

Socialist ORGANISER

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"We need more than finance, more than food – we need the physical participation of workers. We do not want pious words from the leaders of the labour movement. We want industrial action in support of our union!"

Arthur Scargill

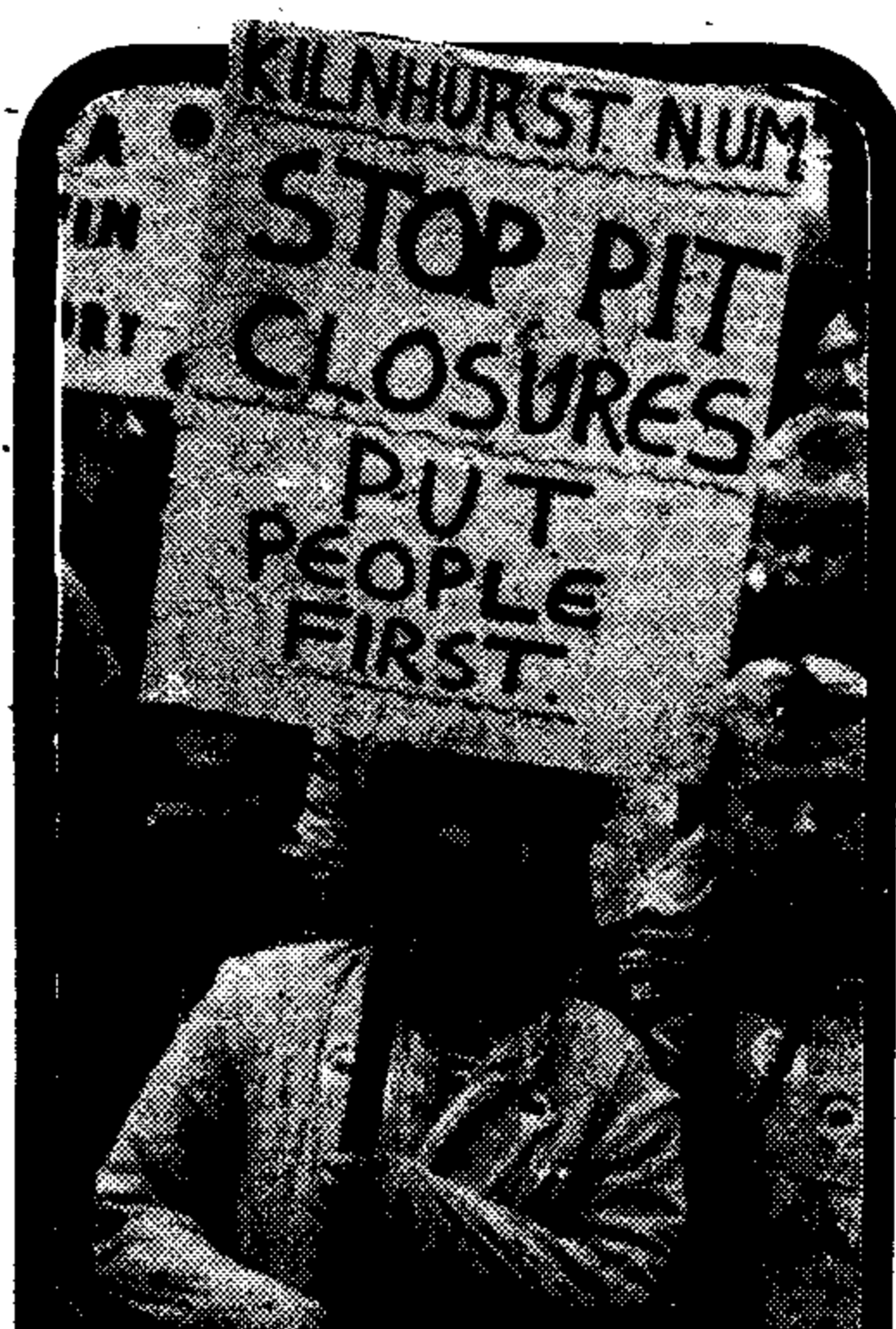


DOCKERS JOIN JOBS FIGHT

SECOND FRONT!



20,000 striking miners, trade unionists, and supporters marched from Saltley Gates, the scene of the NUM mass pickets in 1972, on Saturday July 7. First they observed a two-minute silence for Davy Jones and Joe Green – miners killed while picketing in the current strike – and then marched through Birmingham City Centre to a rally addressed by Arthur Scargill, Mick McGahey, Betty Heathfield, a woman from Greenham Common, and local councillors and trade unionists. Photo: John Harris.



Back the miners

STOP THE STEEL!

MARK THOMAS from Penrhiw-ceiber NUM, South Wales, spoke to Geoff Williams.

THE STRIKE is at present at a very critical stage in South Wales for a number of reasons.

Firstly, while the strikers are still very solid at the rank and file level, and ready to stay out until Christmas, the leadership — or the majority of them — are failing to give us a determined lead.

This comes out most notably in the manner they have handled the steelworks situation and the scab miners at the Point of Ayr colliery in North Wales.

There are a lot of members who have been under-used. At present we are spending £3,200 a week on picketing from the South Wales area, but the vast majority of this picketing is token — in Leicestershire, in Derbyshire, and at Point of Ayr.

At one point we began to get a mass picket at Point of Ayr and this began to get the membership fully involved from my lodge because they could see something constructive happening. Increased picketing is not only essential to win the dispute but key to keeping the membership involved.

At the beginning of the strike we would have hundreds of people besieging our lodge office for instructions and advice — really getting involved. While you still have got this up to a point, many people have drifted off, not because they have lost interest, but because of the token nature of the activity we are involved in.

I think the basic reason for this is lack of money. The strike is national, and the money should be found nationally. South Wales should be seen as part of the struggle and not hived off.

One way or another, these steelworks have to be put on a care and maintenance basis and the steel which is produced stock piled. Scargill said one thing, Emylyn Williams [the South Wales NUM president] another. We have been told that South Wales has to follow the national line, but nothing has come of it yet.

There are 4000 workers in Llanwern. Not all of them can be Bill Sirs fans.

This should not be simply a token effort, but an all-out one — a regular bulletin attempting to speak inside the plant, leafletting of the pubs and clubs in the area — so much can be done to get the message over, and yet it hasn't been tried.

The idea put forward by SO supporters that the picketing of plant should be done by the women's support committee, is something which should be carried out. This could be a national focus for the different women's committees. But the point is that, one way or another, the steelworks have to stop.

North West action

FRIDAY 13th sees the latest regional day of action in support of the miners — called by the North West TUC, and centred round a march and rally with Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn speaking.

A number of workplaces will be striking for one day — including, in Manchester, Piccadilly railway station and North Manchester General Hospital.

The strike action will be patchy, however, because of the lack of any clear call from the North-West TUC or Manchester Trades Council.

The local Labour-controlled City Council has, however, tried to build the day of action. It has sent a letter to all council workers telling them that the council will support them if they strike: the day's wages for the strikers are to be donated to the miners' strike fund. The council has also, despite a threat of legal action, hired out the Free Trade Hall for the rally for a fee of only £10.

The day can be the basis for building a broadened support committee in Manchester.

Rail solidarity

By Rob Dawber

FRUSTRATION at the activities of a hard core of railworkers at Shirebrook, about 2 dozen, has led the supporters of the union decision not to handle coal to escalate action.

Those handling coal had been allowing management to tear up union rights and conditions. A mass picket was called at short notice for Monday 9th to supplement the normal lobby on the depot gates.

The joint NUR-ASLEF meetings that have been organising the action so far also decided to ask supporters not to cross the line, rather than letting workers go in and wait for management to send them home.

But the union full-timers did not see it the same way. The NUR is now paying those sent home — but arguing that therefore they do not need to be supported by others walking out.

Under pressure from the full-timers, the joint NUR-ASLEF meeting decision was reversed on the day and members went through the picket line. Nonetheless support from Doncaster, Derby and Sheffield boosted the lobby, and more agreed to refuse to move coal than previously.

Nine trains were cancelled out of an expected 18.

Mail opened

LAST Wednesday, July 4, there was yet another example of police flagrantly abusing the civil rights of striking miners, in Keresley, just outside Coventry.

On the pretext that a letter bomb was suspected, police opened an envelope addressed to the strike committee which arrived at the pit's main office. The envelope contained photographs taken by the local newspaper of victimised Keresley miner Clive Ham on the picket line — pictures that might be of use in his defence.

What exposes the police claim is that Coal Board officials were present at the opening of the letter — indicating how serious police were about the alleged 'suspect device'.

Support committees

Cardiff: c/o Room 219, Transport House, 1 Cathedral Road.
Birmingham: c/o Trade Union Resources Centre, 7 Frederick St., B1 3HE.
South London: c/o Joan Twelves, 1 Alverstone House, Kennington Park Estate, SE11.
Manchester: c/o F.T.A.T., 37 Anson Road, Victoria Park, M14.

Brent Miners' Solidarity Committee, c/o Local Economy Resource Unit, 389 Willesden High Road, NW10. Ken Evans, 459 6221.

Maesteg Trade Union and Labour Party Support Group: Idwal Isaac, 10 Bridge St., Maesteg. (Tel: 738321).

'Scabs shouldn't make policy'

SOCIALIST Organiser went to Berry Hill, the headquarters of the Notts NUM, on Monday night July 9, to talk to the occupying miners.

We found them well dug in, with the kitchen in full production and a bloke with a guitar leading the singing.

We spoke to Steve Abbot, one of the two who are named on the eviction writ.

"We came in shortly before six, peacefully. We just walked in, all 52 of us. We are preventing the area council from taking place.

They want to meet to decide

on a mandate for the Sheffield delegate conference this week.

We have now had a writ served on us by the three trustees of Berry Hill requiring us to appear in court before 10am tomorrow morning. We're not going because that would mean leaving by 9 and giving the area council a chance to meet. So we will have to wait and see what happens — what the police do to enforce the writ. We might end up in jail.

But judges, solicitors, and so on, haven't done much good for this union or any other in the past, and they're not shifting us. The area council doesn't have to

meet here, but some delegates won't meet anywhere else, so a meeting in any other place would be invalid."

We also spoke to Andy, from Linby pit in South Notts. "I'm here to stop the mandate getting to Sheffield. They are scabs, not representing the national union at all."

Another miner, Steve, told us. "I'm here to stand by the union and the principle that you never cross a picket line. It took so much hard work to get a union — people lost their lives for it."

By the morning, another

couple of hundred had arrived, and so had the same number of police with riot shields. The strikers in occupation held a meeting and decided to come out.

Geoff Poulter, who was branch secretary at Bolsover for 12 years before the election of a scab to the position, told us: "We've won. The reason why we're out now is that we know we can't win in court, but we've won the day as it is. The intention was to get the area council meeting stopped. We don't believe those people who are working have the right to make policy".

Ravenscraig

More pickets needed

By Stan Crooke

ROUND-the-clock deliveries by road of iron ore and coal to the Ravenscraig steelworks in Motherwell continue to frustrate miners' efforts to shut down production at the plant.

Such supplies have been brought in by road since the end of June, when railway workers agreed to black all coal supplies, and then all iron ore supplies as well, in support of the miners' fight.

The lorries bringing in the coal and iron ore no longer run in convoys, as they did in early May when railway workers previously blacked coal supplies. They arrive in groups of anything between three and ten, or sometimes as lone stragglers.

Sometimes there is only a five minute gap between two deliveries. At other times it can be half an hour. But however irregular the deliveries, they are continuous. The lorries, from over a dozen firms from as far south as Lancaster, roll into the steelworks day and night.

During the earlier picketing in May one picket was arrested for breach of the peace for shouting at the scab lorry drivers during the night. But none of the drivers have been arrested for breach of the peace, despite local residents complaining about how impossible it is to sleep now due to the noise from the lorries. On the contrary, the police help the lorry drivers to breach the peace.

Outside the steelworks, about a dozen miners carry out what amounts in practice to a token picket. They shout abuse at each batch of lorries as they arrive, but the drivers, a number of whom are known to be TGWU members, carry on scabbing regardless.

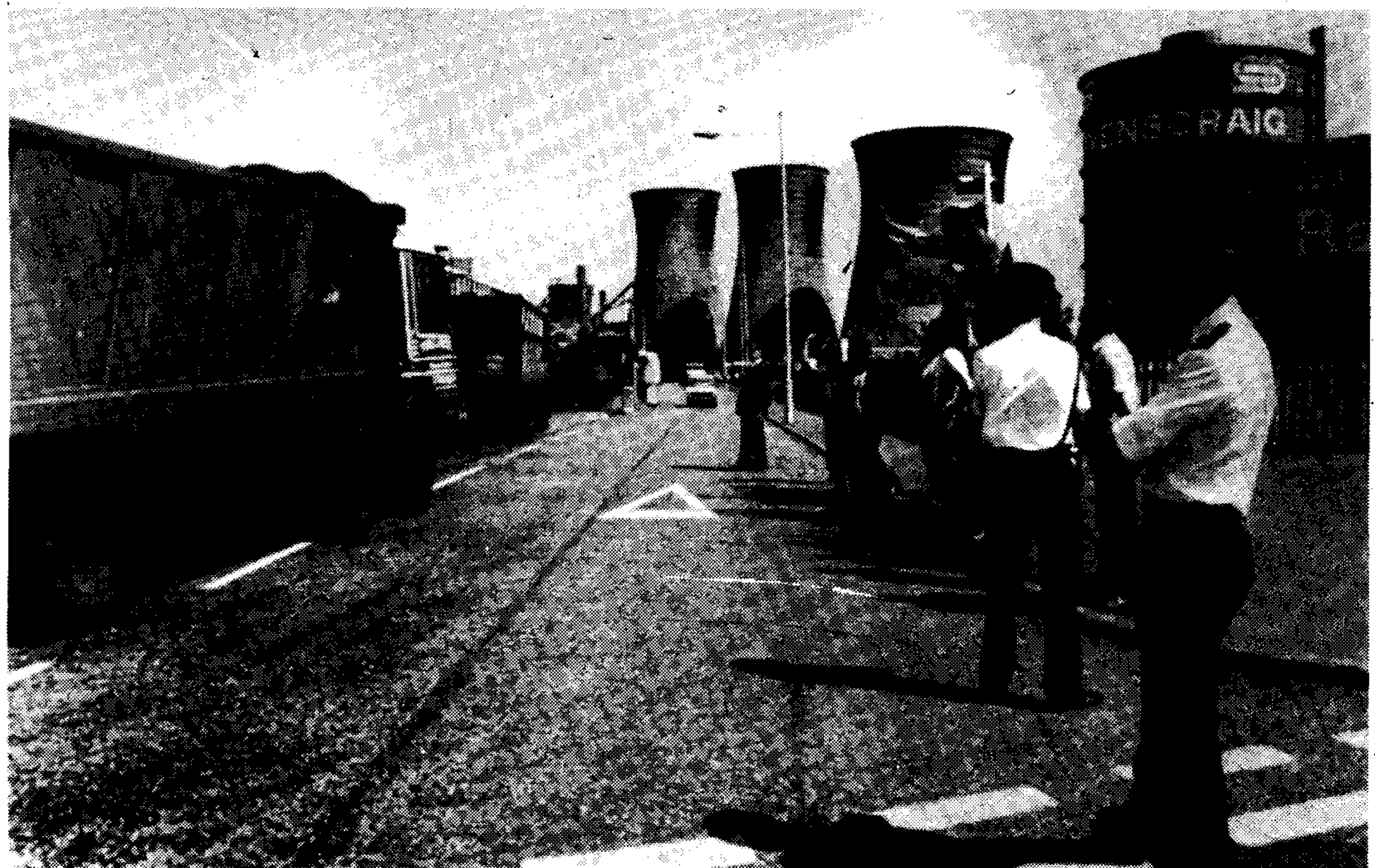
The pickets are from the Pockemmet pit. There has been no resumption of mass picketing since the ISTC-NUM talks broke down without agreement. And no-one is aware of any plans to resume the mass picketing. Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey, has pledged that the "necessary action" will be taken to stop the blockade being breached. As yet, though, there has been no sign of the "necessary action".

The result is that BSC has been able to stockpile supplies of both coal and iron ore at Ravenscraig. Even if further supplies were to be completely cut off, the plant could maintain standard levels of production until the end of July.

To make matters worse, the bulk of the Ravenscraig workforce is on holiday during the last fortnight of July, so consumption of coal and iron ore will fall anyway during that period.

Although picketing out power stations is more important than picketing out steelworks, in terms of making an impact on production by industry in Britain, it is the steelworks, particularly Ravenscraig and Llanwern, which are now centre-stage in the miners' fight.

If they succeed in maintaining production, then the NCB and the Tories will secure a major psychological and political victory. Conversely, the shutting down of production would be at least as important in terms of the boost it would give to miners' morale as it would be in terms of



Token picket at Ravenscraig as the lorries roll in day and night

the impact on other sections of British industry.

Despite the central importance of the conflict over Ravenscraig, and Llanwern, the "necessary action" is, as yet, still in the pipeline. It is beginning to look like a very long pipeline. But with every day that goes by, the stockpiles grow at Ravenscraig and the confidence of the scabs increases.

Action needs to be taken right now on a number of different fronts:

*The TGWU must discipline any of its members involved in running supplies into the plant, such disciplinary action to go up to and including withdrawal of union card, fuel supplies to firms which persist in supplying lorries for breaching the blockades must be blacked;

*Pickets need to leaflet and argue with steelworkers going in and out the plant, stressing that

the NUM is not out to shut down the plant, and that the only way that the closure of Ravenscraig can be prevented in 1986 is a united fight right now by miners, steelworkers and railway workers.

*Such arguments also need to be taken up with steelworkers' wives and the local community which is deeply divided over whether to back the miners or the steelworkers; this means miners and miners' wives' support committees leafletting and arguing out the issue in local shopping arcades on Saturdays, etc.

*Attention also needs to be focussed on the finished steel coming out of Ravenscraig, as well as the deliveries going in — scab coal and scab iron ore make scab steel, any steel produced by Ravenscraig should be blacked throughout the labour movement, both by union members involved

in its transport and also union members involved in using it in production.

*Picketing of Ravenscraig needs to be dramatically escalated, but the level of picketing required can only be achieved by other sections of the trade union movement mobilising for the picket lines, which, in turn, means strike action to enable such a mobilisation.

*Pressure on the Scottish TUC must be mounted in pursuit of further all-Scottish strike action to be called, with the picket lines at Ravenscraig, rather than rallies in Glasgow, Edinburgh, etc., being the focus for such strikes, and the agitation for such strike action feeding into the demand for a general strike in support of the miners.



Brent Miners Support Campaign march and picket of Rhodes Boyson's surgery against the cuts in DHSS payments to miners' wives and children

Injuries could include broken neck

Police raid striker's house

SEVEN strikers in Keresley, near Coventry, were arrested and beaten up in the early hours of last Sunday morning in a pre-dawn police attack on a party at which most of the strike committee were present.

One miner is in hospital with a suspected broken neck. Sylvia Jackson told Jean Lane what happened.

You had your gala yesterday. How did it go?

It was a great day. It was a better turn out than any other year. People had put that bit more effort into it, because of the strike, just to show people.

Can you explain what happened after the disco?

Well, it had been a great day and a good night with an extension, and we decided to finish it off down Colin's house because he had a bottle of vodka. We'd been there about an hour, having a drink and records and that and we were in the living room dancing.

There were only about eight of us left and I went into the kitchen to get a drink. I hadn't heard the door go, but the back door was open and there were coppers there, and I could hear Colin telling them to get off his property.

One of the coppers said: "Are you the householder?". Colin said "Yes, and I'm telling you to get off my property". Colin was stood just inside the back door. The copper said "We want a word with you on your own out here". There was about three miners stood with him by the back door.

Colin just put one foot out the door and they just dived on him. There were coppers everywhere. The other lads were trying to pull Colin back in and the coppers pulled them out and they were just kicking hell out of them. All up the side path and into the front garden.

I ran out and shouted. Because the others were still in the house they didn't know what was going on. My husband, Bill, opened the front door to see what was going on and three coppers dived on him. They kicked him all round that garden. It was just unbelievable.

There was a lad from a few doors up who came out to see what was happening and they had him. Then there was a lad from further up the street came out and they had him as well. They were just battering hell out of them.

What happened then?

Before they got Dennis in the van they were just bouncing his head off the bonnet of the car like a ball. Then they threw him in the van. They dragged me to the van and I got in it. I was sat at the end of the van, opposite Bill, and there was still fighting going on outside the van. I couldn't see what was happening.

This other copper came up and told me to get out of the van and I said that Bill had done nothing less than what I'd done, so if they arrest him, they arrest me. He turned to Bill and said "Is this your wife?" Bill said yes and the copper told him "Well, I'm advising you to get her out of the van for her own safety".



Photo: Martin Shakeshaft, IFL

Llanwern — police hold back miners as a coke convoy passes.

So Bill said to me "Come on Sylv, get out of the van" and I said "No, I'm not".

Bill just turned to the copper and said "You heard the lady, she's stopping". So the copper just grabbed me by the hair and pulled me out. And as fast as they pulled me out loads of coppers just dived into the van and shut the doors.

They took some to Bedworth and some to Nuneaton. Me and Vanda, Dennis's wife, got on the phone to the union bloke and then we went straight to Bedworth police station. They were horrible in there.

First of all they wouldn't tell us where they all were. Then we said we wanted to make a formal complaint. He said he didn't have time.

A bit later he told us that Bill and Dennis were at Nuneaton, so we went there. We said there that we wanted to put in a formal complaint and this inspector took us into a room and tried to pacify us.

But we wouldn't have it. He was making excuses and we were complaining about the violence that had been used. He said that sometimes it's necessary to meet violence with violence. He said that if it's "in the course of the duty" they have the right to use it.

But I couldn't accept that.

That's not what happened. One of the blokes in the house, Les, was fast asleep in bed and when they'd got Colin and the rest of them in the garden they went into the house and looked in all the bedrooms and dragged him out of bed.

I eventually got to see Bill. He's got all cuts and bruises on his head where they dragged him across the road. He told me that Dennis was a mess. I never saw him but Vanda did. At that time he was still walking, but only just. The police just told us that the doctor had seen him. They never told us any more.

We went home then. But we just missed the union blokes going up there and they said when they got there they saw the ambulance taking Dennis away. That was only a matter of five minutes after we'd left. But they hadn't told Vanda they were taking him to the hospital.

What were the injuries?

They suspect a broken neck. His face was out here and his teeth were loose. Colin's got a broken nose. They've just transferred him to hospital now. Nev had to go to hospital for x-rays on his ribs. Ray who just came out of his house to see what was going on — has got a big lump on his head.

Bill's got all cuts and grazes on his forehead and his mouth is swollen, his ribs are sore and he's limping. Bas's neck is all swollen. I don't know about Les.

It said over the local radio that six policemen have been injured.

They must have done it themselves, that's all I can say. Bill hasn't actually been charged yet but they reckon they're having him for assault on three police officers. Which is a 'bleeding joke'. He didn't have a chance to get up. He was on the ground the whole time. The other charges are for assault and affray I think. I don't know the details because they said they can't be charged till they interview the coppers that were on duty.

Two have been kept in jail because they have "broken bail". The others are out on bail — except Dennis. They can keep them in jail for up to a fortnight without charging them. Bill's up in court tomorrow but they won't be able to charge him then because they won't have seen those coppers.

Some people think it was a scab who got the coppers there. Is that right?

We didn't have a chance to find out why they were there. It all happened so quickly. They said there had been complaints from the club, and complaints by the neighbours about the noise. But I've heard since that there was just one complaint which is probably the scab. But I mean, any other complaint you get for a noisy party, you get two coppers come to the front door asking you to turn your record player down. There were loads of coppers, at least 20. The whole street was covered in vans and they came to the back door. To me, they had it well planned.

I mean there was the chairman of the strike committee, there was the main fund raiser, there was the fund raiser's driver. One of the strike committee wasn't there. And as soon as it had all died down and they'd got everyone into the van, they went down to his house. They never knocked on his door. They

just stood by his door, looking for an excuse to get him. They'd got most of the rest of the strike committee.

It was so well organised. So whether the scab had phoned or not nobody knows — it was just an excuse.

Will there be any action in the village about it?

There's bound to be. It's too early to say what yet. The union was getting onto Dave Nellist (MP) and the NCCL. But there's going to be something happening about it. I mean it was pure brutality. I saw it with my own eyes and I can't believe it. I've never seen anything like it in all my life, never.

Were they local coppers?

Yes, I think so. Nev was just stood by the gate of the house and one of the coppers just stuck one on him. Got him straight down and then tried to drag him over the wire mesh fence. All his arms are scratched and bruised. It was like all hell let loose. We got photographs taken of the car that they were bouncing Dennis off, and there are traces of blood and hair left on it.

We'd all had a really good night and weren't expecting anything. It all happened completely out of the blue. I hate them bleeders, I tell you.

Do you think people have changed their views of the police as keepers of law and order?

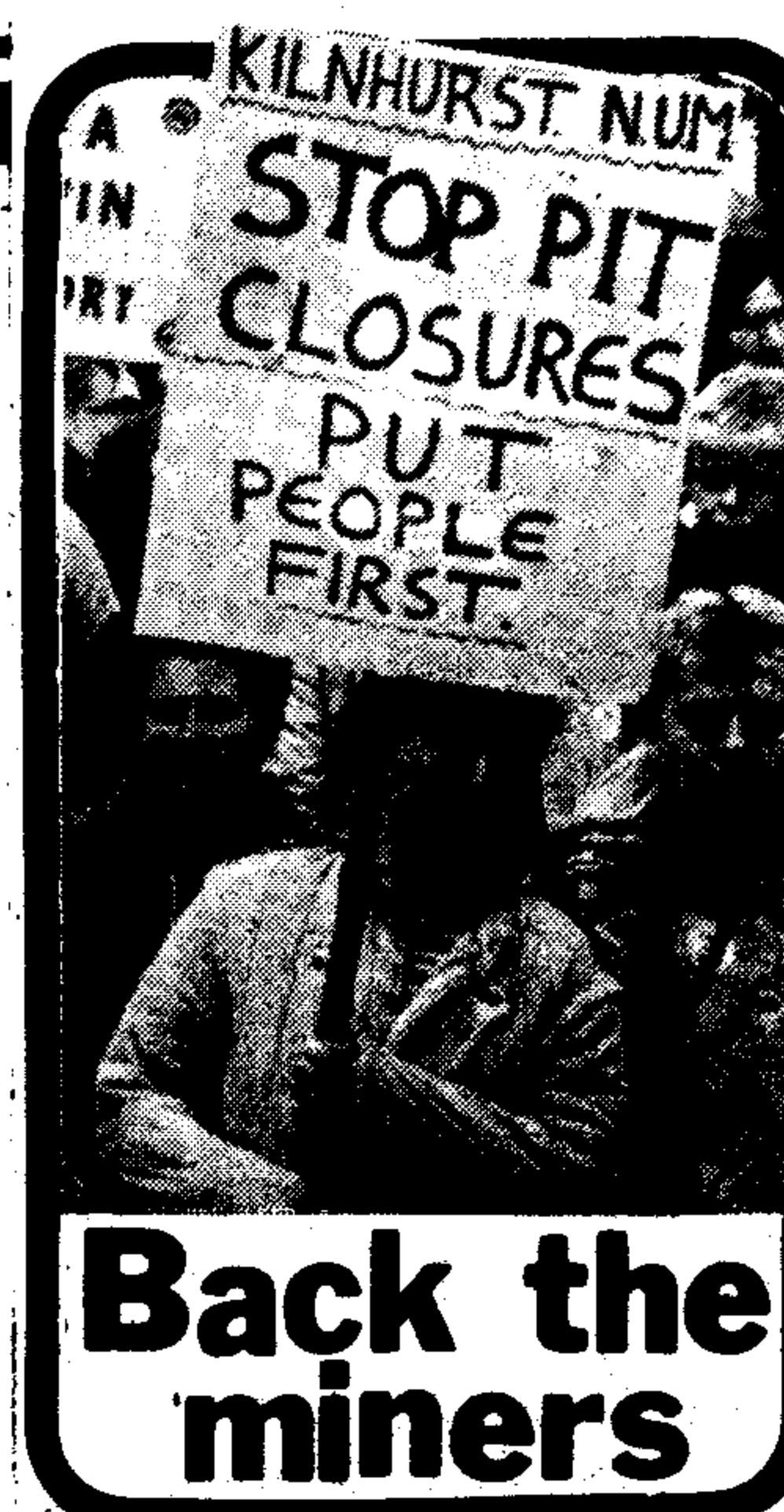
I used to think that. I think a lot of people have changed their minds. Six months ago if people had told us this sort of thing could happen we wouldn't have believed it — you don't know that British coppers can act in this way till you see it with your own eyes. I'll never forget what I saw and I'll never ever trust them. Never.

Policewatch

Sheffield Police watch: 73, West Street, Sheffield S1 4EQ.
Kent police monitoring group: Richard De Friend or Ian Grieg Spall; 0227 86822.
Nottingham Co-ordinating Committee Against the Police Presence: c/o Ivan Wels, 11, Osborne St., Sherwood, Nottingham.
Hull strike HQ is collecting statements about police behaviour: Pete, Mansfield 862790.



Miners in Jubilee Gardens, London.



Women's march planned

CHRIS GOODWIN

OVER 100 women from all over the country met together last weekend to plan an event which will link opposition to nuclear weapons with the miners strike and provide an impetus for women around the strike.

The women are miners' wives, women from Greenham Camp and from women's peace groups.

We discussed why the miners strike is an issue of importance to all women. The wives see themselves as part of the class struggle and are fighting for women's liberation as well as support for their men.

Job losses affect everyone and so do nuclear weapons which could destroy our children and our class.

The government are trying to wipe out the miners' jobs by changing our energy resources to nuclear power. This is limited to the development of nuclear weapons so the issues are directly connected.

A woman from the Namibian Support Committee described how workers in Namibia are exploited in the production of cheap uranium for use in nuclear weapons. Women from Greenham Common have monthly pickets outside the headquarters of Rio Tinto Zinc in London to demonstrate against their vast investments in Namibia.

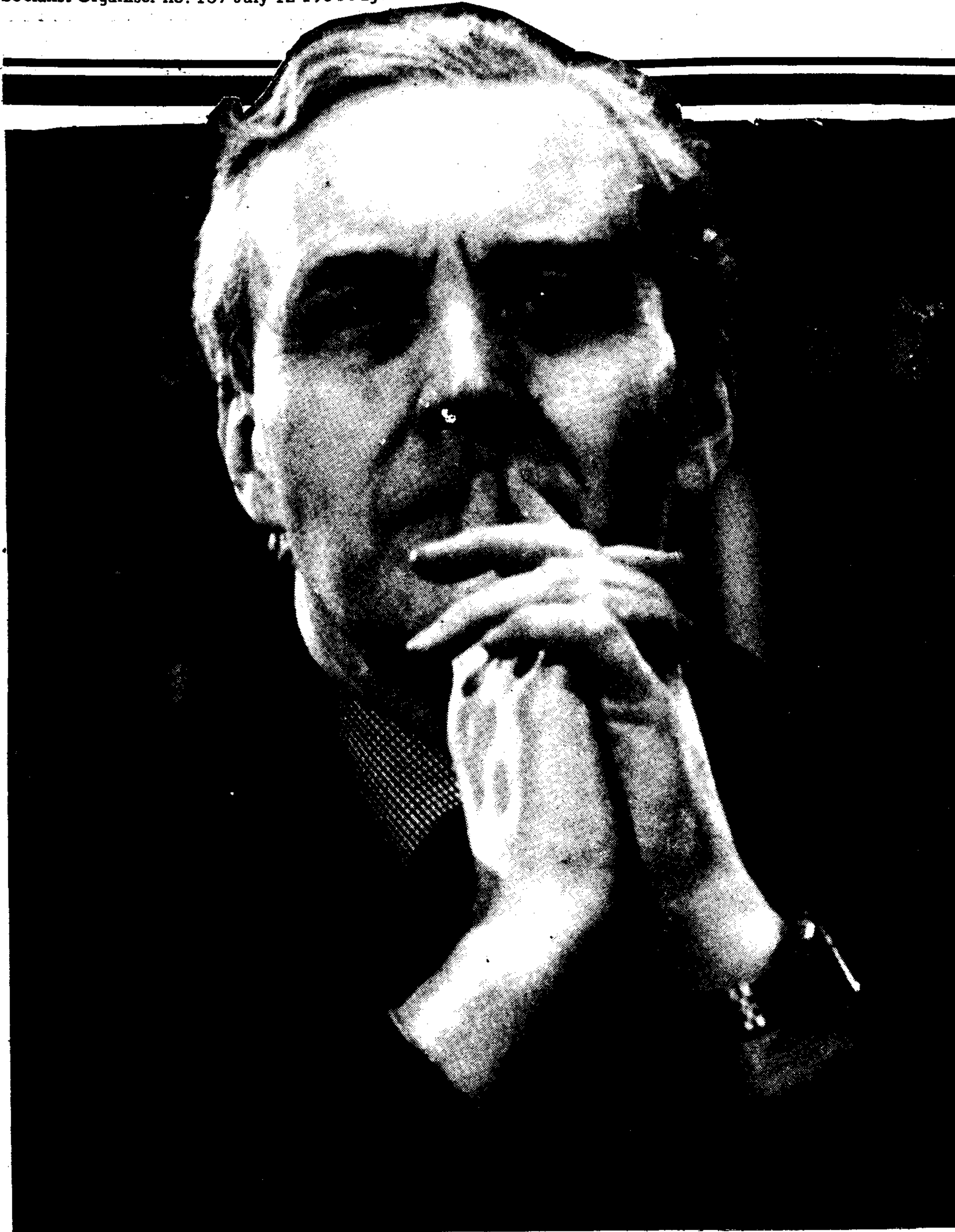
We discussed support for the South African miners who are also on strike and the double exploitation of women in South Africa under the apartheid regime.

We are going to organise a national women's march, from a Friday to Monday, from a nuclear power station in Staffordshire to a rally in Mansfield.

This will take place on the second or third weekend in August and we are urging all women to join the rallies at the start and finish of the march.

Marches in Scotland and Wales will coincide.

Money and further information: Leicester Women's Peace Action Group, c/o The Women's Centre, 13 Welford Road, Leicester.



Tony Benn. (Photo: John Harris)

Continued from p.12

I tell you candidly — if what we did between 1979 and '83 had not been done, David Owen would now be the leader of the Labour Party. Don't make any mistake about it. If we had not made the change in the electoral college, if the Parliamentary Labour Party still elected the Leader, David Owen would now be the leader of a Labour Party that was, in effect, the SDP. That's worth saying.

It's worth analysing some of the other arguments against the gloom and doom people. Take the section of the Parliamentary Labour Party that left the Party. It was quite a high percentage. They set themselves the job of destroying the Party. There was, to put it mildly, a division in the PLP leadership about whether the policy of the Conference was right or not.

That made problems for anybody who was going to vote Labour — what were the Parliamentary leadership going to carry out, policy or anything else? And of course, during the Falklands war the Party — the leadership, at any rate — got itself behind the Task Force, and I think that contributed to our defeat.

But the real damage was not the defeat but the defeat-

We publish here extracts from a speech given by Tony Benn to a conference organised by the Institute of Workers Control and the Labour Coordinating Committee in Nottingham last weekend.

ism. You had this whole Hobsbawm analysis that somehow we were on an irreversible decline and that we better get a Popular Front.

People were totally misreading Thatcherism as fascism. They're not the same. Fascism is a different political animal. Fascist ideas are current in our society, but if it were really fascism then the argument for the Popular Front, which my predecessor in Bristol Stafford Cripps worked for before the war, might have some relevance.

But if you build a movement on an anti-Thatcher policy — then, first of all, you're guilty of the offence of building up Thatcherism. Secondly you're building a movement for an alliance on a negative, not a positive, basis. And, thirdly, you forget that most of the people Hobsbawm seems to want to bring in may be anti-Thatcher but they are more anti-socialist than they are anti-Tory.

These ideas have led to something I recognise — the revisionism that appeared in the Party after 1959, when you had the Gaitskell attempt to change Clause 4. Some people are now suggesting this should be back on the

agenda — incredibly. You can just about understand why after 'you've never had it so good' you drop socialism, but why you drop socialism when 'you've never had it so bad' I've never been able to fully understand.

That was '83. Now in '84 you find the whole situation transformed.

Anybody who has seen or who has been on a picket line knows that it is something a little more than a few missiles on the miners' side and riot police on the other. It is something on a scale involving numbers, cavalry, and infantry that must have occurred in a number of Civil War battles in the middle of the 17th century.

In London Ken Livingstone is treated as somebody beyond the pale because he said he thought Ireland should be independent.

We had very good results in the European elections. And the SDP has appeared increasingly as a Tory splinter. Indeed, if British politics ever moved sharply to the right, it would be David Owen who would be Prime Minister.

David Owen is well to the right of Mrs Thatcher in my

Expand our

analysis. Mrs Thatcher is a Manchester school liberal using the police to sustain the monetarist system; but the 'consensus' in its modern manifestation is authoritarian to a degree. What Mussolini did in Italy in the 1920s is something which a whole school of thought, including part of the Establishment, would like to see now.

They wouldn't hesitate to nationalise the banks, just as Mussolini nationalised them. If the banks collapsed, it would be the Tories that nationalised them and then made the workers pay the price for keeping the system going.

As far as the Labour Party is concerned, there has also been a transformation. We have a new leadership which we elected by the electoral college. And, as I said earlier, we avoided David Owen. We've got a leadership that was elected at annual conference, and they should be sustained and supported.

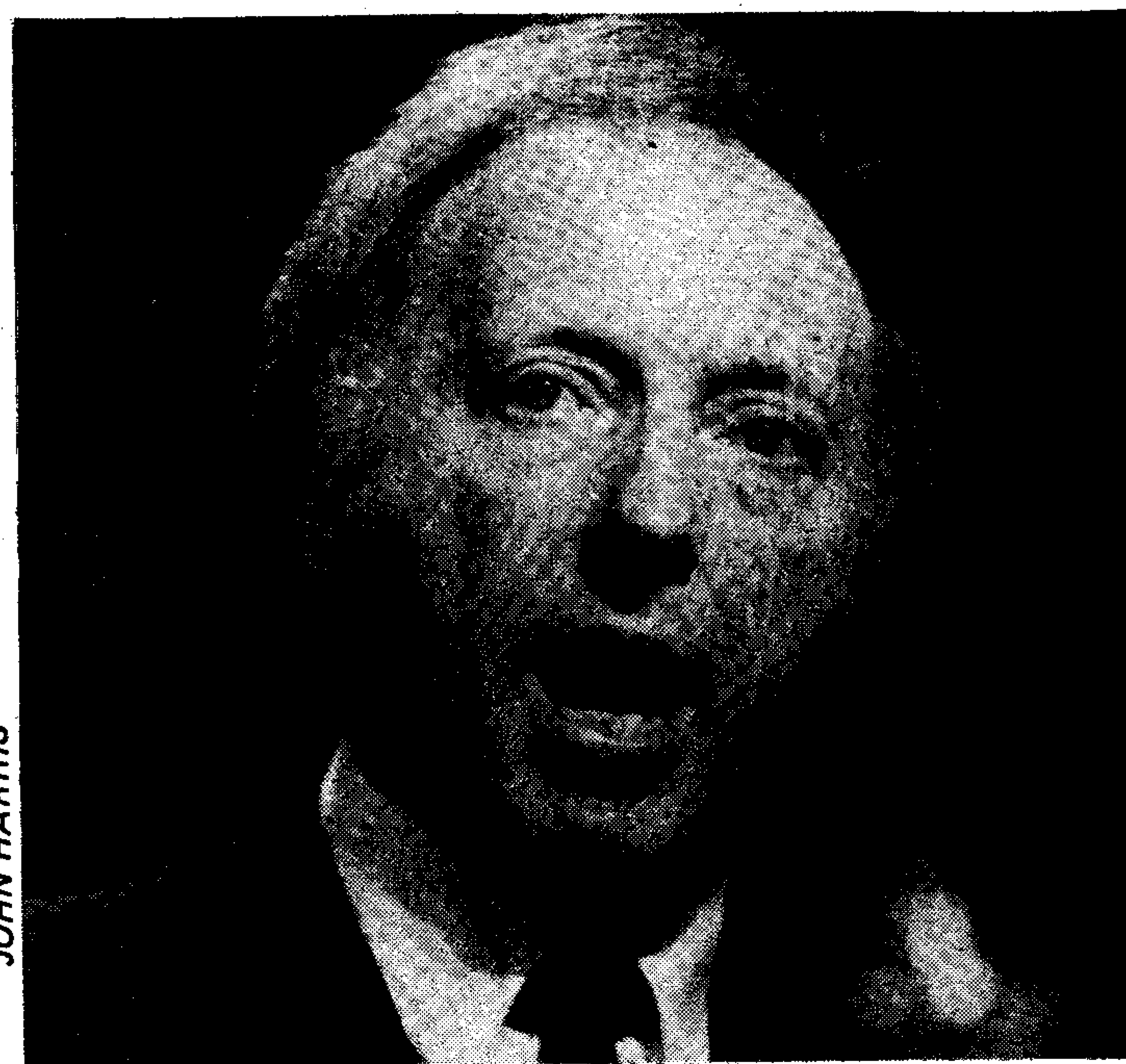
We have 'Labour's Programme for Britain', which, although very modest compared to the standards that would be required of us if we came back to power, is still basically the right Party policy. And we have an improved constitution, which goes some way to see that we don't have an SDP problem in the future.

In that connection I would say that to raise the reselection issue again now as if it would be in our interest to break the link with the trade unions when it comes to selecting candidates would be, to put it mildly, very foolish indeed. Because if the ballots are coming in the unions, and the issue is to be, is it worth reaffiliating to the Labour Party?, then it would be strange to shift over to a reselection process that would exclude affiliated members from having any role.

Now I want to move on to look in two ways at what is happening.

First, the battle; second, the war.

The most important thing is that the Labour Party should give one hundred per cent support to those who are engaged in struggle — that is to say, the miners, the Liverpool councillors, the London and metropolitan counties, and a whole group of Labour councillors who are not going to pay the bills for the police.



JOHN HARRIS

You can't say that we are a campaigning party and then not deploy the full power of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the National Executive Committee, the regional offices, the agents, on the issues which are at the centre of the current conflict. And that is why it is so important that over the last few months — there's been a struggle, but we've succeeded — we've got

mentary activity which led to Peter Tatchell's dismissal because he suggested they set up a camp around the House of Commons.

I think that was related to when Hoover was President of the USA. Didn't the poor in Washington set up a Hooverville to show their poverty, and get chased off by the District of Columbia police? But we've come to realise that our whole history has been a history of extra-parliamentary activity.

There's a local government conference in Sheffield this weekend, and I would be very surprised if George Lansbury [the leader of Poplar Labour Council's defiance of central government in the 1920s] was not the moving spirit of that conference — because events have shown that's what you have to do.

And let's be quite clear. There is an overriding legal obligation to obey the law, but there is no moral obligation to obey the law. So if people say, ought you obey the law?, the answer is — legally you should, but morally you use your judgment.

And provided we differentiate between the legal requirement to obey the law and the moral requirement to judge the law according to whether it's good or bad, we won't go far wrong.

Now from there we have to move into this area of extended industrial action. The Campaign group of MPs wrote round to all union executives and local Parties say-



Margaret Thatcher

the National Executive first of all to support the miners; next to ask for the levy; and thirdly to agree that there would be discussion between Eric Heffer, Jim Mortimer, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield on a national campaign in support of the miners.

And this relates also to the argument about extra-parlia-

Women against pit closures

Dalkeith, c/o Dalkeith Miners' Welfare, Dalkeith, Lothian.
Fish Cross, c/o Fish Cross Miners' Welfare, Fish Cross, Clackmannanshire.

Durham, c/o Heather Wood, 18 Halffield Drive, Easington Village, Peterlee, Co. Durham.

Kent, Kay Sutcliffe, c/o Aylesham Miners' Welfare, Aylesham, Kent.

Thurnscoe: Sheila Jow, 105, Lidget Lane, Thurnscoe, Near Rotherham.

Blidworth. Doreen Humber, 50, Thorney Abbey Road, Blidworth, Mansfield, Notts.

Edlington: Veronica Balderson,

62, Blowhall Cres., Edlington, Doncaster.

Maesteg: Teresa Barry, 13 Charles Row, Maesteg, West Glamorgan. (Tel: 738825).

Birch Coppice wives' group, Wendy Coxson, Tamworth 896069.

Barnsley. Ann Hunter, 5 Packhorse Gn, Silkstone, near Barnsley phone 791187.

Maerdy Wives Support Committee, c/o Maerdy Strike Centre, Ferndale 755 301.

Oakdale, Gwent: 82 Markham Cres., Oakdale, Blackwood, Gwent. 0495 220158.

Celyn North, Gwent. c/o

Dorothy Phillips, 13 Thorn Ave., Newbridge, Gwent. 0495 245000.

Rugeley, Staffs: Mrs Jackson, 9 Woodlands, Handsacre, Rugeley, Staffs. Mrs Southwell, Rugeley 6179.

Littleton, Staffs: 6 Tower Road, High Green, Hednesford. Linda Platen, Hednesford 76614.

Merton, Durham. Hetton-le-Hall 267641.

Sheffield Women Against Pit Closures. Kath Mackey, Sheffield 381594 or 454163.

North Staffs wives' committee: Brenda Proctor, 153 Broadway, Meir, Stoke on Trent. 0782 332151.



Picketing at Ravenscraig steelworks. Photo: Rick Matthews, IFL.

demands

ing, will you consider supporting industrial action? I made a speech in East Ham which was described as a call for a general strike, which it wasn't. What we wanted people to see was that the support for the miners can't be rhetorical.

When I went round picket lines near Chesterfield, I came across my first NUR-ASLEF picket line. It was very different from the young miners stripped to the waist, tattooed and brown and very lean — I saw these middle-aged men from the NUR and ASLEF, and the trains stopped — I felt like Wellington must have felt when Blucher arrived at Waterloo.

That is supporting action. That supportive action is right. We should support it and encourage it. Politically the most important thing that happened was when the print workers in Fleet Street insisted that every newspaper print the printworkers' supporting statement. Three newspapers who would not do it, the Daily Mirror, the Financial Times, and the Sun, didn't appear.

All right, let's have six weeks annual holiday, let's have a shorter working week, let's retire at 50, let's do all sorts of things that share the work and the leisure, but don't re-define unemployment as leisure! Let's make the demands on housing, on education, on collective health, and of course expanding our demands in terms of the public sector.

The reacquisition of the privatised assets is only going to be a part of what we do — but I would like to pay a tribute to Mrs Thatcher for her legislative initiative in saying that miners on strike are deemed to have got strike pay. When we reacquire the de-nationalised industries we will deem their profits to have been taken. We are not going to pay money to people who have bought our assets cheap.

And for our next manifesto I personally think they should be presented not as promises but as demands. It's a subtle difference. But it means that if we vote Labour next time, then the labour movement will be *demanding*

"It is a pathetic historical failure that so huge and powerful a labour movement, with such a long history, should have done practically nothing to change the balance of power in our society"

That is right, and we should support them in doing it. Surely it must now become apparent that what they call 'freedom' of the press is the freedom of the proprietors to deny freedom of the press... Indeed, I would like to see some historian rewrite the history of the 17th century by saying that what it was all about was the freedom of the monarch being limited outrageously by the action of those who questioned the divine right of kings.

And, finally, in terms of the battle, we've got to broaden the policy, to energy and nuclear power construction in Britain.

They want nuclear power for plutonium for the Bomb. They want nuclear power to beat the miners. Isn't it extraordinary that when the Americans have cancelled 90 Pressurised Water Reactors and haven't built one since 1977, and when we're told we don't need coal so we close pits, we spend millions on a lousy American reactor that isn't safe. And then we're told that's part of an energy policy.

The battle is part of something much bigger, which indeed provides the engine for change. We must expand our demands.

The miners have made some very bold demands, but if we listen to Denis Skinner, who is demanding things on behalf of the miners which go beyond what even the NUM would say, we realise that *this* is the moment to set our sights a lot higher.

We must talk about the need and entitlement of everybody for useful work.

I do not believe this neopessimism being peddled by certain people that the new technology means that we're all going to be out of work — that we have to re-define unemployment as leisure and therefore that will somehow make it better for those who can't find work.

these things — not Labour ministers *offering* them. There's a difference between a manifesto that consists of demands and a manifesto that consists of promises.

There is a real difference here which we ought to think about — whether we win the next election by winning a thousand Guardian readers who are wobbling between us and the SDP, or by mobilising 25% of the population who never thought the political system had anything to offer them and didn't vote before.

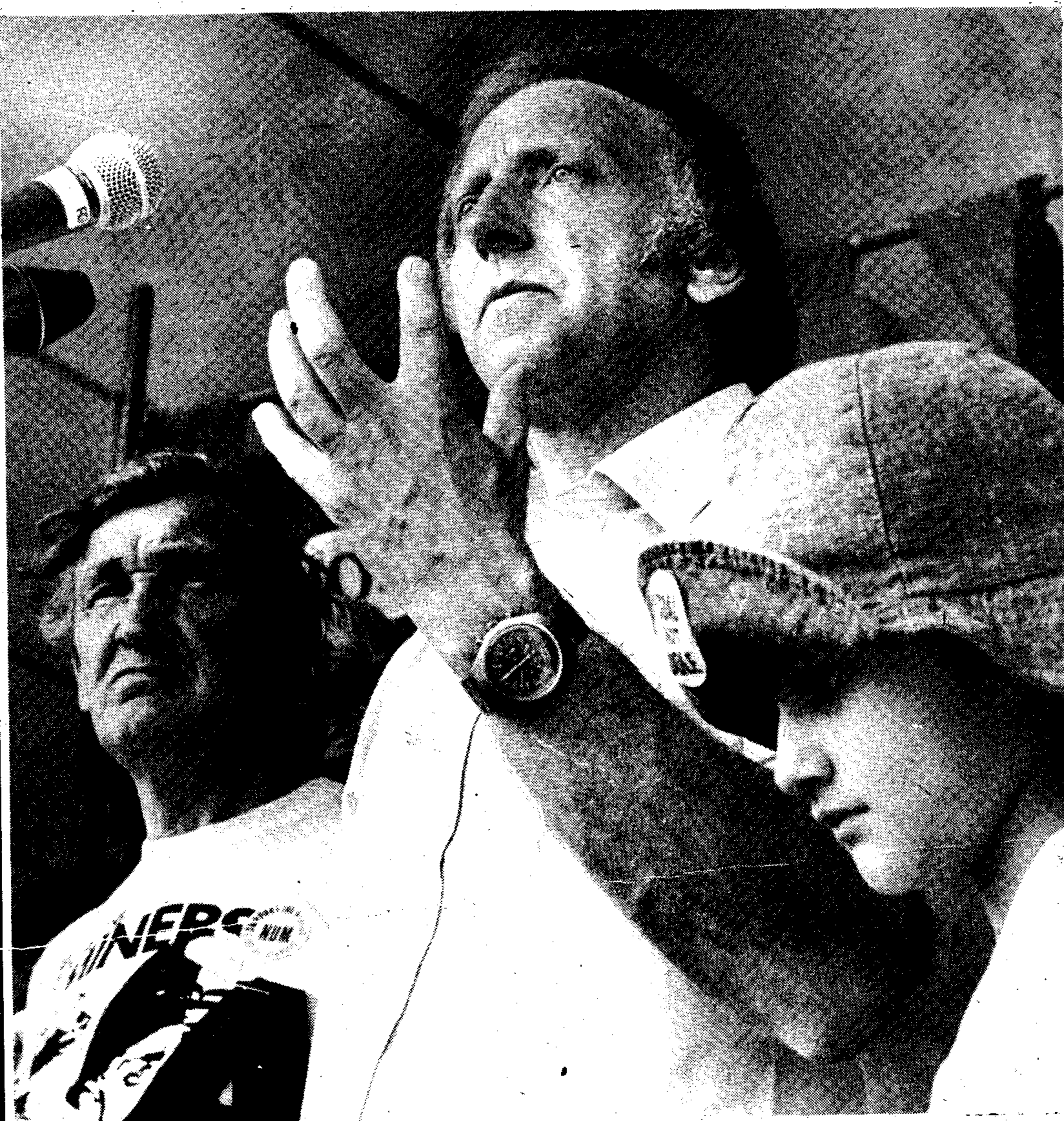
It is an extraordinary thing that a labour movement that came into being in order to control a society in the interests of those who create the wealth should have allowed itself to be so easily submerged behind the financial demands, the wage demands, or whatever it happens to be.

It is a pathetic historical failure that so huge and powerful a labour movement, with such a long history, should have done practically *nothing* to change the balance of power in our society.

When I hear praise for the Lords for what they did over the Greater London Council, it turns my stomach. We should not allow the short-term gain that it might offer us for embarrassing the Tories to give any legitimacy to this chamber. They might make life difficult for Mr Jenkin — and then, reinforced by popular approval, deny us when we try to do something real.

We, as a labour movement, have been a convalescent home for capitalism when it has been in difficulties. We have not sought to change the values, we have not sought to change the structures.

But I'm absolutely clear in my mind, and Liverpool and London councils prove it, that we're going to win the next election not by subterfuge but by sharpening and clarifying what we're going to do.



Arthur Scargill. (Photo: Brian James)

Join the pickets!

How is morale after 18 weeks on strike?

For myself I am 100% behind the way the leadership is running the strike. Their stand of no compromise is fully backed by my lodge and all South Wales miners.

What picketing has taken place?

We have a regular picket at Point of Ayr colliery in North Wales (the only pit in Wales which is working)

Have you experienced any violence on the picket line?

No. The only violence I have experienced was at the lobby of the National Executive Committee in Yorkshire. Others in South Wales have seen more police violence than I have — members of my own lodge who went to Orgreave. The actions of the police have radically changed our idea of them. Before we saw the police as our friendly local bobby protecting our rights. Following the mass pickets we see that they are now there to oppress us, to stop us exercising our right to picket.

How has the support committee organised in your area?

The support we have received has been overwhelming, both in Cardiff and South Wales generally. Since the support committee was set up we have received only two letters and one phone call attacking the efforts of the NUM and hundreds in support.

This is in Cardiff, which is a Tory stronghold. The support we are getting shows that the public is behind us.

While our organisation could be improved I think it is generally OK. For instance, about 400 of the families in my pit are collecting food parcels. While we get some of these from the central relief fund, the majority come from the local community. They are collected and organised by the women's support committee

Nigel Bevan, Penrhin-ceiber Colliery, and secretary of the Cardiff Support Committee, spoke to Mick O'Sullivan.

Has the action of the women changed the attitude of miners towards them?

Definitely. The miners have realised that it is not just tea and sandwiches from the women. They are getting out there, speaking at meetings, writing leaflets — their leaflets are worded differently to the ones the miners write and seem to attract more support.

Since the beginning of the strike attitudes have changed amongst both men and women. At the beginning the women's first concern was that money wasn't coming into the house and they acted as a pressure to go back to work.

However, their attitude soon changed as they realised that the fight was for more than just jobs — for our communities. We have also learnt a lot from the women. There is now a common stand against MacGregor's plans for the coal industry.

What do you think of the present discussions with the Coal Board?

I look at these with concern. The Board's plan seems to be to redefine what is an uneconomic pit, doing this on the basis of loss per ton. I don't think there can be any room for compromise.

The Board will use any such deal to their own advantage. However, I think it's good that people are sitting round the table. I have complete confidence in Arthur Scargill. I don't see him selling us out.

The picketing of the steel works has been developing over the last few weeks. How do you think the South Wales NUM has handled it?

I think we have given the steel workers too much. Since

the beginning of the dispute Llanwern has received enough coke, coal and iron ore to maintain a reasonable level of production. This is unacceptable.

During the steel dispute we suffered a tremendous cut back in coal production because we blacked all foreign steel and lost a number of days pay in support of their strike which also meant a loss in our productivity bonus earnings.

Some bulletins have already gone in, arguing support and explaining the issues involved. At a national level the ISTC leadership is no good at all.

The NUM response can be vastly improved in three ways.

An NUM bulletin should go out to the plant to be handed out to the workforce on their way to work.

Pressure should be increased by increasing the number of NUM pickets on Llanwern and Port Talbot.

We should appeal to the public and fellow trade unionists to join the picket lines.

So you think that solidarity action should be stepped up?

Definitely. There should be a call for a one-day general strike in solidarity with the NUM. It would make the government realise that the whole of the trade union movement has had enough.



Back the miners

Threats fa

By Dan Duncan

THE Coal Board has plumbed new depths in its campaign of lies and intimidation against striking miners. Colliery manager Kiverton Park, Brookhouse Treeton in South Yorkshire week sent personal letters to striking miners pleading with them to return to work. The contents of these letters would make any Sun journalist blush (possibly with pride!).

In what is a skillfully written blend of sticks and carrots, Taylor, colliery manager Kiverton Park, declares himself to be 'particularly concerned about the condition of HOI face' quotes a visit by himself and the local union officials as evidence of the truth of his claims. W Socialists Organiser asked two of the officials concerned, branch president George Smith and committee member Les Poppel about management's claims, they painted a very different picture.

Les told us "As far as I'm concerned that face was no worse than it gets after the fortnight summer holiday. George agreed "It's been worse than that at a bad roof-fall while we were still at work."

Some of his other comments also illustrate the board's attitude quite well. He says "Many of the men were interested before strike in turning back to work. If this is true (and it probably is) why then does the Coal Board want to shut pits and capacity. The answer to the riddle is simple — smashing the NUM more important to the board than mining coal. If people die of cold and mining communities have to die of job starvation, then so be it.

Only in the last paragraph does Mr "Your interests are our deepest concern" Taylor show true colours: "If you are as concerned about this as me, might consider doing one of the following.

1) Make your concerns known to the union officials.

2) Telephone the colliery and ask to speak to me or senior BACM man on duty. Let us know if you are interested in returning to work. We will be able to help you."

When asked by union officials if this meant that he was intending to organise scabs to go to work Taylor denied it (no doubt with injured innocence).

He is unlikely to be satisfied with the results of efforts.

1) No-one has turned up to work at Kiverton Park.

2) BACM paid a visit to the pit apparently to give Mr T. a polite smack on the wrist.

Notts strikers need money

Send money or invitations for fund-raising visits to the Notts Miners Rank and File Strike Committees North Notts. Strike Centre, Ollerton Miners' Welfare, Ollerton, Notts.
South Notts. Miners' Strike Centre, c/o AUE 218 Mansfield Road, Nottingham.



Convoy of armoured cars in London during the General Strike

By Sue Scott
THE YEARS 1919-26 marked a decisive period in the history of the British labour movement.

An understanding of this period is of great importance to workers today.

Like today, it was a time of growing class conflict. This sharpening of class struggle derived from a profound dual crisis of British capitalism.

Firstly, Britain — the first capitalist state on the world arena — had entered a phase of irreversible decline, her economic predominance being challenged and displaced by the other imperialist states.

The First World War itself had, in part, been a product of this decline. Germany had begun to encroach upon and capture large chunks of the world market to the extent that this loss could only be redressed and a redivision of the world market effected by military means.

But far from the war providing a remedy for the chronic problems of Britain, it actually deepened them, opening the way for an even mightier challenge from the USA.

Secondly, the period was characterised by a cyclical crisis of capitalism. The post-

The story of 1919-26

war boom, which had been based upon a demand for industrial goods, ended abruptly in mid-1920 when the inflationary bubble well and truly burst.

And these were not the only difficulties which faced the bosses. The post war boom had registered tremendous changes in the outlook of the working class, which had taken advantage of the situation to assert its strength. To wrench wage concessions out of the employers, the workers had to resort to their only weapon: organisation.

Trade union membership grew in leaps and bounds from 5½ million in 1917 to 8½ million in 1920. The changes in consciousness in the working class produced by the sharpness of the struggle helped in turn to intensify the problems of the ruling class, giving it very little room to manoeuvre.

Equally vital in its impact was the example of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

All Europe was ablaze. There had been revolutionary waves in Germany, France, Italy, Hungary and Ireland.

In Britain, too, there were revolutionary developments taking shape in every sphere of society. There were strikes in every industry, disorder in the Army and even a strike by those custodians of capitalist property and legality, the police.

Thus, the position of the ruling class hardly provided a foundation for optimism. Yet, for the bosses, there was only one way out — a relentless attack on the living standards and rights of the working class which prepared to meet this challenge in the only way it knew, by developing and strengthening its own organisation.

This explains the drive towards the amalgamation of trade unions which took place in the immediate post-war period. In 1921, the AEU (now the AUEW) came into existence as a result of the amalgamation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and nine smaller unions.

Similarly in 1922 the TGVW emerged out of the shell of the old Transport Federation. Two years later came the GMWU.

Parallel with this, the pre-war agreement for a Triple Alliance of Transport, Railway and Mining unions to stand and act together was revived.

Both sides were getting into battle formation and the first major shots were fired in the late summer of 1919, following closely upon the tail end of the boom. The Tory-Liberal Coalition provoked a rail strike by attempting to impose a statutory wage cut.



Ernest Bevin — general secretary of the TGVW

Despite the strenuous efforts of the railwaymen's leader, J.H. Thomas, to betray the strike, the government folded up at the threat of the Triple Alliance acting together.

Workers' militancy was on the upswing, and the struggle was reaching unprecedented levels to the point where industrial action became a political weapon.



J.H. Thomas

This was demonstrated particularly by the "Jolly George" incident, in which the dockers in London refused to load weapons destined for use against the Red Army by the Polish army which invaded Russia in 1920.

Councils of action

To stress the point, Councils of Action were formed under the leadership of union leaders like Bevin, to spearhead the struggle against British intervention in Russia if that became necessary.

The next round of struggle involved the miners, who demanded a wage increase and called upon their partners the Triple Alliance to throw their weight behind them. The coal-owners refused the increase and on October 16 there began a strike.

The threat of solidarity action by the transport workers and railwaymen created a panic in the ruling class which, while buying time, also pushed through an Emergency Powers Bill which virtually

DAYS

restored its wartime anti-strike powers and foreshadowed the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies.

In reality the decisive struggle was only postponed for six months. The ruling class had bought time to prepare a counter-attack.

By 1921, 2½ million were unemployed. The "shake-out" had begun. Next in the firing line were the workers in the vital export industries — ship-building, mines, engineering — where chronic problems of lack of investment and surplus capacity existed along with what the employers considered high wages.

The mines were destined to be the first battlefield for the bosses' attack. By April 1921 the coal-owners demanded a wage cut and, this being rejected, locked out the miners. It was now class against class.

Miners

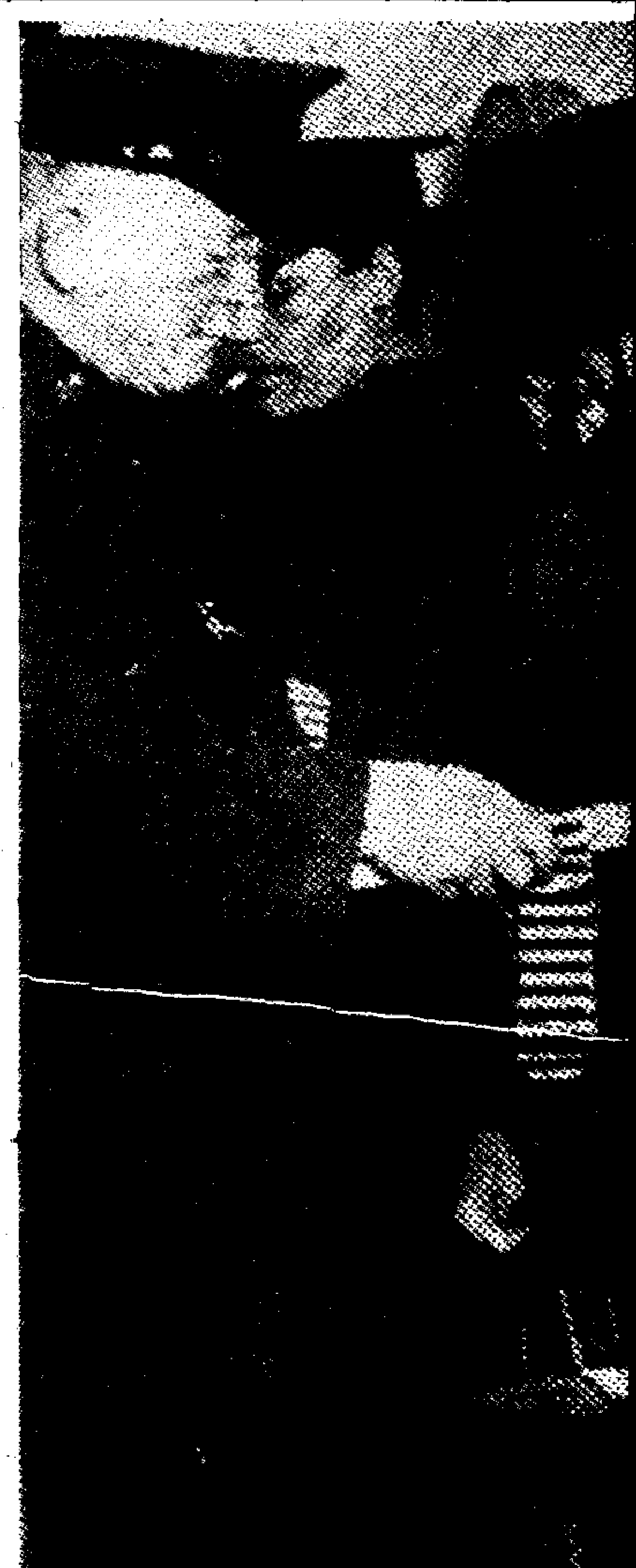
Amidst tremendous support for the miners in the working class, the Triple Alliance was involved, a sympathetic strike being called for April 16, 1921.

The Tory-Liberal government was now on a civil war footing. The Emergency Powers Act was used, reservists were mobilised, and troops were posted to industrial areas. The union leaderships surrendered at once.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Thomas of the NUR and Williams of the Transport Workers backed out and left the miners to fight alone. Betrayed and deserted, the miners fought on for two months and were forced to concede defeat.

This monumental betrayal went down in working class history as "Black Friday". It was a colossal demonstration of the cowardice of the leaders of the labour movement. Moreover, it demoralised whole sections of the working class.

Section by section, the employers dealt with the



Special constables being issued unions and, in the wake of Black Friday, defeat followed defeat.

The employers had drawn strength from their victory over the miners. Just like they would from a victory now. They took on the engineers and virtually smashed the remnants of the massive war-time shop stewards movement.

Following on this, they inflicted defeats on the dockers, building workers and textile workers, to the extent that they could boast of having slashed war-time pay increases by 75%.

These defeats had the effect of dampening down the class struggle. Large numbers of workers drifted out of the unions. The tide of class struggle had begun to ebb. The only force which stood up



McDonald, Thomas and Henderson leave Buckingham Palace after the form

TRANSPORT & GENERAL WORKERS AMALGAMATION
ONE BIG UNION
A MASS MEETING
NATIONAL UNION OF VEHICLE WORKERS
EUSTON THEATRE
ON SUNDAY EVENING, JAN. 30th, 1921
Chairman: SAM MARCH, J.P., L.C.C.
SPEAKERS:
HARRY GOSLING, L.C.C.
WILL GODFREY, C. CONSIDER, A. HARVEY
R. W. STOCK, SID PECK
Admission: 7 P.M. PROMPT.
ONE BIG UNION.

OF HOPE



clubs during the General Strike against these developments was the infant Communist Party, which fought resolutely inside the unions to draw out clearly and understand the lessons of Black Friday.

By early 1924, the workers began to regain their fighting spirit. This was shown in the rise in the number of strikes from 576 in 1922 to 710 in 1924. This steady increase reflected, in turn, the determination of workers to resist attempts at wage cutting, whether at the behest of a Labour government or the Tories.

It was clear that the working class was going to stand its ground, despite the treachery of the leadership.

This resolve gave new heart and courage to the militants who began to organise anew.

The Communist Party



on of the first Labour government

launched the National Minority Movement, a mass rank and file organisation to coordinate the militants.

Functioning essentially as a broad alliance of militants, at its height it embraced a quarter of the organised trade union movement. Through its activity A.J. Cook was elected as secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

Offensive

The policy of the National Minority Movement was to go on the offensive. They aimed to turn the tide of struggle into an all-out assault on the employers and their state.

The policy of the trade union leadership was, however, purely defensive, and aimed at consolidating their positions, amidst tremendous rank and file criticism by being seen to be doing something.

This line, of course, only created the conditions for further treachery. At a time when capitalism could not afford half-measures, this leadership of J.H. Thomas and Co. were prepared to act only on the basis of such half-measures.

They dissipated the will of the class to fight and covered the coming struggle in a smokescreen.

The capitalists saw things quite differently. They knew what was in store and prepared for it. They began by demanding new wage cuts in the pits and threatening a lock-out.

Owing to the low stocks of coal available, this was a premature move. Recognising their advantage, the miners rejected the coal-owners demands, and in July 1925 forced the Tory government to back down by granting a subsidy to maintain wage levels for nine months.

This was a partial victory. The Tories had retreated — strategically. It became known as "Red Friday".

The Tories were quite clear on what they had done. As Churchill put it — "The government was impressed with the fact that the country as a whole was not sufficiently informed about the character and consequences of such a struggle. We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it or, if not averting it, of coping efficiently with it when it comes." Or as Prime Minister Baldwin put it more succinctly, "We were not ready".

Their intentions were quite clear to everyone except the trade union and Labour leaders. The whole crisis of the coal industry determined the bosses' and Tories' outlook.

Bosses

The employers and their government were now intent as never before on cutting miners' wages. To do this involved the capitalist state in preparations of a most detailed character.

In September 1925, they began in earnest to prepare for a revolutionary situation. They set up a body "unofficially" with the object of maintaining communications and supplies in the event of a general strike. This was the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies.

It was made up of middle class Tories who wished to do their "patriotic duty". It was joined by students and such gutterwash as the (pre-Mosley) Fascists.

The government encouraged the OMS and set about preparing its own forces. It divided the country into ten regions, each under a Civil Commissioner. 88 Voluntary

Service Committees were set up to keep local services in operation.

The police force was enlarged through a massive recruitment of Special Constabulary and the armed forces were mobilised to guard the docks, railways and telephone exchanges.

Warships were anchored in the Mersey, Humber, Tyne and Clyde, while troops armed with gas were moved into the capital and the main industrial centres.

The bosses meant business.

True to form, the trade union leaders did nothing to meet the challenge.

A Royal Commission on the Coal Industry reported, demanding that the miners accept a wage cut and a longer working day. The coalowners declared a lock-out for May 1, 1926 unless the miners accepted these conditions.

In response the miners raised the slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day. No district agreements".

On April 20 a state of emergency was declared and the Special Constabulary was mobilised. On April 29 the Executives of the unions met in a special TUC conference and frantic efforts were still being made by 'leaders' like J.H. Thomas and J.R. Clynes to avoid a confrontation.

Lock out

On May 1 the miners were locked out. Simultaneously the TUC conference took a poll of the trade unions on their attitude to a general strike to defend the miners. 3,653,527 voted for a general strike; 49,911 were against.

But still the union leaders prostrated themselves before the government, begging the cabinet of "hard-faced men" not to push them into a fight. "I never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all today," confessed Thomas.

Finally the dithering leaders had their hands forced for them — in the middle of a conference with the Cabinet — by unofficial direct action by the NATSOPA chapel of the Daily Mail, which refused to continue printing a viciously anti-union editorial.

Baldwin, on hearing the news, jumped up from the conference table and broke off the negotiations.

Even now the trade union leaders were still grovelling, and tried to disown the printers. But the government felt that it could beat an army led by such generals and, moreover, it needed to take on the workers and defeat them. So the strike was on.

Daily Mail

The union leaders were terrified. In fact, they agreed with the Daily Mail — "Two governments cannot exist within the same capital. One must destroy the other, or surrender to the other". The great tragedy of the situation the labour movement now faced was that the labour



A J Cook, secretary of the Miners' Federation, addressing strikers

'leaders' felt that a working class defeat was an enticing prospect, because fundamentally, they feared the workers more than the employers.

They deliberately held back the workers even after the strike was declared, leaving whole groups like the engineers at work until the very last day of the strike. Throughout the strike they maintained contact with the government.

Betrayal

Finally they called off the strike "so that negotiations could begin", even though the determination and activity of the workers was increasing and a whole new wave, including the engineers, had started to move into action.

The miners were betrayed. Victory had been possible. But the TUC ran away and left the miners to fight alone for six months. Defeated, they were forced back to work with their wages cut, hours lengthened and national agreements scrapped.

Thus the ruling class was able to inflict a decisive defeat on the working class.

This included the Trades Disputes Act of 1927 which contained many of the ideas of present day Toryism including bans on mass picketing, sympathetic and political strikes and an attack on the political levy designed to weaken the links between the unions and the Labour Party by introducing the practice of "contracting in". This was soon followed by the mass unemployment of the "Great Depression". And it took more than a generation for the labour movement to recover from the defeat.

In the absence of serious militant leadership, the class was defeated and demoralised not so much by the prepara-

tions and strength of the enemy, as by the eagerness of its own leaders to throw in the sponge.

The lessons for today are obvious. If the miners are defeated then the whole class will feel the effects of it, probably for a long time to come.

We must not let the miners be defeated.

**WANT
EVOLUTION
NOT
REVOLUTION
VOTE
LABOUR**

Labour election poster,
December 1923

The short-sighted TUC leaders who refuse to mobilise the strength of the labour movement to help the miners win, do the same work today that their predecessors did in 1926. We cannot rely on any of these people. Unfortunately there is only one Arthur Scargill at the top of the trade union movement. The rank and file of the unions must organise.

Right now the main thing is to support the miners — financially and on the picket lines. In the longer term we must organise the rank and file to transform the labour movement from top to bottom. The fact that the miners have been left to fight alone for over four months is the latest proof that this transformation is long overdue.

Advertisement

A collection of articles on the history and theory of the general strike.

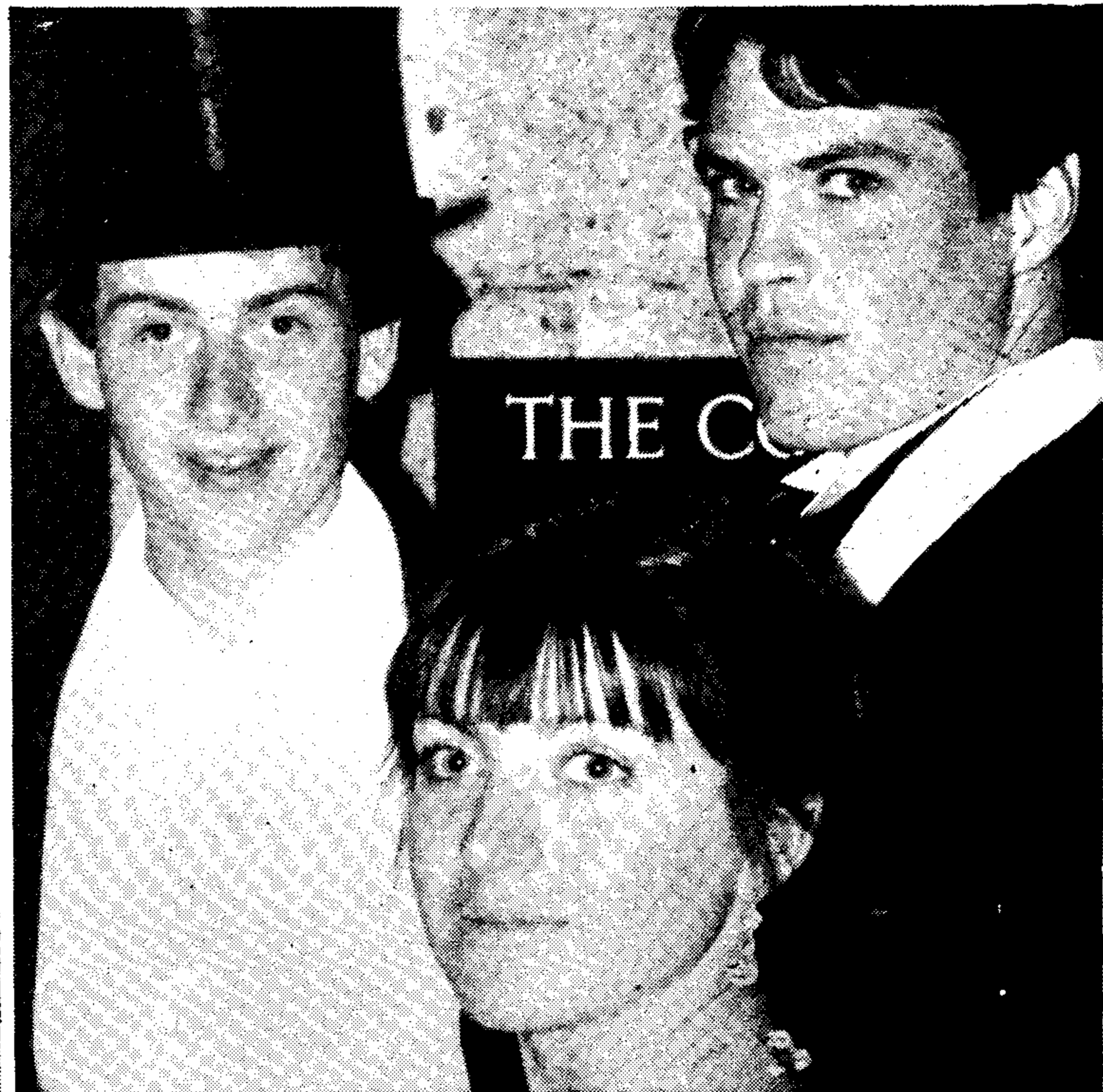
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**Why we
need
a
General
Strike**



PHOTO: JOHN HARRIS

The funeral of Joe Green, the Yorkshire miner killed by a lorry while on picket duty.



Trinity College May Ball: the young upper class

In whose interest?

IN THE last two articles I have argued that the state is not neutral, but is tied to the interests of the ruling class.

What is the ruling class?

A hundred different definitions could be given of the 'top people', by different aspects of their privilege and power, but underlying all those aspects is their wealth.

Money, as Shakespeare put it, "will make black white, foul fair, Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant... Will knit and break religions, bless the accursed; Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves And give them title, knee and approbation With senators on the bench."

Or as Marx put it, money is the "god among commodities." Those who own money are therefore gods among people.

Inequality

Although the inequality of wealth in Britain has decreased somewhat this century, the top 1% of the population still own 23% of all private wealth, and the top 5%, 45%. At the other end of the scale, 75% of the population owns only 16% of the wealth.

These figures, however, understate the real inequalities between classes. The top 5% have not only more wealth than the bottom 75%, but a different sort of wealth.

The top 5% account for 96% of all personally-owned

Martin Thomas looks at the British ruling class.

shares. They also own all the 'family firms' except the tiniest.

Now compare 1000 people who each own, say, a house, some household equipment, and a car, totalling £30,000 each; and on the other hand ten people each with a wealth of £1 million. The ten people — the top 1% — own "only" 25% of the total wealth: but they own all of the sort of wealth that gives power and access to further wealth.

Means of production

The top 5% monopolise the means of production.

The division between the bottom 75% and the top 5% is not just a division between less wealthy and more wealthy. It is a division between those who live by selling their labour power, and those who live off their ownership of the means of production. It is a division between the worker and the boss.

Now among this wealthy class, as Marx put it, "there is little love lost in competition among themselves", but they "form a veritable freemason society vis-a-vis the whole working class". They are, in short, a class, not merely a collection of individuals.

Profit

They have a common interest, first, in the maintenance of the existing order of society and the stability and power of the state; and, second, in raising the general level of profit. Capitalists' incomes depend partly on their individual business wits but also on the general level of wages and productivity. The class, as a class, has a common interest in keeping down wages and pushing up productivity.

On the basis of this common interest, each national capitalist class develops a more-or-less common system of ideas, and common institutions — political parties, universities, clubs, business associations of various sorts, newspapers, and of course the state machine itself — which give shape and coherence to its class policy.

No working class anywhere, ever, has come near the degree of class solidarity exhibited by the British capitalist class in its almost-unanimous support for the Tory party.

Capitalist

The central core of the capitalist class is very small indeed. One author has estimated that the people running the 1,000 largest companies — that is, by far the biggest chunk of the economy — together with their immediate families, are less than 0.1% of the population (one in a thousand). And within that 0.1%, a smaller group of maybe 300 people has supremacy.

The interconnections within the core of the capitalist class are well illustrated by the journalist Anthony Sampson:

"Governments have never known quite where to look for their chairmen (of nationalised industries) . . . but when in doubt they turn to bankers . . ."

"The most pervasive influence was that of the Hill Samuel bank, the merger created by Sir Kenneth Keith in 1970 . . . when Lord Melchett, the head of the Samuel half of the merger, lost out to Keith he was given British Steel as a consolation prize."

"Keith himself assembled a board of industrialists and ex-civil servants with close links to the Department of Trade, whose permanent secretary, Sir Peter Thornton, soon became a director of Hill Samuel. Keith was on the board of British Airways, and was later followed by his friend Frank McFadzean, the joint head of Shell who became chairman of British Airways, which he ran for two days a week from the Shell building . . ."

"At the same time Sir Charles Villiers, from Lord Kissin's bank Guinness Peat, was taking over British Steel in 1976 from Melchett. Sir Kenneth Keith in the meantime had taken on another nationalised industry, Rolls Royce, which he ran for eight years until 1980 when he was succeeded by . . . McFadzean."

"When the Conservative government planned to sell off British Airways, the City was not surprised that the

bankers chosen for the task should be . . . Hill Samuel."

The capitalist class also reproduces itself to a large extent, through inherited wealth and privilege.

Of people who died leaving £100,000 or more between 1956 and 1973, 49% had had fathers who died leaving £100,000 or more. (And many of the rest, of course, may have inherited wealth from more distant relatives).

Oxbridge

Something like 1% of the population goes to Oxford or Cambridge university, and something like 1/2% to the top public schools. Yet this tiny minority dominates not only in the state machine — as we have seen — but in the top circles of the economy.

In 1982, all five chairmen of the big banks had been to one or another of two schools — Eton and Winchester.

Out of the 18 chairmen of top merchant banks, 13 had been to top public schools (8 to Eton alone) and/or Oxbridge. 9 out of 12 insurance company chairmen came from that sort of background.

Eton

When Lord Poole, boss of the merchant bank Lazard's, was asked how he had avoided getting caught in the financial crashes of 1974, he replied: "Quite simple: I only lent money to people who had been at Eton."

The chiefs of industry are drawn from a wider range of backgrounds than those of finance: but one-half of the directors of the largest industrial companies in 1970 had been to public schools, and one-sixth to Eton alone. 39% of those directors were from 'a propertied or wealthy background' and a further 25% from well-off professional families.

The capitalist class is not the same as a feudal elite defined primarily by inheritance; and other capitalist classes — for example in the US — are much more open than the British to new blood, without that openness making them one whit less capitalist.

The self-reproduction of the capitalist class from generation to generation, however,

helps to cement its cohesion and sense of identity.

Despite all this, some writers have argued that the capitalist class is withering away or has withered away. Three main facts are cited to support this argument.

1. Ownership has been separated from control. Practically all big companies today are owned by a multitude of shareholders, who have little control over company affairs, and controlled by managers who do not own the companies.

2. Moreover, a large proportion of shares are owned not by individuals but by institutions. By the end of 1978, 38% of UK company shares were owned by pension funds or insurance companies.

MacGregor

3. Many of the biggest companies are state-owned. Ian MacGregor, after all, does not own the coal mines.

All these facts add up to the decline of the individual capitalist — but not of the capitalist class!

In class terms ownership and control have not been separated. Top managers receive incomes far over the top of any salary scale. Ian MacGregor, for example, gets between £200,000 and £350,000 a year, and many private industry managers get more. They all own large amounts of wealth — very often in the form of shares in the companies they manage.

When companies are nationalised under the present system, the same class continues to run them. They switch from private capitalism to state capitalism. Usually nationalised concerns are run at a loss — so that the workers in those concerns are effectively producing profits, not for their own employers, but for other businesses that benefit from juicy contracts, cheap supplies, or streams of interest payments.

Insurance companies and pension funds give capitalists the possibility of bringing together the small savings of thousands into one mass. Each small nest-egg is not big enough to act as capital — wealth that produces further wealth — but the collected

mass is big enough. This represents a strengthening of the economic power and privilege of the capitalists, not a weakening!

But the decline of the individual capitalist does prove something. The 19th century factory owner combined the functions of owner of wealth and organiser of production in one person. Modern capitalism has separated those functions. The organisation of production in a modern capitalist enterprise is not done by the owners of the enterprise, nor even by the top managers, but by salaried employees.

The whole process of production is highly integrated, socialised, tied up with the state, and bureaucratised: but it is given its chaotic, wasteful, specifically capitalist character by the fact that it is all carried on for the benefit of the top 5% of wealth-owners.

This economic structure is more than ripe for socialism — for the working class to impose common ownership of the means of production and replace bureaucratic management by democratic workers' management.

In the days of early capitalism, when thousands of small capitalists ran individual businesses, it was not at all clear that welding the economy into a single unit, to be run by the working class according to a common plan, was a feasible replacement for the regulation of the economy by the laws of the free market. Today even the capitalists themselves recognise the need for social planning of production. Only under the rule of the working class can that planning be made rational and democratic.



MacGregor

Arguing

for Socialism

Black miners strike in S. Africa

A SERIES of strikes by black miners have hit the gold, coal and mineral mines of South Africa. At present, there is a strike by 1700 miners for higher wages. Earlier this year 1000 workers downed tools for two hours in sympathy with two co-workers who died repairing a lift cable.

One worker was dismissed for participating in the action, but was reinstated after a strike in his support.

At a platinum mine, 1500 workers went on strike over the dismissal of seven workers who demanded that a racist supervisor — who called them 'kaffirs' — be transferred. Subsequently, the strikers, who made up practically the entire workforce, were all dismissed.

In 1982 and 1983 there were a large number of wildcat stoppages which the employers blamed on 'factional' disputes between miners of different tribes.

In one case police arrested about 100 gold miners who were part of a 1800 man shift who blocked underground tunnels in support of their call for a strike over wages.

In another instance there was a 'riot' by about 100 miners in which eight were shot dead by the police.

In another, 12,000 workers went on strike following unilateral salary increases imposed by the Chamber of Mines for one company which were significantly lower than salary increases won by workers in the largest of the mining companies, Anglo-American.

The workers broke out of the hostels where they had been locked up by the company's security guards. The police shot six of them dead.

There is nothing new about fierce disputes in the South African mines. What is new is the re-emergence of a black miners' union. One union in particular, the National Union of Mineworkers, has organised between 70 and 100,000 black miners in the last two years.

Under the leadership of their general-secretary, Cyril Ramphosa, they are demanding a 25% wage increase for all 480,000 black

By Bob Fine

miners (not just their own members) and the Chamber of Mines (a syndicate of the mining houses) has upped its offer to 14%. The union has formally declared itself to be 'in dispute', a necessary first step towards declaring a legal strike. In the making is the first legal strike by black miners in South African history. The union called a special delegate conference to prepare for action.

The re-emergence of a black miners' union has come in the wake of the growth in the last ten years of an independent non-racial trade union movement among black industrial workers. Until recently, the mining houses had successfully resisted union organisation among its workers. The vast majority of black miners are 'migrant' workers whose families and homes are either in the 'homelands' or in foreign countries like Zaire, Mozambique, Botswana, etc.

They are brought over on fixed contracts and have to return home when they expire (usually after a year or two). They live in compounds or hostels that are heavily guarded and cut off from the outside world. Access to these workers by union organisers is thus very difficult.

In 1982 unions were allowed into the mines by the Chamber of Mines under the impetus of the massive, monopoly company, Anglo-American. Why? Partly because of the fierce conflicts which were occurring in the mines in the absence of any institutionalised channels of negotiation; partly because the mines now require a more stabilised and skilled black workforce to handle its new machinery; partly because they are beginning to replace expensive white skilled workers with blacks; partly because even the white-dominated craft union, the Boilermakers, called for black unionisation; and partly because the mines were an anomaly in the context of the general development of black trade unionism.

The mineowners did their

best only to let tame unions in, but pressure from below has clearly pushed the NUM to the left.

The NUM has negotiated a number of recognition agreements with companies like Anglo-American. They have led a strike in the homeland of Bophuthatswana when Union Carbide, hiding behind the refusal of the 'government' of Bophuthatswana to allow South African trade unions to operate, denied the NUM recognition.

They have adopted a fairly successful legal strategy to counter the appalling death rate among black miners. About four miners in every thousand — most of whom are in the prime of their youth — die each year while on contract to the mines. The issue of compensation for deaths, of pension rights for the families, of money to transport the body home, etc., is a key one for the workers.

The union recently won the right of black miners to refuse to undertake dangerous work and reversed the dismissal of some miners who had stood up for this right. The present dispute marks a significant step forward in the union's militancy.

The mines are not as crucial to the South African economy as they once were. The industrial sector is in every way now much larger than the mining sector. But the mines are still vital to apartheid.

They provide the bulk of the foreign earnings which allows South African capital to import machinery and technology for its young industries.

The price of gold goes up in slumps, so S. Africa can ride out economic depressions relatively unscathed compared to other capitalist countries. The absence of alternative energy resources in South Africa (it has no oil) make their coal reserves vital, especially

given the threat of a possible oil embargo.

Black miners are unlikely to be easily appeased. They live and work under appalling conditions; their families are suffering from the erosion of whatever subsistence base is left in the homelands (exacerbated by the current drought); urban industrial workers have shown them an example of what is possible through organisation; they have a long history of militancy going back to massive strikes in 1946 and 1920. On both of those occasions they were heavily defeated. Conditions have now changed. A mighty working class force for change is being unleashed in South Africa.

In the context of cheap coal being produced in South Africa under slave labour conditions and currently being shipped to Britain, international trade union solidarity is an urgent necessity.

Expressions of support from

British workers, especially from miners, are much needed by the NUM in South Africa. As Thatcher builds up her links with the apartheid regime, we too can build our links with those fighting apartheid and in particular with the black working class. Direct contact can be made with the NUM by writing to:

The National Union of Mineworkers, PO Box 10928, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa or to NUM, Lekton House, 3rd floor, 5 Wonderers St., Johannesburg, 2001, South Africa or phone 010 2711 298031.

Messages of support will be read out at mass meetings of miners and are enormously helpful in raising morale and in laying the basis for support of miners' struggles here.

Protests may be sent to The Chamber of Mines, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Dikko and the rip-off system

By Colin Foster

UMARU DIKKO, so the Nigerian government says, took £1 billion from the Nigerian state. Other exploiters in exile are said to have run up fortunes totalling £3 billion.

The Nigerian government may be swelling the figures so as better to pin the blame for the failure of Nigeria's oil boom to benefit the mass of people on a few scapegoats. There is, however, little reason to doubt that Dikko and others were looting the national treasury on a huge scale.

\$25 billion poured into Nigeria in oil export revenue in the peak year of 1980. For the great majority of Nigeria's 90 million people, there is nothing to show for it.

Agricultural production — which the majority of the people depend on — has been declining since 1960. The average food consumption, in calories per head, was in 1980 9% below the minimum for health calculated by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. It is lower now: average income per head is probably now below what it was before the second big oil price rise in 1979.

Money was poured into prestige projects. The major investment in agriculture was a huge dam and irrigation project at Bakolori, in northern Nigeria. So much was this project carried out over the heads of the farmers who were supposed to benefit from it that the story ended with the army going in against a farmers' protest and killing (according to official figures) 19 of them.

Luxury hotels and gleaming government offices were erected all round the country. The Financial Times reports: "In Abuja (the new federal capital) three large luxury hotels are due to open this year . . . In virtually every state there is at least one modern hotel planned, nearly finished or left incomplete . . . The Concorde at Owerri . . . with lavish Italian furniture, British management, French restaurant and American-run casino . . . and its white marble halls, looks quite incongruous in the midst of the building



Millions starve so Dikko and others can make their millions.

site which was to have been the new state capital".

On all these projects there was a percentage for the officials who approved them, awarded the contracts, and dealt with the administration.

As a source of income, no productive activity could come anywhere near having a finger in this honeypot.

There is nothing uniquely Nigerian about it. Every hectic capitalist boom has a tendency to spin off into wild plunder.

In Mexico — where the oil boom after 1979 acted on a much more established and well-structured capitalist system — the capital city's former police chief was arrested for corruption this January. "When the police raided his 250-hectare estate . . . outside Mexico City . . . they found 15 race horses, 19 vintage cars, cellars with imported wines and a discotheque which is a replica of Studio 54 in New York.

"His house . . . on the Pacific Coast is a palatial mansion modelled on the Parthenon, with marble statues and columns . . . the former police chief had 1200 private servants at his various homes, all paid out of public funds." (Financial Times).

Something like a third of the \$252 billion increase in foreign debt of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico between 1974 and 1982 is estimated to

have found its way into Swiss, US and other foreign bank accounts and assets.

The same sort of thing happened in the period of the first exuberant growth of capitalism in Europe and the US.

Marx commented on the shift from the 14 hour day in early 19th century Britain to the ten hour day: "Apart from the working class movement that daily grew more threatening, the limiting of factory labour was dictated by the same necessity which spread guano over the English fields. The same blind eagerness for plunder that in the one case exhausted the soil, had, in the other, torn up by the roots the living force of the nation".

The railway booms of the late 19th century were accompanied by huge swindles and plunder.

In the US the 1876 presidential election was decided by more or less open bribery. In France, Marx commented on the regime of Napoleon III Bonaparte (1852-71): "The most important aspect of this process . . . is the percentage that finds its way into the pockets of the head and the members of (Bonaparte's) Society of 10 December".

In Germany, Bismarck seized the fortune of the King of Hanover and used it as his own personal 'Reptile Fund' for bribery, etc. He and his banker Bleichroder made huge fortunes out of his 28 years at

the head of the state. In Britain, in the early 19th century, self-enrichment from public office was the openly proclaimed rule, and public offices were therefore awarded not by merit but by sale to the highest bidder.

All these historic examples seem, however, rather tame beside Dikko's feats. So do modern examples of corruption in the richer capitalist states like the \$12 million that Japanese officials, including prime minister Tanaka, got out of the US corporation Lockheed in bribes for a warplane contract in the early '70s.

And so they are. Never at their wildest were the railway fevers or the Californian gold rush of the 19th century as hectic as the oil boom in Nigeria, and never in that period of relatively free enterprise capitalism were the spoils so concentrated in the hands of the state.

Capitalism in countries like Nigeria today combines the vices of young, wildcat capitalism with those of senile, stultified, bureaucratised capitalism.

One last thought. British bankers and bosses make a few billion each year in profits, interest, and dividends from Third World workers and peasants. It is all very orderly and genteel compared to Dikko's monster rip-off. But is it any the less a rip-off?



Gold miners in Transvaal

Labour Party

A fight by Labour councils?

FOR ALL its weaknesses, Liverpool City Council's stand has created a new spirit among Labour councils.

In March even left-wing council leaders were saying that Liverpool's defiance of the government would lead to ruin and disaster. It didn't. It led the Tories to make concessions. And now the idea of defiance is spreading.

The Labour Party's local government conference on the weekend of July 7-8 agreed that: "The delegates have confirmed that they are committed to defending jobs and services..."

"To maintain jobs and services will require tactics of non-compliance... non-compliance could lead to some councils being unable to fix a rate; for others it could mean running out of money for essential services".

A united stand by as many Labour councils as possible is important to deal with the Tory government's rate-capping law which comes into effect next year. Under this law a select few councils — probably about 20 — will be singled out and legally forbidden to raise their rates above a certain level.

The 'rate rise' option will be definitively closed for those councils. In that way the Tories hope to force them to cut jobs and services.

The Tories obviously hope to split off the rate-capped councils from others; to get councils scurrying to prove what good housekeepers they are so that they escape being capped; and to split up the victim councils among themselves, negotiating separately with each one about whether it will be rate-capped and at what level.

So a united stand is important. And the best way to get that now seems to be a campaign to mandate as many Labour councils as possible for the definite don't-fix-a-rate option, rather than the worryingly vague option of other forms of 'non-compliance'.

We also need to try to mandate Labour councils for more than that — for a campaign to rouse industrial and tenants' action to make central government maintain funding for local services.

GLC leader Ken Livingstone

LOOKED at in isolation, the concessions that Liverpool City Council has got from the government are a considerable victory.

The calculations are not so simple, however.

If there were really no chance of defeating the government outright, then a 17 per cent rate rise would be bad but perhaps the best that could be got. But we are in the midst of the greatest working class struggle for a decade at least, with real possibilities of developing into a general strike!

The Liverpool labour movement had a tremendous opportunity to link up the fight against cuts with the miners' strike.

Yet after the May elections,

while the miners' battle developed, the grass-roots campaign in Liverpool dwindled to almost nothing. The axis was shifted to talks with the government. The national conference called in support of the council last month was made into a general anti-Tory rally instead of a workshop for action.

Now Liverpool has got its separate deal — as the railworkers got theirs. Liverpool's deal is rather better than the rail pay deal. But the chance to develop a stronger working class struggle against the government has been passed up in favour of sectional negotiations.



After the May elections, the demonstrations stopped and the negotiations took over. Photo: John Harris.

was quoted in the Morning Star on Monday 9th as saying: "If we can't make a budget next spring that is within the government guidelines, we won't have the money to pay interest charges. I should think the banks will be quak-

ing in their shoes".

But it will take more than votes in council chambers to panic the banks. After all, senior council officials have legal authority to ignore councillors' decisions and use available funds for interest payments

rather than for wages.

The banks can easily sit tight and wait for the councils to panic about the fact they can't pay wages — unless a fighting alliance has been created between councillors, Labour Parties, council unions, and tenants' organisations, which can follow up votes in the council chambers by industrial and rent/rate strikes.

The don't-fix-a-rate option stands or falls with that alliance. We should demand that councils start building that alliance now. Labour councils have to show a bit of support for council workers now if they are going to expect council workers to support them later on rate-capping.

The trouble is, many of the supposedly left-wing Labour councils have a very bad record on this score. Islington council, for example, is currently sitting out a pay strike by some of its lowest-paid employees, the nursery workers.

Without a turnaround by the councils on their attitude to their workers, the don't-fix-a-rate option could prove very ineffective.

It seems that the council leaders expect their refusal to fix a rate to be followed by negotiations with central government on the model of Liverpool's talks with Tory minister Patrick Jenkin. The difference between the don't-fix-a-rate option and the no-rate-rise option is that the former leaves open the possibility of fixing an increased later. It gives the council more scope for negotiation — or for retreat.

Without union and tenants' mobilisation, why should Jenkin give Islington, or Hackney, or Lambeth, or Sheffield, the sort of concessions he gave Liverpool?

And isn't there a danger that those negotiations could break the whole principle of a united front, and get each council arguing about its individual claim to a bit more money or (worse) a bit more rate rise?

The best way to fight against these dangers now, though, is to argue for the don't-fix-a-rate option to be coupled with the creation of a militant alliance between councillors and the grass-roots labour movement.

Liverpool: half a victory

By Kevin Feintuck

ON MONDAY July 9, Liverpool District Labour Party voted to approve a compromise deal with the Tory government as a basis for Liverpool City Council's budget.

The council had been pledged to defying the government, and in April the Labour councillors proposed an 'illegal' budget. The 'illegal' budget was defeated by the votes of six Labour renegades on the narrowly-balanced council, and Liverpool was left without a budget.

After local elections in May a clear majority was won on the council for the District Labour Party policy of defiance, but the council leaders delayed making a budget while talks were conducted with Tory minister Patrick Jenkin.

Three factors persuaded the District Labour Party to vote for the compromise package.

Firstly, it represents serious concessions by the government, and will allow jobs and services to be maintained.

Secondly, although many Labour supporters will not be happy about the rate increase, it has to be said that 17 per cent is well below the increase involved in the cuts packages proposed by the Liberals and Tories.

Finally, if the District Labour Party had decided to fight for further concessions from the government, it could have won only by strike action on a massive scale.

Given the attitude from leading members of the GMBU and NALGO at the meeting, it was clear that the council unions were not prepared to give the necessary lead in continuing that strategy.

The reason why there was not the potential to develop a movement to fight for further gains are quite clear.

The campaign in Liverpool had succeeded in mobilising tens of thousands for days of action. But these have been essentially isolated incidents, with the vast majority of activists being used as a stage army to be wheeled on and off at the whim of the local bureaucrats.

What has been lacking throughout has been a broad-based campaigning body with roots throughout the whole of the working class. It is likely that if such an organisation had taken shape in the 14 months since Labour took office, there would have been no need to compromise with the Tories.

Such a body, organised from the base upwards, would have guaranteed the active, ongoing participation of many people who are neither members of the Labour Party nor of affiliated unions.

In the absence of such an organisation, to vote against the package was an arid and meaningless act.

Liverpool has helped to break one Tory minister. We have shown that the government can be forced to concede. If the experience is repeated up and down the country next year, and if the campaign is run by bodies representing the whole of our class, then not only can the Tories be crushed — the labour movement itself can be changed in the process.

Don't cheer the peers

By Bryan Edmands

"... and when I hear praise for the Lords for what they did over the GLC it turns my stomach. That even though in helping to defeat the government, that we should allow the short-term gain that it might offer us for embarrassing the Tories to give any legitimacy to a chamber whose sole justification is that they might make life difficult for Mr. Jenkin and then, [when] reinforced by popular approval [move] to deny us when we try to do something real."

Tony Benn, speaking in Nottingham last weekend.

THE crowing by Neil Kinnock, Ken Livingstone and other similar left wingers a couple of weeks ago when the House of Lords voted down the government's so-called paving Bill — intended as an initial move in abolishing the GLC and the six English metropolitan counties by cancelling next year's council elections — is reckless, unthought-out, short sighted and unprincipled. Benn is right.

As he points out, if any future Labour government made moves to introduce legislation that ran counter to the interests of the ruling class, then the House of Lords could quite legitimately (in its own terms) cite the present Labour Party leadership's support for its recent action as a precedent to block such reforms — and thus in so doing provide a Parliamentary rallying call for the forces of reaction.

Besides which, of course, what about the present Labour Party policy concerning the Lords? Labour's last manifesto commitment in June 1983 stated quite clearly "We will also introduce an early Bill to abolish the legislative powers of the House of Lords."

This is a demand that all socialists should support. Whether it could be done through Parliament itself as Benn thinks — that's another question.

So why all the cheers for this long outmoded, undemocratic, Church and Tory backwoodsman dominated privileged elite that should have been overthrown centuries ago?

Letter Not the problem!

MARTIN Thomas's survey of the activity of Socialist Organiser groups around the miners' strike was most informative. Unfortunately, the juxtaposition of the reports from Coventry and from Birmingham gives a seriously misleading impression of the Birmingham situation. The Coventry report concludes by describing the trades council there as a "dead hand" on the strike committee. The Birmingham report follows on from this and begins: "Jim Denham from Birmingham reports similar problems with the official trade union structure being a hindrance to solidarity activity."

There have been problems in Birmingham but not caused by the trades council! On the contrary, the Birmingham Trades Council has played an excellent role, setting up a very effective support committee that regularly attracts 50 or

more delegates from local union branches and Labour Parties, plus representatives from Midlands pits and visiting pickets from South Wales. Women play a prominent role in the support committee.

The President and Secretary of the Trades Council have put in a tremendous amount of work getting this activity off the ground. The attitude of the Regional TUC was initially complete hostility to the Trades Council's involvement.

Now, however, the CP and the Regional TUC have been forced to come to terms with the Trades Council Support Committee and have even been claiming the credit for its work! The Regional TUC "Saltley Gates" demo on Saturday 7th, was largely organised and built for by the Trades Council Support Committee.

Yours fraternally,
JIM DENHAM

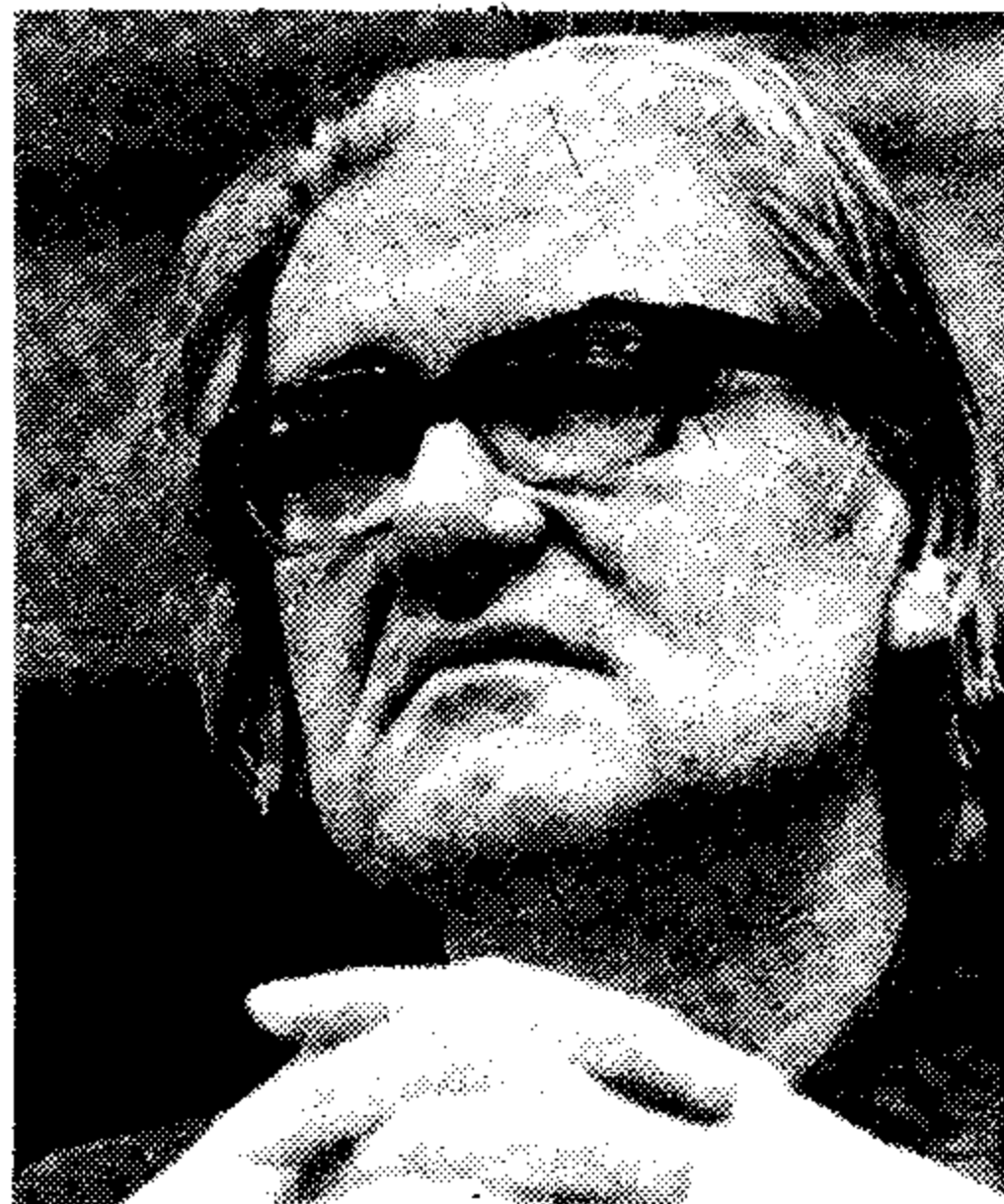
Attack on accountability

THE LABOUR Party organisation sub-committee on Monday July 9 decided to support a constitutional amendment to give constituency Labour Parties the option of an individual ballot for selection of Parliamentary candidates rather than the established procedure.

The proposal will now go to the full National Executive Committee on July 20, and if approved there to the Labour Party annual conference in late September.

It means excluding affiliated trade unions from the selection procedure, and by-passing the organised delegate structure of the Labour Party in favour of something more like US-style 'primaries'.

Vladimir Derer, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, told Socialist Organiser: "It is an attack on mandatory re-selection through the back door. It is an attack on accountability."



Vladimir Derer

"They are moving towards a sort of primary system where you vote on people you haven't seen and haven't interviewed. Obviously it gives tremendous advantages to the sitting MP."

"And of course the present leader of the Party gave it his full backing."

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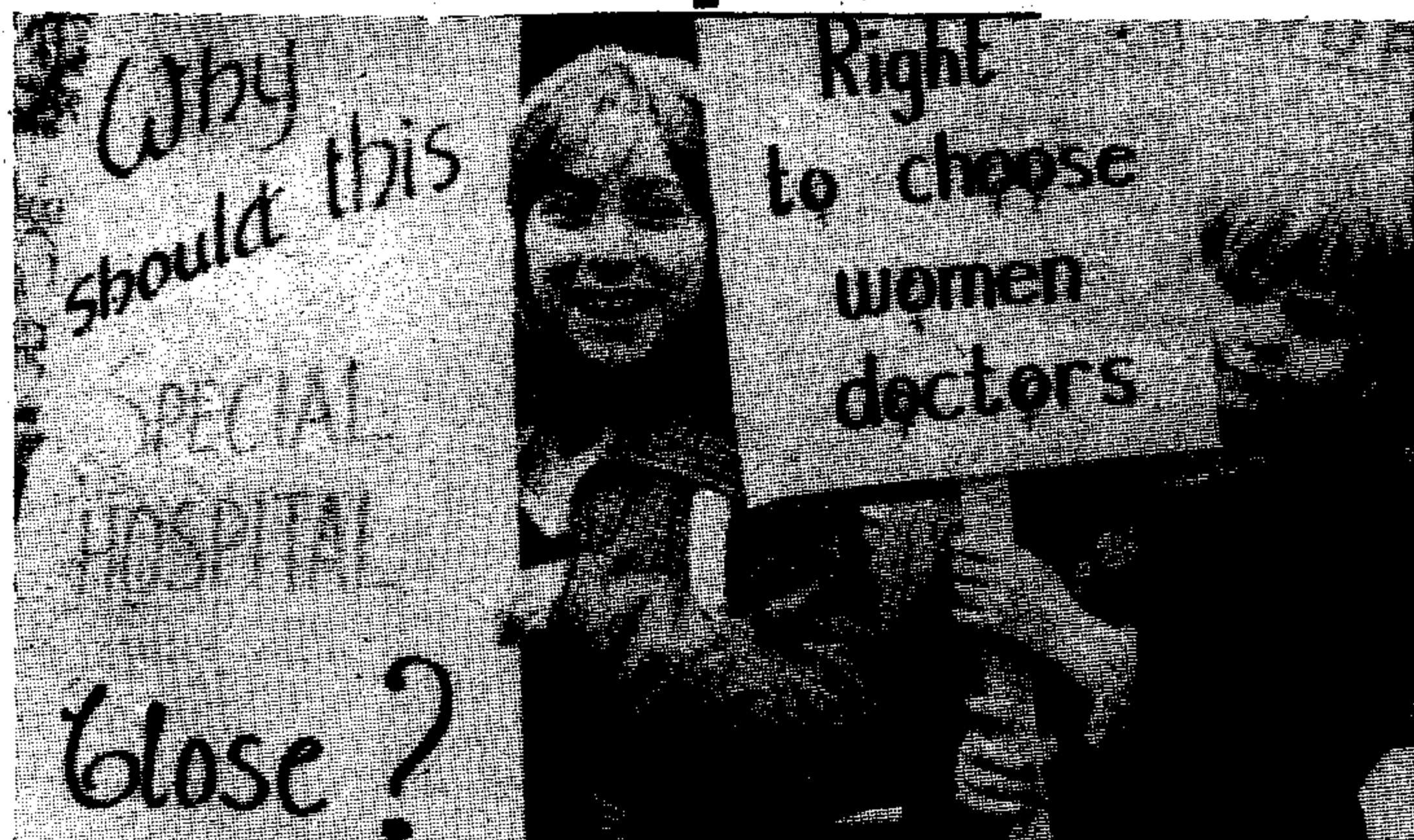
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Name

Address

Send to Socialist Organiser, 28 Middle Lane, London N8 8PL.

Hospitals



S. London Occupied

SOUTH London Hospital is occupied to stop closure. It is the only hospital in the country run for women and by women.

What is needed now is support from the health service unions for workers who have refused to accept closure or transfer.

What to do:
1. Support the pickets. Get your union branch, Labour Party

war, women's group, etc on the picket line.

2. Lobby your GP to refer patients to the hospital (there is no waiting list!)

3. Ill, expecting, had an accident? Make yourself a patient at the women's hospital.

For donations and offers of help write to 19 Vardens Road, London SW11.

Support St. Leonards



St Leonards Hospital under occupation. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni, IFL.

Statement issued by Hilda Kean, Leader of Hackney Borough Council and Jo Thwaites and Councillor Dinah Morley, members of City and Hackney District Health Authority, nominated from Hackney Borough Council.

We fully support the occupation of St Leonard's Hospital by workers and local residents in order to keep it open. Last year over 10,000 local people signed a petition to keep St. Leonard's open, yet the District Health Authority, consisting mainly of people who do not live in Hackney and will never have to use our health services, want to close the hospital by August 1.

We have spent time at the occupation and everything is running normally. The only difference is that the administrators, whose work consists of running the hospital down in preparation for closure on August 1, are not allowed in.

Miss Hibbs, the District Nursing Officer, visited the occupation on Wednesday July 4 and saw for herself how St Leonard's is being run by the workforce.

She said that she was satisfied that the patients were being well looked after.

We are appalled that the DHA has seen fit to call in Mr Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, and the courts to eject the local people and health workers who want to save the hospital.

The fact that an entire union - NUPE - along with a few named people, some of whom work at St. Leonard's, have been served with an injunction which seeks to prevent them from keeping the hospital open, sets a dangerous precedent. This affects every member of the trade union movement and attacks their right to fight for their jobs and local hospital services.

We deplore the use of the courts to attack the livelihood of working people. Last week we saw people threatened with charges of vagrancy (an antique law brought in at the time of the Napoleonic Wars) for collecting money for miners. This week we have workers, local people and an entire union being banned from their own hospitals. Next week ...?

Dockers, Miners: one fight

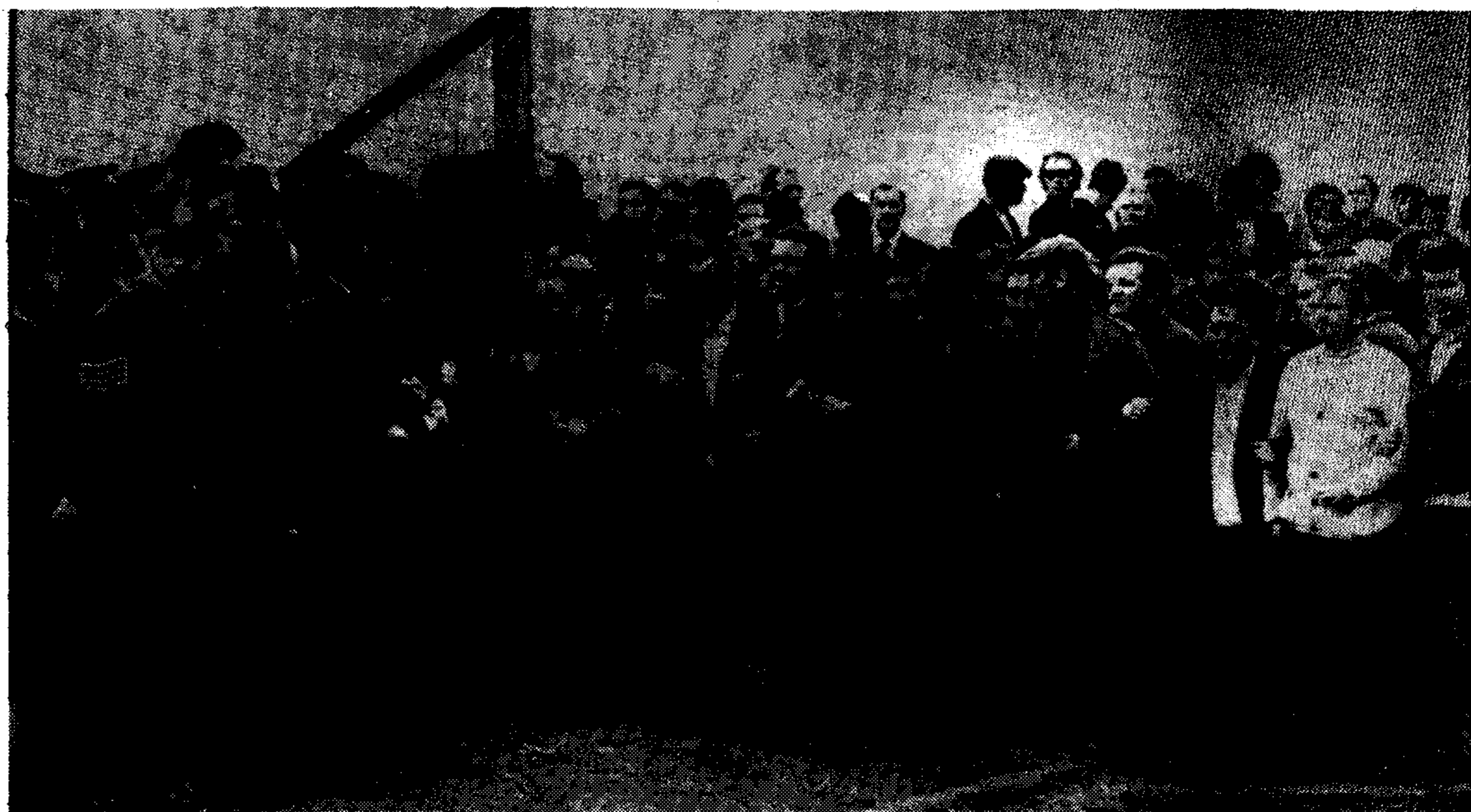
By Peter Gilman

WHEN the Daily Star reported that the Soviet oil tanker Fedor Poletaev was delivering 50,000 tonnes of oil to the Kings North power station it highlighted the great weakness of the miners' strike - their failure to stop coal and oil imports into Britain. If the miners cannot stop coal and alternative fuels coming in they can be beaten.

In an article in the Daily Mirror entitled "Tory Plan to crush miners" it was stated energy secretary Peter Walker was masterminding a plan to flood Britain with imported coal "To keep the miners in their place". The article appeared on October 19 1983, four and a half months before the strike began.

It is now clear it has been the intention of the Tory government all along to force the miners out on strike, when the time was right for the government and at the worst possible time for the miners, and then import all the coal and alternative fuels needed. They hope to get it in through small ports like Wivenhoe, most of which are non-registered and some non-unionised. This imported coal would render the strike ineffective and the miners would thus be smashed.

These ports are now playing a crucial role in implementing the Peter Walker plan and these same ports will be used to break the dockers' strike when the govern-



Dockers and police, 1972, at Neap Wharf

ment brings it about. For after the miners, the dockers are next.

Since the 1940s the National Dock Labour Scheme has guaranteed employment to registered dockers. The Tory government plans to abolish the scheme in order to reduce wages and cut the workforce. Nicholas Ridley has made this clear and Donald Singer, chairman of the National Association of Port Employers has been quoted as saying - "we are now convinced the scheme should be superseded."

The TGWU have said they will call an all-out national dock strike to stop the National Dock Labour Scheme being abolished.

It is up to those dockers themselves, aided by the miners, to effectively organise the scab ports like Wivenhoe, and organise them now. We must make them fully unionised and fully aware of their duty to black all scab cargoes. Then the dockers themselves must ensure that no coal or oil is imported into any port in Britain. If the bosses and govern-

ment respond with victimisation the dockers must respond with strike action, and with the dockers picketing out any scab ports.

This is the only way to stop the Peter Walker plan to smash the miners. It is also the only way to stop the scab ports securing the destruction of the NDLS. The dockers and miners have a crucial common interest and they must act together. United they will win, divided Thatcher can smash them both.

Closure fight

Andrew Hornung reports on the struggle to save St Leonard's in Hackney.

AT 5pm on Tuesday July 3, following two meetings of workers from the hospital, St Leonard's in Hackney was occupied to stop transfers and rally staff and the local community against closure.

Closure has been hanging threateningly over St. Leonard's for about 18 months. The plan is to close this hospital and all the other existing hospitals in Hackney - an area crying out for increased health care provision - replacing them with a single new hospital with fewer beds than currently exist. The closures are planned to take place before the new hospital - the Homerton Hospital - is fully operational.

From the beginning of the closure threats, Hackney Health Emergency campaign has worked hard to mobilise the local community and unite workers in the health service.

The long, patient work recently moved into a higher gear when, a month ago, the Secretary of State finally approved the closure plans that until then had been the subject of much argument after the authorities realised that they were being opposed by a very determined campaign. Following the approval, two wards were closed, making it necessary either to stage immediate resistance or give in.

Despite verbal undertakings from an area official and from Rodney Bickerstaffe, NUPE general secretary, that the occupation would get official backing, NUPE has cut and run at the first whiff of court action.

Two days after the beginning of the occupation, administrators came to the locked gates to serve court orders on the occupiers. One was an injunction restraining leading members of Hackney Health Emergency, NUPE's area organiser and a NUPE steward



Rodney Bickerstaffe

from obstructing the administration and barring the health campaign leaders from being on the hospital's property. The second was a summons to appear in the High Court on the following day to answer the case for repossession made in the administrators' affidavit.

If the speed of the occupation seems to have shocked the administration, the speed of the courts seems to have panicked NUPE. Following the court hearing, NUPE immediately withdrew its support: its area officer tore down all NUPE posters and removed all official NUPE publicity, while the steward named in the injunction instructed members not to cooperate with those in occupation.

Worse yet: in this attitude of fear, a number of departmental representatives on the occupation committee whose names appeared on the first occupation newsletter have now circulated a note dissociating themselves from the committee.

Bickerstaffe's betrayal has been a big set-back for the struggle to save St. Leonard's. At least as important, it is a sign that such "leaders" are incapable of taking a firm stand against Thatcher. Instead of adding NUPE's strength to the mounting front-line of fighters against the Tories - the miners, the dockers, Liverpool City Council, the teachers and others - he has taken them out of a struggle that they had been in for about a year and a half and shown them no alternative but the dole queue.

NUPE pay action

By Alan Johnson

THE INDUSTRIAL action of NUPE workers at Newcastle University over pay is entering a crucial stage.

Post sorters have been effectively locked out but are still being paid. Management is using casual labour more or less at will.

The will to fight is still there. Last week the refectory staff walked out in reaction to the use of casual labour.

The NUPE members must act now to build on this mood. The picketing should be stepped up and all gates covered. A rota is needed. The overtime ban must be tightened up before a drift back to overtime work begins. The isolation of the action can be broken by speaking to other trade unions and Labour Parties in the area.

All this needs regular mass meetings. In this way the morale of the members can be boosted, the isolation of different sections can be broken, and the action better organised.

Messages/donations to Joe Holland, NUPE branch secretary, Ancillary Services, University of Newcastle.

CPSA strike

A STRIKE, begun on June 25, by members of the biggest civil service union, CPSA, at Job Centres in Bury, Prestwich and Radcliffe in the Greater Manchester area over job losses and closures, enters its third week with supportive strike action beginning in London.

A week-long protest strike began at Tooting Job Centre in South West London on Monday July 9, with Balham Job Centre due to strike next week.

CPSA members are taking action over proposals by the Manpower Services Commission (the body that runs Job Centres) to switch from separate Job Centres to "Job Points" and "Job Shops" located in places like supermarkets, which would result in 800 jobs being lost nationally, at first, if the plan is put into operation, accompanied by closures and eventually further job losses.

CPSA leaders have committed their members to accept the trials and switchover plan though members will not accept them if it means redundancies, job cuts and closures.

-SPOTLIGHT-



A TV adaption of the novel 'Strumpet City', by James Plunkett, is currently being shown on Channel 4 (Sundays 6.15pm). It includes the story of the great struggle of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, led by James Larkin (above), in Dublin in 1913 - described in an article in Socialist Organiser last week.

Rally against plans to privatise services at Hammersmith hospital

Wednesday July 18, noon, at Wormwood Scrubs, adjacent to the hospital.

Speakers. David Williams, general secretary CoHSE; Rodney Bickerstaffe, general secretary NUPE; Clive Soley MP; Jeremy Corbyn MP; Michael Meacher MP, Ken Livingstone.

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Dockers join jobs fight

THE ground is catching fire under Mrs Thatcher's feet.

35,000 dockers have now joined the miners, to take on the Tory government in a fight for jobs.

At the same time a brutal attempt by a judge to meddle in the affairs of the NUM brings the

possibility of a full-scale confrontation between the organised labour movement and the government — that is, a general strike — nearer. The NUM leaders are refusing to let the courts tell them how to run the union.

The dockers' strike means that one of the Tories' worst fears is now a reality: a stand up fight with two strong sections of the working class. And they don't come much stronger than the dockers, who defeated the Heath government and immobilised its anti-union laws back in 1972.

The dockers' strike comes directly out of the miners' strike. Dockers at Immingham refused to unload iron ore in an act of solidarity with the miners. So the British Steel Corporation tried to unload it using non-dockers. Dockers saw this as a direct attack on themselves. The result is the first national docks strike for 12 years.

Dockers know that they are targeted by the government for drastic changes in their conditions and job security. If the clash had not come now, it was sure to come soon.

Since 1947 dockers in most ports have been 'registered' with the National Docks Labour Board. The end of casual labour in the docks allowed dockers to build up a great tradition of militancy and a high level of job security.

Barring 'serious misconduct' a docker had a job for life.

The bosses have tried many ways to destroy the National Dock Labour Scheme. The strike in 1972 was to stop them removing dockers' work from the area

covered by the NDLS, to be done outside the ports by non-dockers. Great cargo containers could be packed and unpacked by workers at much lower wages than the dockers, bypassing the ports.

In effect, the dockers won an extension of the area covered by the NDLS, and this was recognised by the Jones-Aldington agreement after the 1972 confrontation with the Tories.

It was during that confrontation that five picketing dockers were jailed under Edward Heath's Industrial Relations Act — to be released by mass industrial action by about 300,000 workers all over the country and the threat of a general strike. The TUC called a one-day general strike, but the government quickly caved in and released the five.

Changes in the pattern of trade have seriously undermined the dockers' position. Much trade has moved from traditional ports like Liverpool to ports on the eastern coast linked to Europe — Felixstowe, for example. While Liverpool has declined, and the port of Manchester, which had 2000 dockers in the '60s, has closed down completely, Felixstowe and other ports have grown.

But Felixstowe and several other growing ports are not part of the NDLS. Thus the conditions have been building up for a new employers' attempt to break the framework of the NDLS and scrap it entirely.

The weakening of the registered dockers' position should not be exaggerated, however. On day one of the strike only 25% of seaborne trade was continuing. The port employers themselves say that they are only slightly less vulnerable to a dockers' strike now than in 1972.

Various prominent Tories have recently been talking as if the time has come to take on the dockers. Now it has come sooner than they expected, catching fire from the miners.

Immingham's act of solidarity with the miners has pitched the dockers into a headlong clash with the Tories. They are asking for guarantees about the future of the NDLS for both the dockers and the miners. That's the best thing that could happen.

The Tories are not strong enough to defeat the organised labour movement. If we strike together we can defeat the government and shatter both its credibility and its ability to rule as it has ruled Britain for the last five years — as a hostile power lording it over the working class.

The NUM leaders — Scargill, McGeahy, Heathfield — have all told the judge that they will not let him tell them how to conduct the affairs of the union and that the national delegate conference will go ahead whatever he says.

The scab leaders who recently took control of the Notts NUM had asked the court to stop the union conference until they had had a chance to mandate their delegates. The occupation of their headquarters by striking miners has prevented that so far. The judge did what they asked him to do.

The union's defiance of the courts puts the ball back at the judge's feet. He can order arrests for contempt of court, set the police to stop the delegate conference, or fine the union — if he dares.

If he dares lay a hand on the NUM, the entire labour movement must answer with a general strike in support of the miners. A general strike is the way to defeat Thatcher and all the little Thatchers in industry, like Ian MacGregor.

The national docks strike brings us a long step nearer to a general strike. Punitive action by the courts against the NUM may be the spark to ignite it.

Victory to the miners!

FUND

We've received £221 this week — £100 from a reader in Australia, £110 from Mary Corbushley, £40 from Nik Barstow, £55 from Mike Grayson, £15 from Martin Barclay, £1 from councillor Terry Herbert. Our total so far this month stands at £866.19.

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



Miners occupying Rossington colliery turn a hose on the police. Photo: John Harris.

Not Thatcherism — it's capitalism!

By Tony
Benn



THE FIRST point I want to make — and I make it with considerable feeling — is, drop this talk about Thatcherism.

This is one of the great illusions. 'Marxism Today' has been doing it for ages, and there's been a tendency among the Labour Left to talk about 'Thatcherism'. They say: let's analyse 'Thatcherism' — but I'll tell you, if we don't drop this talk of 'Thatcherism' quickly, then they'll drop it first.

They'll drop Thatcher, and we will have invested all this energy into the very thing that we've always said we weren't interested in, which is personality in politics.

If you put all that in it — giving her special powers, suggesting she's got a new philosophy, suggesting she's popular, suggesting she's really got something nobody else has got — then it's a tribute to a strength that she doesn't actually have.

And therefore my first point is: don't go along that road.

Our task is to rebuild and to renew the labour movement. At least we're luckier than Keir Hardie was when he went to the Trade Union Congress in Dundee in 1883.

He tried to get them to set up a Political Action Committee which eventually led to the Labour Representation Committee.

Henry Broadhurst, who was the General Secretary of the TUC at the time, a man from whom Len Murray is probably descended, went to the TUC and condemned irresponsible men who caused division in our ranks. That was Keir Hardie he was talking about.

What Keir Hardie was trying to do is what has to be done. And if it can be done once, it can be done again.

The second thing we've got to realise is that the political situation has been totally transformed since 1983. If we had been meeting on July 7 1983 there would have been all the gloom and doom that has become the profession of, I fear, some members of the Party... 'Tony, you don't seem to realise how bad the defeat was'.

Well, I lost a seat after 34 years and I know how bad the defeat was in 1983. We were very badly beaten on polling day.

The reason for that is very important. Was it because there were people like Keir Hardie who caused division in the ranks? Those arguments are 100 years old.

Continued on page 4

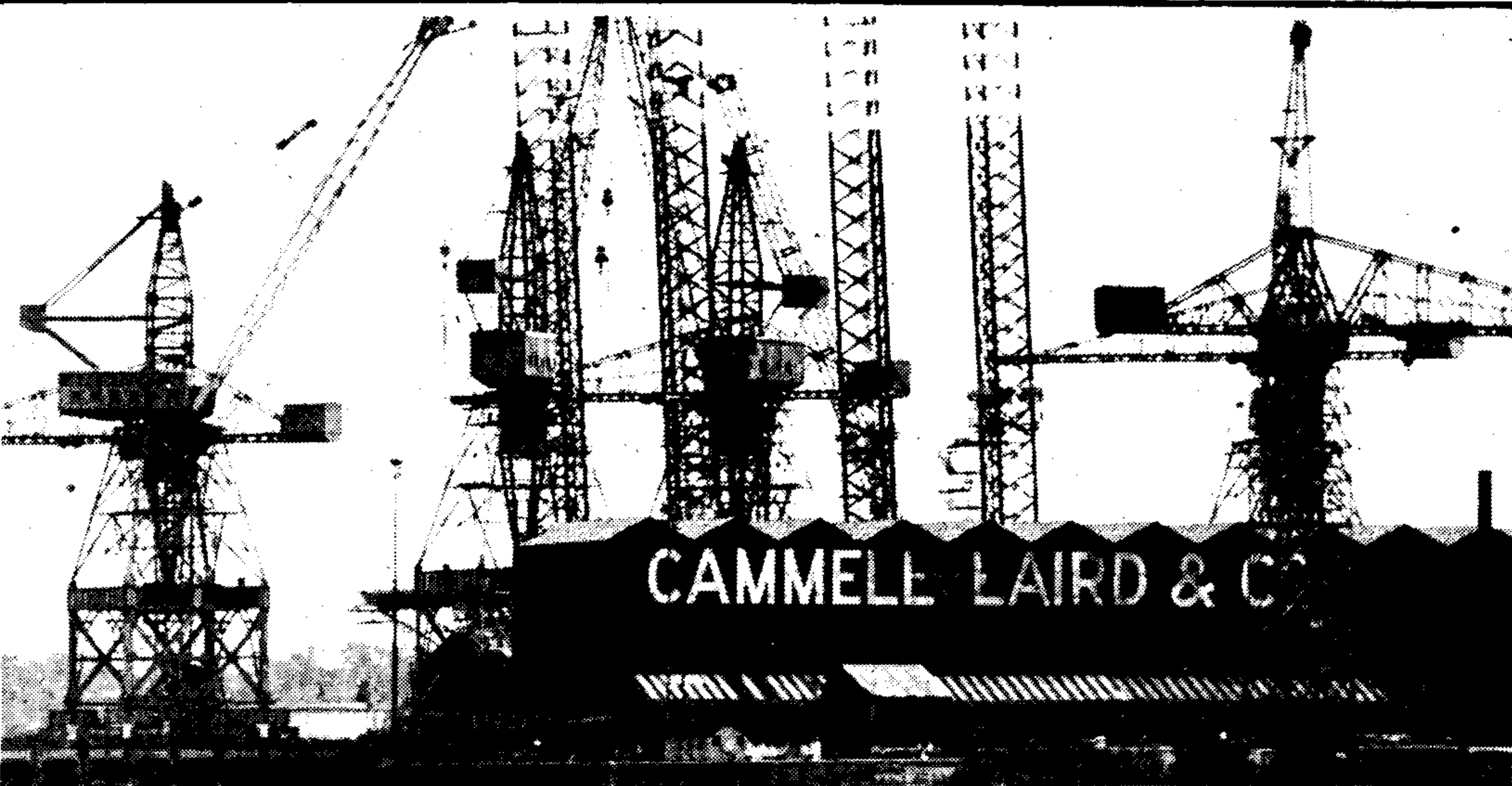


Photo: John Smith (IFL)

Laird workers occupy

By Lol Duffy

ended and it was playing into the hands of those who want to close the yard.

The occupation committee reacted by sending delegates to a meeting of officers of Wirral District Labour Party, Birkenhead branch Labour Party (at which Field was speaking), and Birkenhead constituency Labour Party executive committee, calling on them to pledge their support for the occupation and condemn Frank Field's statement. The officers of the DLP put out a press statement dissociating from Field, as did Birkenhead branch.

At the Birkenhead branch Field tried to say that his statement had been misinterpreted and what he really meant was that tactically the occupation should have been on the frigate and not the rig. Two days later, at a meeting with Tory minister Heseltine ab-

OVER 100 workers at Cammell Lairds shipyard in Birkenhead are in their third week of occupying a gas rig and a frigate in opposition to enforced redundancies and the threat of closure of the yard.

The gas rig was taken over on Wednesday June 27 after it was discovered that management planned to have it towed away to France even though there was months of work left for Lairds workers.

The frigate was taken over on Tuesday July 3 to step up the action and also to prevent it going out on trials and not returning.

As a result of the action, about 2000 other workers have been laid off.

Support for the occupation outside the yard is strong. The tug boat and gig boat workers pledged not to help remove any vessel from the yard. The British Shipbuilders shop stewards national combine committee is calling for a national lay delegate conference in line with the policy of supporting anyone fighting enforced redundancies.

Finance and messages of support have come in from local Labour Parties, from Liverpool dockers, container workers, unemployed groups, and miners, and many others.

Support also came from a meeting at Boia miners' welfare on Thursday July 5. Delegations have been organised to the Clyde and Tyne shipyards.

One thorn in the side of the occupation is Birkenhead's so-called Labour MP, Frank Field. He appeared on television saying that the occupation should be

out securing naval work for Lairds Field said that those occupying the vessels were a tiny minority of hotheads and Heseltine should ignore them.

Field has definitely made himself some determined enemies in his campaign to be de-selected.

Despite Field the occupation is solid and determined to fight for a victory at all costs. Management have sent a letter out to those laid off to encourage them to cross the picket line. They are also consulting with their solicitors and no doubt the Tory government over the possibility of issuing writs against the occupation.

Support has to be given to the occupation. All the yards should be called out against enforced redundancies. Pressure must be put on the Shipbuilding Negotiating Committee of the Confed to make that call, and if they don't do it, then the combine committee should.

You can put pressure on union leaders, MPs, etc to declare full support for the occupation, get your organisation to send a donation/message of support to the occupation, invite a speaker to your meetings, or organise meetings in support of the occupation. Those taking part in the occupation are determined to win. Your help will guarantee a victory.

Donations, messages, or requests for speakers to Lol Duffy, Cammell Lairds Occupation Committee, 3 St James Court, Victoria Rd, Wallasey, Merseyside L45 9LD (phone 051-638 2310 or 051-647 6122).



Lairds shop steward Lol Duffy