Now it is going to be made compulsory.

The TUC should get out of it and bring the whole lot of YTS crashing down.



SEARCH FOR ME

Not the Church and not the courts

Victoria Gillick has won her appeal for no contraception or abortion information or treatment to be given to young women under the age of 16 without their parents' consent.

The DHSS will be appealing to the House of Lords and hopes the case will be heard before the end of the month.

Simply stopping young women obtaining the pill will not stop "underage" sex. The resulting increase in unwanted pregnancies and a return to back street abortions may not be the only effects. The judgement may also lead to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases (because young women will be more worried about going to a doctor and admitting to "illegal" sexual activity) and may possibly lead to the creation of a black market in contraceptive drugs.

The hypocrisy of the state in relation to the sexual behaviour of men and women is clearly shown — "underage" men will still be able to buy contraceptives over the counter at any chemist.

The YS should, as well as condemning the reactionary Gillick and Tory hypocrisy, state that it is in favour of lowering the age of consent, free and easy access to contraception and abortion on demand.

CLASS FIGHTER

NO CONSCRIPTION

ON TO YTS!

Class Fighter 12 months ago warned of the danger of conscription onto YTS. We were right.

Inside

Bloody Sunday
Foolhouse and skin
YCND
Newham 8

ON the evening of April 7, 1984, after a day of racial attacks throughout Newham, a group of Asian youth were attacked by racists drinking in the Duke of Edinburgh pub. Glasses, pool cues and balls were thrown and the Asian youths defended themselves.

The police arrived and arrested some of the participants in the ensuing fight and later arrested the racists. Over the next few weeks seven Asian youths were arrested and all charged with conspiracy and various other individual charges, ranging from criminal damage to affray.

At their last court appearance, all seven pleaded not guilty to all charges and the conspiracy charges were dropped on six of the defendants. All remaining charges will be heard at the High Court in May and a national demonstration is being planned for April.

A large turnout is essential to demonstrate our feelings that self-defence is no offence.

Further details of the campaign and speakers for meetings from: The Newham Monitoring Project, 258 Romford Road, London E7.



Picket of Duke of Edinburgh pub organised by Newham 7 Defence Campaign, November 3, 1984
Photo: Stefano Cagnoni (IFL)

ON FRIDAY July 20 Mukith Miah went to get some chips during his school lunch break in Stepney Green, East London.

On the way back he was ambushed by twelve or thirteen white youths. They kicked him unconscious. Then, as he lay on the ground, they slashed his back with a Stanley knife.

Mukith lost a lot of blood and had to stay in hospital for five days. Now he will bear the scars of racism until he dies.

In Newham, also East London, homes of black families have come under siege from stoning and firebombing.

In August five Asian women fought a running battle for half an hour with 20 white thugs who threw stones and concrete blocks at their homes.

In Newham, the local Monitoring Project deals with an

average of ten racist attacks a week.

In Greenwich, South London, the local anti-racist groups has an average of 14 cases reported each week.

The record of violence by racists against black tenants on council estates is horrifying, particularly in Tower Hamlets, East London.

On the Lincoln Estate, all 25 Bengali families have faced an uninterrupted torrent of racist abuse. Pigs' trotters, blood, shit, bricks, fireworks and burning material are posted through their letterboxes.

Graffiti, verbal abuse, and physical assault are everyday occurrences.

Not one racist has been arrested. The police have not even bothered to take wit-

ness' statements.

At a meeting on the Lincoln Estate between police, GLC officers, Bangladeshi and other tenants, a white woman resident said that she would petrol-bomb all the Bangladeshi residents given the chance. None of the police present reacted.

It is very difficult directly to prevent racist attacks from happening. Unorganised attacks, like being beaten up walking down a street, are impossible to anticipate. Organised attacks by fascist groups are also difficult to prevent because of their clandestine nature.

The only real way of combating attacks is to pinpoint areas where there are known to be high levels of attacks, and for the community to organise to defend people in those areas.

There are possibly two ways of dealing with fascists' organ-

ised attacks. Firstly, to act instantly on information picked up by anti-fascists and organise a 'reception committee' for them. The other option is to go out and deal with them before they attack, where we know their names and addresses.

A lot of people will probably be horrified at the second option, but it should be discussed. These fascists have murdered people and got away with it through police inactivity. This option would also take anti-racists onto the offensive as a movement, rather than having small areas of resistance responding to rather than preventing attacks.

For too long now anti-racists have not taken the initiative. As a movement, it's about time we did so.

class women just don't do it. Really?

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

"It was as though women had been asleep for hundreds of years. We awoke to a new awareness, a realisation of what we as women could do. It is only comparable to the suffragettes. Do you know, I believe we are a part of history being made." (from South Yorkshire).

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

At the same time, women

must now organise around

Demands

The aspirations raised by women involved in the strike can only take us forward. Women have gained much by breaking their isolation, having childcare more available and collective eating. We

must now organise around

At the same time, women

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At the same time, women

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At the same time, women

have witnessed in themselves changing consciousness and political awareness which makes them say "We cannot go back to the status quo".

Kids have eaten better in the collective soup kitchens, shopping has a whole new meaning — it's collective or non-existent because it's distributed, shared and some days you don't have to do it at all.

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

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

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such demands as 24 hour, free nurseries, a woman's right to choose and collective facilities.

"After the strike we will keep ourselves together and do you know what we'll do first! We'll have a campaign against low pay because it hits women — and we'll start with the women in the canteen and bar staff — get them a pay rise, something the NUM should have done" (from South Yorkshire)

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

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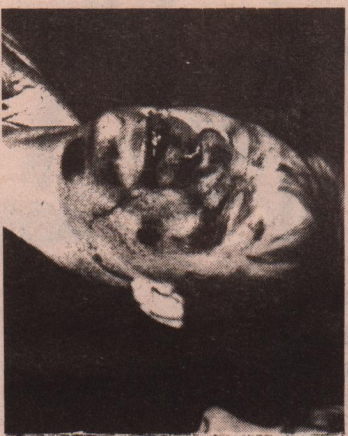
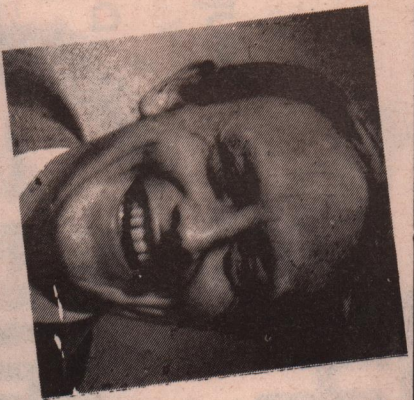
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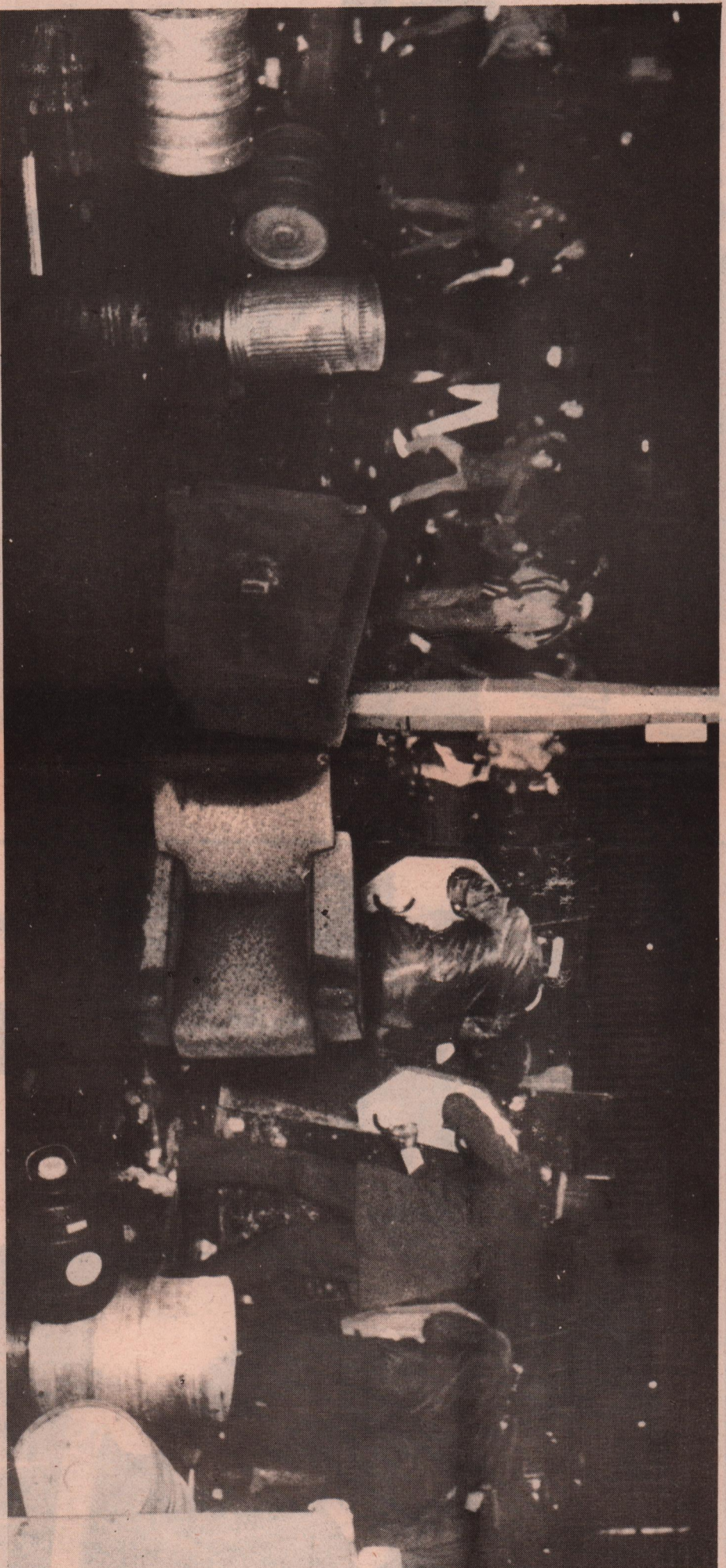
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Kinnock thinks miners should not defend themselves. But on Kinnock's recent visit to Nicaragua, he carried a gun in case he was attacked by US-backed 'contras'!



Working-class youth fight the police - Toxteth 1981

VIOLENT ENEMIES

What we think

Enemies of the miners' strike often complain of 'violent scenes' that have been witnessed on picket lines. By concentrating on this, they hope to persuade people who aren't sure about the strike to oppose it. Clive Bradley looks at the arguments and puts the Marxist view.

SINCE the miners' strike began, the newspapers and TV have been full of stories about 'violent pickets', 'pit mobs' and 'pit-head thugs'.

Leon Brittan, the Tory Home Secretary, has threatened pickets with life imprisonment.

The image the government and the media put over is of 'heroic working miners', who have to be protected by the police from petrol-bomb throwing, baby-eating, murderous pickets.

Condemn

To defend the scabs' 'right to work', almost anything goes. Literally thousands of police have poured into peaceful pit villages to make sure that — in some cases — a single scab can get into work. Horses, clubs, riot gear, military-type operations — all have been used to put down the strike.

The violence that the government and media condemn is never this violence. What they condemn — what sends them

into apoplexy — is pickets *defending themselves* from the violence of the police, and fighting back.

Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party leader, said at Party Conference, 'I damn violence — all violence, without fear or favour'. But again, what really concerns Kinnock is the violence of pickets, rather than of the police.

Kinnock believes, like Thatcher, that if ordinary people challenge those people whose organised violence is sanctioned by law — the police — then 'democracy is under threat'.

Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution, described people like Kinnock very accurately nearly 50 years ago: "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."

The Tories, the Tory press and Neil Kinnock are *not* opposed to 'all violence'. Capitalism (and British capitalism more than most) killed, maimed, slaughtered and exterminated its way through

history. An entire people — in Tasmania — were wiped out by British colonialism. Anti-colonial revolts were suppressed with great brutality.

In Ireland, Britain has repressed the people in one way or another for hundreds of years. Troops are in Northern Ireland now — still shooting and still killing people.

In 1982, Britain went to war against Argentina over the Falkland Islands. During the course of the war, around 450 Argentinian sailors were sent to their deaths when the Belgrano was sunk. The

Tory cabinet claims that killing those 450 people was justified.

And Britain is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). That involves the possession of nuclear weapons. Like Cruise missiles, which are the most destructive forces ever created.

And NATO is a force for international counter-revolution. NATO forces threatened to invade Portugal during the revolution there in 1974-5. The Turkish army that seized power in a coup in 1980 is a member of NATO.

Repressive regimes

British governments — Tory and Labour — have supported savage, repressive regimes elsewhere in the world. The military dictatorship in Argentina they suddenly found to be 'fascist' in 1982 was sold arms by Britain — a regime responsible for the disappearance of thousands of people.

The regime of Colonel Pinochet in Chile — which massacred thirty thousand people when it seized power in 1973 —

has Tory support. In fact the Tory Party has openly praised Chile's economic policies, which have meant terrible hardship for ordinary workers.

The Tory government supports — with a few 'criticisms' — the apartheid regime in South Africa which massacres black people when they get out of line.

In Britain itself, former head of the British Army, Michael Carver, once commented that in 1974 when Edward Heath was kicked out, "Fairly senior officers [thought that] if things got terribly bad the army would have to do something about it . . ."

Interests

The fact is that the ruling class supports violence if it is to defend their interests. For capitalists and people who accept their system, there are really two kinds of violence.

Violence on behalf of the bosses is legal, justifiable and even necessary, they say.

Violence on behalf of the workers is 'mob rule', 'anarchy', 'a threat to civilization'.

Less violence

The entire history of the working class struggle against capitalism shows that when their rule is threatened, the capitalist class will unleash the most terrible violence to keep their power and wealth.

Working class history also shows that *the better prepared, organised, and armed the workers are, the less violence there will be.*

In Chile in 1973, many workers could see that the right wing and the army were preparing for a coup. They pleaded with President Allende to give them weapons to defend themselves — but Allende refused, preferring to trust the generals.

Without workers being armed to defend themselves, they were slaughtered.

But when 11 million workers were on strike in France in 1968, in many areas they fought back against the riot police. Eventually — after being beaten — the riot police refused to fight anymore.

Effective working-class resistance *reduced* potential casualties.

In France, the working class did not take power. But that basic organisation of working class self-defence was an important component of what a working class state would be.

Militias

Just as, under capitalist society, the capitalists have control over all the forces of violence — legally sanctioned — and the working class has control over none of them, in a workers' state the working class itself would be armed to defend its rule.

Instead of a standing army, navy, airforce and police force, there would be democratically-controlled workers' militias. And the beginnings for that future workers' state are being laid now in the pit strike and in black communities defending themselves from racists.

Workers need to be organised to fight back, and to meet force with force. The brutality of the police now is nothing on what the ruling class will do if their interests are threatened — if they are faced with a serious fight for socialism.

The lessons we learn now will help us win in the future.

Lessons of Belfast 1919

The 1919 strike failed in two ways. It failed to achieve its immediate object of a 44 hour week and it failed to establish a tradition of working class consciousness and solidarity which would have transcended sectarian incitement in 1920 and prevented the outbreak of the pogrom.

On the day the strike ended the Chairman of the strike committee, Charles McKay, gave his explanation for the first failure to the Newsletter: "If the Clyde and other centres had displayed the same solidarity, made the same stand, as we in Belfast made, we should now have been working 44 hours." But this is not enough. Belfast was the strongest centre in the strike. There the strike was most widespread, it had the sanction of a democratic ballot of the workers, and the authorities were slow to act against the strikers. Belfast should have been able to stand alone. And if the "44" had been won in Belfast it would have spread to other centres.

Two decisions of the Strike Committee ensured their defeat: the failure to call out the transport workers and the failure to challenge the military occupation of the power station and the gas works. From the first week-end the rank and file were calling for the involvement of the transport workers and at the end many were convinced that this was the reason for their defeat. The strike committee all the time maintained that they had the support of the transport workers and having declared limited industrial war in Belfast they would have been better to broaden the struggle.

Clash

When the military occupied the gas and electricity works no attempt was made to picket them. The committee feared a clash like that in Glasgow. The authorities were expecting it and had brought in three extra magistrates to try the resulting court cases. The workers were not afraid as they showed when they attacked the trams on the last Sunday. But the committee shirked the risk and failed to call the authorities' bluff; thereby they conceded defeat.

For the strike committee to be willing to call a virtual general strike or to take the risk of serious rioting between strikers and troops they would have had to believe in the doctrine of the class war and that the government was the tool of the employers not the servant of the people. Members of the committee believed no such thing. At the Custom House meeting on Sunday February 10, Clarke of the Strike Committee boasted that "they had never once said a hard or harsh or unkind word about the employers." Even James Baird who was something of a militant, wrote to the Northern Whig "I most emphatically deny having at any time said or written anything calculated to create class prejudice."

The dilemma of the strike committee was that they were trying to fight their battle according to the rules. The employers had no such scruples and anyway they made the rules so they could change them if they wished.

The second failure of the strike was related to the first. To build up a solidarity which would transcend and overcome sectarian prejudice required political as well as industrial awareness. The strikers received an industrial education from the strike itself though the final lessons went unlearned when the committee failed to extend the strike. The political lessons of the strike were not drawn by the committee and they prevented anyone else from drawing them.

The strike committee was made up of delegates and officials of all the unions affiliated to the federation. It was a heterogeneous body. Two prominent members, James Freeland and Robert Waugh had been Labour candidates in the recent election. So had Sam Kyle, a textile workers' official, who played an active part in the strike. But also on the strike committee were Robert Weir and William Grant, prominent members of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, which had been set up

This is the third and concluding part of Michael Farrell's article on the 1919 Engineers' and Shipbuilders' strike in Belfast. It points out that despite this being the greatest labour upheaval in Belfast's history, lasting solidarity amongst workers was not established owing to the lack of a socialist party prepared and ready to challenge the existing sectarian ideology.

to counteract the spread of Labourism in the working class and keep them loyal to the Unionist Party. Grant later became a Unionist MP and Stormont Cabinet Minister.

The motley composition of the strike committee produced the resolve to keep the strike 'non-political' John McKaig of the Workers' Union, speaking at the City Hall on January 29 said "he was not there to discuss politics or religion. They were there to get a 44 hour week for the people of this country, North, South, East or West" (Belfast Newsletter). James Baird, who was a member of the Belfast ILP wrote to the Whig "like Mr Allen (a director of Workman and Clark) I refrain from introducing any political references, except to assure him that politics have nothing to do with the hours of labour".

The desire to keep politics out prevented more than the briefest reference to the conduct of the Unionist MPs for Belfast who had pledged themselves to support the 44 hour demand before the election and who now completely ignored the issue. Indeed one, RJ Lynn MP, who had spoken strongly in favour of the "44" at the Ulster Hall meeting on December 5, was editor of the Whig which daily attacked the strikers. The three "Labour Unionists" elected — all trade unionists — were particularly silent, yet one of them, Sam McGuffin, MP for Shankill, was cheered at a union meeting a few days after the strike began. No attempt was made to expose the hypocrisy of these charlatans' claim to represent the interests of the working class.

But the strike committee did more than just discourage politics. During the first few days of the strike a member of the Workers' Union, Jack O'Hagan, spoke at several meetings and made the only serious attempt to talk of socialism, capitalism and the class war. O'Hagan, who was not a Northerner and had been involved in many strikes, then

organised daily meetings at the City Hall at which he and a few colleagues put the socialist case.

On Thursday January 30, they were interrupted by Clarke, a member of the strike committee who announced that the committee wanted no unauthorised meetings. "Mr O'Hagan might think he was doing a great deal of good in connection with the strike, but he could tell him that he was doing an enormous amount of harm." This led to shouts that "There was neither Bolshevism or Sinn Feinism in the strike movement". (Belfast Newsletter), and O'Hagan was rushed by a section of the crowd. When O'Hagan went to the strike committee's offices to clarify the matter Robert Waugh told the large crowd outside that O'Hagan had no authority from the committee to hold meetings and the committee alone should run the strike. Bob Weir of the Unionist Labour Association added that "If these men attempt to speak again you can deal with them" (Belfast Newsletter).

Dublin

Clarke figured again at the meeting on Sunday February 2, when he referred to labour unrest in Dublin. "On behalf of the strike committee he disclaimed any responsibility for anything that might occur in Dublin (a voice 'Unity is strength'). The speaker concurred but said the Dublin workers had not been in with the Belfast workers from the start. In fact the Dublin movement was entirely unconnected with the Belfast movement which was purely a local one" (Belfast Newsletter). For this performance Clarke won the nickname of "the repudiator".

At the end of the strike Charles McKay repeated the point in his interview with the Newsletter. "There was none of the frothy talk of the usual agitator type, who take advantage of strikes to push their own

ideas. The men held to the idea of the 44 hour week as a simple plain demand, without working out any theories such as were associated with the shorter hours movement on the Clyde and elsewhere" and he outlined his own philosophy, "I have every hope that if we can stick to the purely industrial aspect we shall remedy many injustices which the worker still suffers from in Belfast."

In fact they did not always stick rigidly to "the purely industrial aspect". Some forms of politics were less rigidly excluded than others. At the big meeting on December 5 to persuade the election candidates to support the 44 hours, the proceedings began with "God Save the King". And when the shipyard workers downed tools on January 14 to march to the ballot on the strike issue, the Union Jack was prominently displayed, together with trade union banners.

It was impossible to keep "politics" out of the strike when every development forced it upon the strikers. The practical effect of the strike committee's efforts was to reduce the politics of the strike to the lowest common denominator. The vast majority of the strikers were Unionist by upbringing and tradition. The strike brought them into conflict with the Unionist establishment. That conflict could only be resolved and their sectarian prejudices left unchallenged if the ideology of Labour Unionism remained dominant, an ideology which claimed that class conflicts were not irreconcilable, that the interests of workers and employers were basically the same and merely needed periodic readjustment.

By bending over backwards to deny any connection with Sinn Fein, Bolshevism or the workers of Dublin, by tolerating Unionist flag-waving, by eschewing any effort at political propaganda themselves, and by prohibiting it from socialists the strike com-

mittee reduced its politics to those of Robert Weir and William Grant, to the level of the Unionist Labour Association.

The "Labour" members of the committee occasionally referred to the need for greater "Labour" representation, and their words may well have borne fruit in the corporation election of 1920, but this still didn't challenge any prejudices or indeed raise the question of socialism since Freeland had declared in the 1918 election that he would oppose Home Rule and Waugh had boasted that he was an Orangeman and had "no connection whatsoever with any political body." (Northern Whig).

Solidarity

The reason the 1919 strike failed to establish lasting solidarity among the workers of Belfast, a solidarity that would have overcome any further incitement to sectarian hate, was because no-one tried, or was given the chance to try, to use the lessons of the strike to uproot the sectarian ideology of the workers and replace it with socialism. All that was left behind was a veneer of economic militancy which cracked as soon as sectarian tension grew. In trying to exclude "politics" from the strike, the strike committee sowed the wind. In July 1920 they reaped the whirlwind, many of them personally.

There can be few clearer examples in history of the ephemeral effect of purely economic militancy. The greatest labour upheaval in Belfast's history left scarcely a ripple on the political consciousness of the city's workers. There could be no better proof of the need for a socialist party which can not only take the lead in such struggles but constantly draw the lessons of them and take advantage of the heightened political interest and involvement of the workers at such a time to hammer these lessons home



Tanks on the streets of Glasgow



Police truncheon striker, 'Black Friday' 1919.

Another new realism?

Consider the last five years. If the trade unions had campaigned vigorously for work-sharing without loss of pay when the unemployment figures began to spiral upwards, then the labour movement could have been roused to make Britain ungovernable, and things would be very different now.

If the leaders of the Labour Party had launched a vigorous campaign of agitation, the labour movement could have been given the heart and confidence for a big fight back against the Tories.

If the TUC had fought — agitated, campaigned — for solidarity action with the miners, then the propaganda of the press could have been countered.

A better Labour and trade union leadership would have linked other workers' struggles with the miners' and created a combined offensive against the Tories.

Who says that a general strike "cannot be delivered"?

On a cold calculation of existing quantities, of course, it won't be delivered. But a fighting, campaigning, labour movement leadership could still rally the movement around the miners. At any rate, it should still try, and socialists should insist that it is the duty of the existing leadership to try.

A year ago, who would have imagined that the miners — who had twice rejected Arthur Scargill's calls for action in ballots — would be capable of the epic ten-month battle they are fighting now and can still win?

This or that cold calculation you make, comrade Williamson, may be reasonable: your basic approach is wrong. It rules out of the picture the force which can transform it — working class action. It rules out the pioneering role that the Left must have in generating that action.

Gramsci

Some of Kinnock's entourage, and occasionally Kinnock himself, are fond of citing the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci long ago wrote a crushing picture of the basic politics of your editorial:

"It is certain that to foresee means only to see well the present and the past as movement: to see well, i.e. to identify with exactness the fundamental and permanent elements of the process. But it is absurd to think of a purely 'objective' foresight.

"The person who has foresight in reality has a 'programme' that he wants to see triumph, and foresight is precisely an element of this triumph... since reality is the result of the application of human will to the society of things... to put aside every voluntary element and calculate only the intervention of other wills as an objective element in the general game is to mutilate reality itself.

"Only those who strongly want to do it identify the necessary elements for the realisation of their will...

"Too much' (and therefore superficial and mechanical) political realism, often leads to the assertion that the man of State must work only within the sphere of 'effective reality', not interest himself in 'what should be', but only in 'what is'. This would mean that the man of State must have no perspectives longer than his own nose...

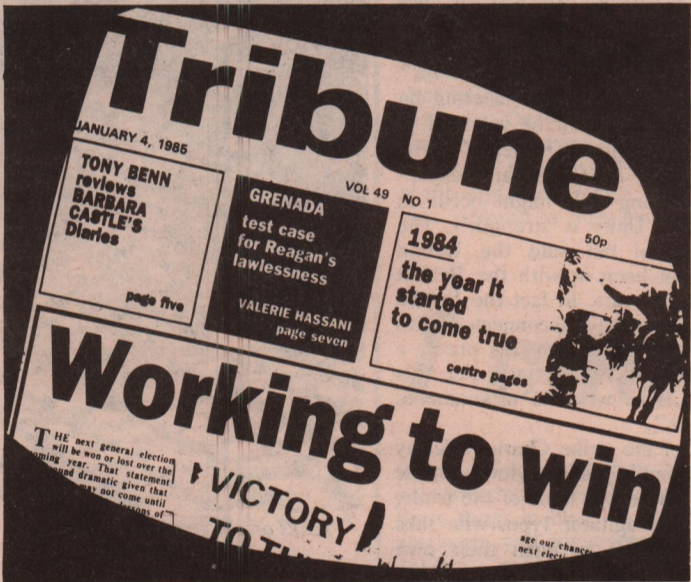
"The decisive element in

John O'Mahony and John Bloxam conclude their open letter to Tribune's editor Nigel Williamson with a reply to his "be realistic" approach — which in effect means an accommodation to the status quo and the existing leadership and their aims.

They argue that a decisive, fighting party openly committed to working class struggle can and would provide a generating focus for anti-Tory and socialist struggle; and that to see this become a possibility, the fight to transform the labour movement must continue.



Nigel Williamson. Photo. John Harris



every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour)..."

So we should believe in miracles? On one level, yes! But not miracles created by 'outside' intervention into the processes going on in society.

The 'miracle' is the sudden transformation of working class consciousness. History shows many examples of such miracles. The 1968 general strike in France, for example. It erupted spontaneously only weeks after a call for a half-day general protest strike had been a resounding flop.

Explanation

The explanation for such 'miraculous' transformations is to be found in the fact that the normal consciousness of most workers under capitalism does not correspond to their own interests. Once changes begin, transformations of attitudes can take place with the speed of an explosion.

Millions of workers voted for Thatcher and acquiesce in the demolition of the welfare state, the scrapping of a council housing policy, and the anti-union laws. But it is not in their immediate or long-term inter-

esties collapse into accepting the best (or less than the best) option within the system. They become the blinkered politicians that Antonio Gramsci wrote about.

It is to be or not to be for socialists: do we fight for a different system, or make our peace with the best options within this system ('for the time being', and by way of accommodation to such of its organs as the Parliamentary Labour Party...)?

You present your case as a matter of being realistic. It is hardly realistic even in Gramsci's sense of seeing no further than the ends of our noses.

The truth of the matter is that the Kinnockites have no answer to Thatcherism. They have no coherent, credible "realisable aims and objectives" that answer the needs of the working class in a Britain rotting all around us.

Both you and the Kinnockite 'centre' forget not only the lessons of the last Labour government, but also the lessons of all post-war British history.

Resistance

For most of the '60s and '70s the ruling class were prevented from ruling Britain as they wished and from 'modernising' it in their own way by the resistance of the working class. The working class was strong enough to stop measures of capitalist reform, and strong enough to knock Heath's government out of the ring in 1974.

But we were not able to solve the protracted crisis of decline which has afflicted British society for decades. Labour governments tinkered with a system that needed to be overturned and uprooted to make way for socialism.

The best elements of the working class confined themselves mainly to industrial struggle. We frittered away our chances. The Labour government of 1974-9, which rode to power on a great wave of working class direct action, cut working class living standards in the mid-'70s, pioneered 'Thatcherite' cuts and monetarism, and went down to ignominious election defeat after the 'winter



Antonio Gramsci

of discontent' in 1978-9.

No wonder there was cynicism and apathy in the working class!

Then to that was added the grotesque passivity and failure to lead of the TUC, faced with the slump and the Thatcherites' attacks. The Tories had us on the run until the miners made their magnificent stand.

So now, one of two things.

EITHER we will learn the lessons, and transform the labour movement into a force capable of taking on the ruling class and imposing working-class solutions to the crisis of British society — in the first place, creating a workers' government radically different from previous Labour governments in that it based itself on a mobilised labour movement and was prepared to cut through and across the ruling class and its property in order to secure the interests of the working class.

OR the ruling class will grind the labour movement down, and perhaps eventually destroy it, as once-powerful labour movements have been destroyed in other countries.

Anti-union laws and the attempt to de-politicise the trade unions are already upon us. Much worse things are possible — as the Chilean workers learned in 1973.

One scenario for such a catastrophe could contain a Kinnock-

led Labour government. Helpless to solve any of the problems we face, it would further discredit the labour movement, and prepare the way for vicious reaction, as Wilson and Callaghan prepared the way for Thatcher.

On the basis of the existing Labour leadership's present timid politics, which don't even dare to propose restoring Tory cuts, such an outcome would be a certainty.

That's the true 'realistic' picture, Nigel. It leads to the conclusion that the fight to transform the labour movement goes on and must be won.

You are right that the Labour Party must win the next election — even if it is led by Neil Kinnock with its present policies. Such a victory would encourage the working class and open the way for a more radical working-class fight back. The victory of another wave of reaction would not be inevitable.

But we need realism here too. We will not win the battle for trade union allegiance by lying doggo. We will not encourage workers to fight back by telling them that they should let Thatcher do what she likes as long as she can get a majority of MPs for it. And we will not win the next general election by presenting a tame Labour Party.

The right wing and the soft left could add a postscript to your editorial, Nigel:

"If the Left had not started the struggle for Labour's self-renewal in 1979; if re-selection had not been pushed through; if Benn hadn't stood for deputy against Healey — therer would have been no SDP split, no orgy of anti-Labour propaganda in the press. And maybe there would have been a Labour victory in the 1983 general election".

That is a perfectly reasonable account of what has happened in the Labour Party over the last five years — from one point of view. It is possible to sustain it only if you are more or less satisfied with the state of things in the Party as it is, satisfied with the last Labour government's performance, and content to aim for nothing better next time... or if you have come to despair of anything better.

You cannot say what you say about the future without adopting that view of our recent past — without concluding that we, and you, were wrong to set out in 1979 to change the Labour Party.

That's the measure of how far your editorial takes Tribune. Think about it, Nigel.



Labour Party conference 1984. Photo: John Harris.

Michelin 2,500 jobs due to go

THE giant Michelin multinational is the latest in the line of tyre companies to slash its workforce as the world recession and improved tyre technology bite into demand.

Michelin intends to reduce its UK workforce by 2,500 with all but 100 of those jobs going at its main UK plant in Stoke, mostly in the next four months.

The workforce at Stoke will be almost cut in half and unemployment in the Stoke area will go up to at least 13.6%.

An economist at Keele University has estimated that the knock-on effect will take a further 1,600 jobs.

And complete closure of the plant is a distinct possibility in the next couple of years.

It is vital that workers at the Michelin plant link up with North Staffs miners who are also fighting job cuts. And for miners in North Staffs who are scabbing on the strike because they think they will be able to get another job, the lesson should be clear. There will be no other jobs to go to.

In 1983 Michelin management attempted to introduce continuous four-shift working in selected departments. The workers responded with a month-long

By Arthur Bough

strike and won a five shift system which provided an average 34-hour, four-day week without loss of pay and created another 300 jobs at the plant.

The same demand for a cut in hours without loss of pay should be the Michelin workers' answer now.

The 1983 strike is a model to follow in another respect: the workers at Stoke won the support of other Michelin workers throughout Europe for their struggle. With a multinational like Michelin only that kind of international solidarity can lead to victory.

Meetings of shop stewards at the Michelin factory have already taken place, and mass meetings are planned. However the union leadership at Michelin is not militant.

One senior branch official told Socialist Organiser after the 1983 strike, "It is my opinion that we, as union officers, failed the membership on the important points. We should never have accepted any clause which reduced the working week without compensation. We should have totally rejected the clause which returns different shift



Michelin workers picket in 1983. Photo: John Harris

allowance payments according to a worker's ability to earn bonus payments. There was an obvious lack of leadership amongst the shop stewards."

That same lack of leadership is again evident. Works conven-

or Gordon Howle last week refused an offer of support from the local trades council, saying that there was no chance of a fight. Saving jobs now depends on an independent initiative from the rank and file.

Teachers Time to link up with the miners

SCHOOL teachers in England and Wales are on a collision course with their employers and with the Tory government.

Education cuts, low pay and now threats from Education Secretary Keith Joseph of legislation to impose assessment, are creating an angry and bitter mood among teachers.

Frustration from years of pay erosion and increasingly difficult working conditions led to last year's strike, the biggest since 1969/70. This frustration has since been inflamed further by the derisory arbitration award which gave teachers 5.1%, only 0.6% more than the employers' offer, and nowhere near the unions' claim.

Since 1975, teachers have had years of percentage pay increases well below the rate of inflation. This has led to the real value of teachers' pay falling by over 30%, while differentials have widened dramatically between classroom teachers on the lower pay scales and headteachers and those on higher scales.

As the school population has fallen, teaching jobs have been cut back, so there are fewer promotion opportunities, and unemployment for newly trained teachers.

Militants in the NUT, the largest union, have campaigned hard for the pay structure to be changed, and for flat rate pay increases to reflect the interests of the two-thirds of teachers who are on the lower scales, 1 and 2, and mobilise them for a real fight.

Eventually, the NUT leaders adopted these policies in their talks with employers to reform the pay structure.

The pay restructuring working party broke up on December 5 when the NUT walked out in protest against the employers' reply to the unions' claim for a single basic pay scale from £8,500 to £15,000. (At present a newly qualified teacher earns about £1000 less than the starting pay of a police constable).

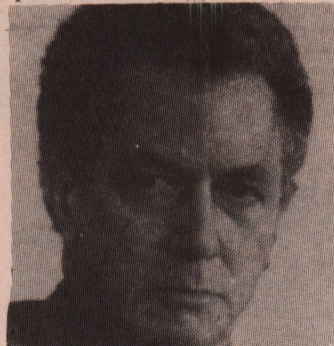
The employers offered less money, but demanded that teachers do away with their lunch-hour, give up their non-teaching time for marking and preparation time so that they can cover for absent colleagues as a contractual duty, and agree to movement up the pay scale

By Cheung Siu-Ming

being dependent on a yearly assessment by their headteacher.

Headteachers will earn up to £24,000 a year and gain almost dictatorial powers over their staff.

The collapse of the pay structure talks means no large pay increases, only the government's 3% cash limit. The NUT is putting in a pay claim for £1200 flat rate for every teacher, worth about 15% of the global wage bill. It is a claim which will command support from NUT members of almost any political persuasion.



The NUT has begun discussions with our counterparts in Scotland, the EIS, who have already started strike action over pay.

Last year's strike shows that teachers cannot rely on arbitration to win their pay claim. The NUT salary conference in the autumn, for the first time ever, rejected arbitration for the 1984/5 pay claim because of the insulting 5.1% settlement last time.

Last year's action, consisting of rolling 3-day strikes in selected areas, used up a good proportion of the NUT strike fund, because the fund has not been built up over the years and because NUT rules at present sustain striking members at full pay!

The NUT must immediately start a national membership levy and change union rules to reduce the level of strike pay drastically. Members must be given the go-ahead to refuse to cover for absent colleagues. A campaign of escalating strike action, leading if necessary to all-out national strike action, has to be launched by the NUT.

Furthermore the NUT must put pressure on the Labour authorities to declare their defiance of the government's 3% pay limit and refuse to carry out education and other cuts.

Over recent months many NUT activists have already been

raising funds in support of the miners' strike, and campaigning to force the NUT Executive off the fence, because we realise that a victory for the miners will help us defeat rate-capping and to win a decent pay increase this year.

Scots action restarts

By Callum Macrae

SCOTTISH teachers are starting a five-week programme of selective strike action over pay.

The action, paid for by a levy of all members of the EIS (the main Scottish teachers' union) is largely limited to three days a week in selected schools in the constituencies of Tory ministers.

Education minister Keith Joseph and Scottish Secretary of State George Younger have made it clear that they are out to drastically worsen teachers' conditions of work — and will use the law to enforce this if we do not voluntarily implement it ourselves.

It might seem curious that Joseph chose to launch his attack on 'incompetent teachers' and make demands for 'payment by results' just as teachers in England consider

starting their pay campaign and Scottish teachers get steamed up to continue theirs. But it would be disastrous to dismiss these statements as just the rantings of a confirmed teacher-phobe. They give the lie to the idea pushed by Scottish teachers' leaders that we are somehow a 'special case'.

We are not a special case — if only because the government doesn't see us as one.

Their offensive against us is part and parcel of their drive against the labour movement as a whole.

The current selective action must be immediately followed by serious, sustained, unpaid action involving the whole of the membership. Most importantly, we must build an anti-Tory alliance of all sectors fighting over pay, conditions and jobs — with the miners central to that alliance.

ILEA attacks teachers

by Cheung Siu-Ming, (President Lambeth NUT, in personal capacity)

IN Inner London, hundreds of teachers are already taking no-cover action unofficially, because the ILEA has failed to deliver the 300 supply teachers agreed with the NUT Inner London Division, the ILTA. The 300 supply teachers are in the ILEAs budget, but they are not in the schools!

Teachers refusing to cover for absent colleagues have received warning letters, not for breaching their contract (no ILEA has managed to establish in court that cover is part of a teacher's contractual duty) but for "unauthorised absence" or

"refusing a reasonable request from their headteacher".

The obvious deduction is that ILEA has no intention of spending much of the money it has budgeted for the 300 supply teachers.

How does ILEA think it can fight rate-capping if it attacks its own workforce just two months before the rate-capping deadline?

Lambeth and East London NUT have called a conference on Saturday January 19 at 11 am at the Lambeth Teachers' Centre, Acre Lane, SW2 to discuss action on salaries. Delegates and observers from other associations welcome. Contact Lambeth Teachers' Centre.

Post workers Stop UCW backsliding

By Pete Keenlyside

Part of the agreement last year's UCW Postal pay claim was settled on was that all the outstanding issues such as a reduction in hours, longer holidays and the five day working week, would be the subject of further discussions between the union and Post Office management.

Since then, a series of meetings have been taking place and recently a special report was circulated to the membership which reported on the progress that had been made. This report will now form part of the agenda of a special conference called for March 4/5.

But any member reading the report, hoping to see what had been gained from all the discussions, would have got a very rude shock. For instead of listing any gains, the report lists a series of management proposals, which if implemented, would threaten the jobs and working conditions of everyone in the industry.

Proposals

What they want is:

*Compulsory productivity schemes in all offices. At the moment there is a voluntary scheme and many offices have refused to implement it.

*Constant workload assessment. In other words constantly increasing the workload on the staff.

*Increased mechanisation and the introduction of new technology. The union have opposed this over the last few years because of the effects it will have on jobs. Existing policy is to demand a new technology agreement which would link its introduction to a cut in hours. Otherwise the introduction of inward code sorting and optical character recognition (machines which can read handwriting) could lead to the work of some grades disappearing overnight.

*Flexible staffing. This would lead to the creation of a new part-time grade and the ability of management to move staff where and when they wanted. It has long been union policy to oppose these.

*A new overtime structure which could decrease the amount paid for weekday overtime. At the moment, anything over 12 hours is paid at double time.

In return for all this, they are prepared to offer us a lump-sum payment of £150, a promise that they will look at the possibility of introducing more five-day-week duties and security of employment if "there was full cooperation in any retraining and/or redeployment to other work areas".

And in the event of the union not wanting to take advantage of the management's generosity, the Post Office board member for personnel and industrial relations KM Young, had this to say:

"We would still prefer to proceed with the union's co-

operation, but the union's present response will force the business to proceed without it."

Faced with this tough stand by management, the response of the union executive committee has been to simply throw the towel in. The report itself contains not a single proposal for action to meet the management's threat. Instead it merely outlines their proposals and incredibly, reprints the conclusions of the Monopolies Commission report on the Post Office. What that is supposed to prove, I do not know.

Selling out

The report ends with a list of recommendations to be put to the special conference. What the executive wants us to support is the reassessing of all previous decisions on the subjects covered by the report; for the membership to allow the executive to negotiate an agreement giving "the best possible advantage" and for the outcome of further negotiations and any draft agreement to be put to a further conference if appropriate.

In other words they want us to ditch all our existing policy and let them get on with selling us out.

This pathetic stand by the executive must be roundly condemned by all the membership and their proposals thrown out at the March conference.

What we need are policies and an executive that can defeat the management and not do their dirty work for them. That's why at a branch meeting on Sunday, the Manchester branch unanimously agreed to amend the recommendations so that existing policies would be reaffirmed, and that any new agreement would have to include a five day working week and a reduced working week.

We will also be asking conference to agree that the executive must call a further conference before any new agreement is accepted.

Bitterness

Every speaker at that branch meeting and at the branch committee meeting that preceded it, talked in scathing terms about the weak-kneed approach of the executive. None more so than Jean Jaques, last year's national chair of the union and a long-standing member of the executive. He spoke of his bitterness and disillusionment at the present position and of the need to defend existing policies.

The job of all UCW members up and down the country is to commit their branches to support the Manchester amendment and to send similar ones as well as making sure the executive don't get their way. The membership need to be prepared now for the battles that are to come, battles the leadership are singularly ill-prepared to lead.

Socialist Organiser

Against the rate-cap



Mick O'Sullivan

By Mick O'Sullivan, chair of London Bridge, (writing in a personal capacity).

non-compliance by the councils. Since then we have been developing our organisation around those two issues.

Along with the councils we have developed a unified tactic of not setting a rate on March 6, within the strategic position of non-compliance. But our policy says "not to fix a rate or raise the rates", and we see that certain problems arise from the 'not-fixing-a-rate' position.

For instance, we strongly disagree with the councils' present position, which seems to be one of entering talks with the government now rather than waiting until a struggle has taken place.

London Bridge recognises that some councillors will be

unable to carry out a policy of non-compliance, and we sent them a letter last year asking for them to resign.

Despite these difficulties, the alliance between councils and trade unionists in London has played an important role in mobilising the movement around our common policy of non-compliance. We have spoken at many Labour wards, General Committees, etc.

More directly, the unity of London Bridge played a major role in the success of the one-day strike against rate-capping and abolition on November 7 last year.

However, we are quite aware of the limitations of one-day action, and we have no illusions that such action will make a dent in the government's attitude. We are trying to build a mass movement which will be ready to take on the government over rate-capping.

RATE-CAPPING is now only a few months away.

London local authority trade unionists have a clear policy against this attack on our jobs and services.

Last September we adopted a fighting plan at our all-London stewards' conference. Central to it was a commitment to all-out strike action and occupations against the cuts, and a call for

Hackney makes a stand

By Hilda Kean

IN HACKNEY we have been asked to make cuts of over £30 million out of a proposed budget of £118 million.

We have campaigned all along for the return of the rate support grant. Since 1979 we have lost £70 million. If this were to be returned, it would result in a rates reduction of 27 per cent.

We had a borough conference of the Labour Party General Committees and the council Labour Group. Invitations also went out to the council Joint Trade Union Committee to attend in an advisory capacity, though all the unions except the non-affiliated ones were represented through the General Committees.

At the conference we first agreed unanimously that, rate-capped or not, we would introduce a budget with no rent rises and no cuts in jobs and services. Then we discussed the specific tactics we would need to adopt in a confrontation strategy.

The conference largely rejected the idea of not fixing a rate, adopted by the other rate-capped London boroughs. Instead it voted for a deficit budget, while recognising that developments over the months that followed could influence the tactic we finally implemented. We also asked any councillors who could not support the strategy to resign by Christmas 1984.



Patrick Jenkin

I hope that all councils will now stand firm. I think we are in a strong position even though there is a tactical difference between us and those refusing to set a rate. The government is confused about what to do with the present united stand of non-compliance by rate-capped councils.

There is an argument for rate-capped and heavily penalised councils, together with unions, presenting their case collectively to the government, but I cannot see how anything is to be gained at this stage from negotiating.

I am not opposed to talking with the government — that happened last in Liverpool, for example — but the reason why Liverpool obtained concessions was not the talks with the government but the action which preceded them.

I am totally opposed to any individual rate-capped authority negotiating with the government — it will weaken our unity.

In Hackney we have set up a campaign organising body which involves the General Committees, the Labour Party Local Government Committee, the council Labour Group, trade union representatives and the umbrella body for community organisations.

In the week we make our budget we will have a car cavalcade through Hackney on March 2; support for the TUC day of action on the 6th; and a mass rally in support of the council's budget defending jobs and services on March 7.

Hilda Kean was talking to Mick O'Sullivan.



Demonstration against attacks on local government. Photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Pressure on the councils

By Michael Kendall

LOCAL authority trade unionists in London, organised through 'London Bridge', have adopted a clear-cut policy, committing them to all-out industrial action to defend jobs and services.

Labour councils, however, are central in the fight over rate-capping, and could be the weak link.

There are three main pressures on councils to back down.

ONE: the right wing within the council Labour groups. The council leaderships are often to the left of the majority of the councillors. Environment minister Patrick Jenkin is looking for Labour groups to split, with the right wing going with the Liberals and Tories.

TWO: the Labour Party National Executive Committee is putting considerable pressure on councils to stay legal and stay in power — i.e. bow the knee to the government and do their dirty work for them.

Such a move would affect the internal politics of the Labour Party by making local government a more solid base for the right wing.

THREE: there is a general political weakness within the councils, though the old guard and the new Left express it differently. They tend to gear campaigns and protest action towards identifying the council as good public servants — rather than seeing the working class as the central force, to be organised around the defence of jobs and services.

These weaknesses, in one combination or another, have affected all the councils, and shroud the situation in a certain amount of confusion. But the position seems to be as follows.

The Inner London Education Authority will endorse its deficit budget drafted at the end of last year, but with a proviso that expenditure can be reviewed. This proviso will make it legal, and put ILEA into confrontation only if expenditure is not reviewed and reduced during the year.

The present conflict between ILEA and London teachers (see separate report) is an indication that ILEA will make the necessary reductions.

The Greater London Council will make a legal budget. The Left seems to be weak in the GLC Labour group, with only about 10 members ready to support a confrontationist policy.

The rate-capped London boroughs and other hard-hit authorities have developed a unified approach, of not fixing a rate. The two exceptions are Liverpool and Hackney, who are going for deficit budgets.

The 'not fixing a rate' policy has the merit of having unified the councils and the unions in London, but it also has dangers. Fundamentally it is a decision to go for brinkmanship and negotiation and maybe confrontation after that, not a clear decision to go for confrontation. It allows room for manoeuvre for local councils to come to a deal with the government.

It seems that Sheffield is opening up a split in the ranks of the 'not-fixing-a-rate' authorities by taking the position that they oppose the level at which the rate-cap is set by the government, not the principle of being 'capped'. To date this approach has not spread to the London authorities, but the dangers are clear given that we have such a split before the battle has even begun.

Liverpool City Council seems to have taken the strongest position. Unfortunately — though for different reasons than the rest of the country — Liverpool's position is not as healthy as it seems.

To see why we need to look behind the mythology about what happened last year. A compromise led to a 17 per cent rate increase and a great deal of 'creative accounting'.

Last year Liverpool set out to make a deficit budget, but ended up not fixing a rate because right-wing Labour councillors would not vote for the Labour budget. The Department of the Environment was then ready to negotiate and make concessions, not least because of the miners' strike. This experience

is now the origin and the model for the 'not-fixing-a-rate' policy in London.

But last year's Liverpool compromise has meant that they are in a far worse financial situation this year, and in a weaker political position.

To their credit, they have decided to fight, and the council's decision has been endorsed by the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee.

There are a number of reasons for the political problems. Attempting to mobilise people on the same issue two years running is always difficult. Also, the 'Militant' faction which is strong in the council and the District Labour Party has alienated many sections of the local labour movement — the Bond affair is the most glaring example.

'Militant' seem to be unable to turn the organised activists outwards to draw in new layers of workers. They did do that to some extent up to the council election in May 1984, but since then and the deal struck with the Department of the Environment, the whole campaign has been largely turned into a recruiting exercise for 'Militant'.

The central problem with the Liverpool experience — especially after May 1984 — as a model, is that the workers remained a stage army.

So there are serious weaknesses in the councils' position. Yet capitulation is not inevitable.

Although councillors often stand to the right of the council leaderships, the Labour Parties are generally to the left of the councillors. London Bridge's stand of non-compliance is an added pressure for a fight.

Those willing to fight must be united around a common programme of non-compliance, and councillors should be given the choice — either to stand with our class and with socialist politics, or to resign and be replaced.

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21 JAN 6:45 AM

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Called by SERTUC and Kent NUM

Fund emergency!

As we feared, fund income this week is well down on last week's £275.

We've received £44 — thanks to Lori Landay (£16), Stan Crooke (£1), Alan Renwick (£6), Andrew Squire (£3), Jim Kearns (£13), and Nik Barstow (£5).

Remember, we need £570 to balance our regular budget this month — that's another £251 — before we can put more money aside for premises.

Send to: 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.



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