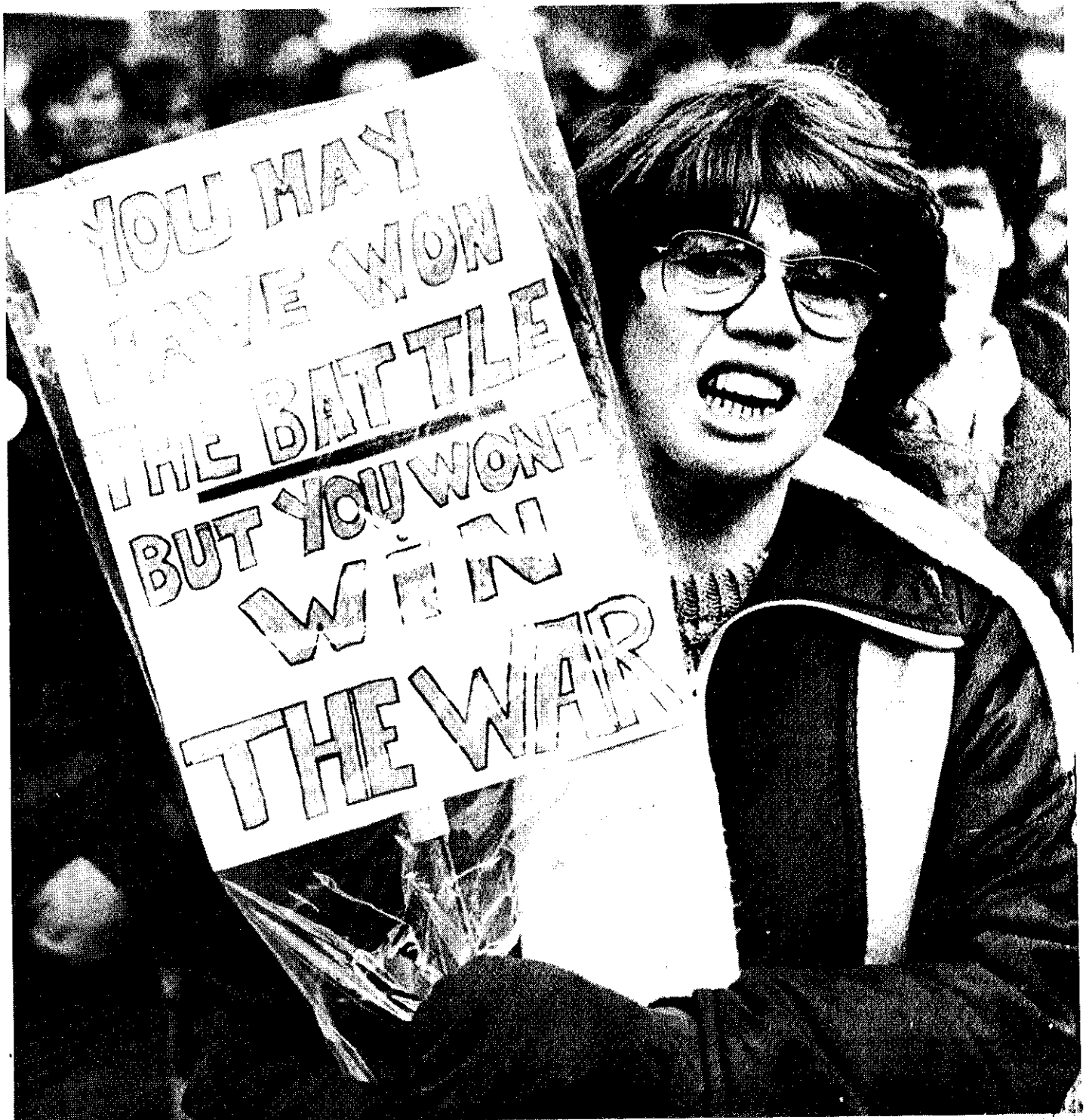


# LESSONS FOR OUR MOVEMENT



## THE STRIKE IN PERSPECTIVE

# Yes, they should have fought!

A major event like the miners' strike can have the effect of propelling the labour movement and the left forward, as it has politicised many miners and their families. But it can also throw political people backwards, depending on what conclusions they draw. A defeated strike is likely to do that. Faint-hearts and quitters are going to say: 'They shouldn't have fought' or 'They shouldn't have fought in *that* way'.

What lessons has the left learned from the miners' strike? What are its conclusions for the future?

Tribune has concluded from the strike that mass picketing is an outdated tactic.

"It is no longer enough to beat manly hewers' chests and expect governments to quake in their boots".

The Communist Party has taken a similar view.

There is a glimmer of truth behind these arguments. Mass picketing was not enough. Mass picketing is very difficult when workers are wary about responding because of the threat of the dole queue, and when thousands of specially-trained police are mounting a big operation against you.

But then the whole strike was difficult. Struggle is difficult when you face a ruth-

less, entrenched enemy. But there is no substitute for struggle.

Without mass pickets the strike would never have got off the ground. Without mass pickets it would never have got the support it did outside the main coalfields hit by closures. Without mass picketing the government's scab-herding operation would have cracked the strike long before March 1985. Without mass pickets the coke from Orgreave would not have been stopped even for one day — and with more mass pickets steel production might have been seriously brought down.

The difficulties actually made mass pickets more important than before. When workers' confidence is high and solidarity is easy, a few people with a union placard may be enough for an effective picket. When confidence is not so high, the strength of numbers is more important.

The answer is not to scrap mass pickets but to make them better-organised and to supplement them with other activities.

The CP's alternative to mass pickets seems to be an appeal to broad public opinion. Thus, CP industrial organiser Pete Carter sums up the lesson of the strike like this:

## Socialist Organiser

### INSIDE

Pages 6-7 report on the 2000 miners' strike.  
Page 8: Communist conference and families.  
Pages 9-10: Miners on the strike.  
Page 11: National Union of Mineworkers.  
Page 12: CP's conference and other reports.  
Page 13: International.  
Page 14: Editor's comments.

## TUC: back the miners!

"I am not asking for moral support, or resolutions, but a campaign of industrial action. The trade union movement only emerged because people fought unjust laws".  
Arthur Scargill

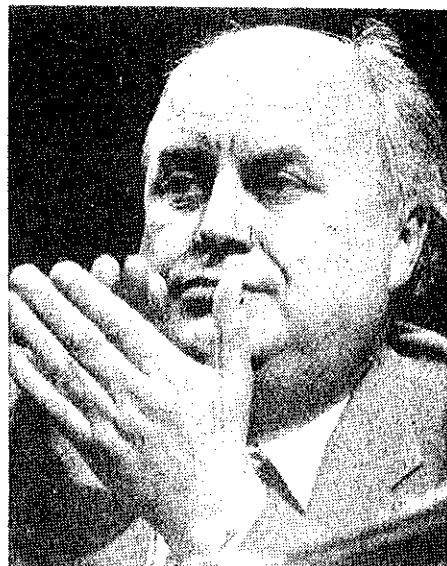


## Strike to defend our unions

"In the present political and economic crisis, even the best organised and most militant sections will face considerable difficulties if they cannot present their demands in terms capable of winning wide support." (Focus, March 7, 1985).

Asked about solidarity for the miners (Focus, February 7), George Bolton, chair of the CP and vice-president of the Scottish miners, devoted one column inch to trade union action and collections, 2½ inches to how difficult trade union solidarity is, and six inches to the churches!

"We have had Liberals on our platforms and the SNP, obviously... We recognised the



Norman Willis — promises but no action for the miners

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*Pickets at Orgreave – yes, they were right to struggle!*

need to approach the churches very early on. We leafleted the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in June, and we got the response...."

But "broad democratic alliances" (as they put it) "bishops and brickies" are no answer to the problems of mass picketing. They mean that CPers being ultra-moderate in order to win over their Liberals, SNPers, bishops or Chambers of Commerce and thus fail to give a fighting lead to the working class.

The Ravenscraig workers' notion that their survival depended on proving "viability" had been fostered by months of CP-dominated campaigning to get an alliance of Scots of all classes to oppose closure of the works. And for all the leaflets the Scottish NUM put out to Church Assemblies, they did not do a leaflet to the workers of Ravenscraig with the message that Arthur Scargill spelled out in the 'Miner' of June 30:

"Join with us. Do not be misled. Once the pits have been butchered, attention will once again be turned to your own industry, creating more dole queue fodder. And when that day dawns, who will be left to fight together with you?"

The opposite pole to the CP and Tribune is the Socialist Workers' Party. The SWP's

line throughout the strike was to call for "much more picketing". The cause of the defeat was too few mass pickets.

"Much more picketing?" Up to a point it is hard to disagree. We can always benefit from more militancy and more activity. For sure this message is better than the CP's and Tribune's.

But there is something very peculiar in the sight of the SWP standing on the fringes of Britain's most tremendous workers' struggle ever, shouting monotonously, "Not militant enough! Not militant enough!"

The SWP do not get to the roots of the problem about mass picketing and solidarity. The other side of this coin is that the SWP completely missed out on the *political* issues of the strike.

Issues of democratic control over the police; links between the police operation against the miners and state violence in black communities and in Ireland; civil liberties issues; the four-day week and the economics of human need versus the economics of profit; workers' control versus NCB dictatorship — all these issues through which workers might have been convinced of a link between their concerns and the miners' strike, and the basis could have

## The problem in 1974

John O'Mahony, editor of *Socialist Organiser*, asked the miners in the meeting to consider why it was that after their crushing victory over the Heath government in 1974 they were having to fight Thatcher under such difficult circumstances ten years later.

"The problem was that in 1974 there was nothing effective to replace the Tory government with. The bitter experience of the Wilson/Callaghan government which resulted from the miners' victory brought *Socialist Organiser* into being as a part of the fight to take control of the entire labour movement by and for the working class."

Although Britain's workers' movement is tremendously strong, it does not have the politics it needs to make it capable of taking power in society. *Socialist Organiser* fights for the necessary socialist politics in the mass movement, and for the widest unity in action among those who commit themselves to that fight.

*Socialist Organiser*, June 14, 1984

been laid for broader action, were scarcely mentioned by the SWP. Instead they repeated their message again and again: "Not nearly enough has been done to organise the picketing..."

Firstly, the facts. Socialist Worker argued that far fewer miners were involved in picketing in 1972. But that is probably not true.

It is estimated that in 1972 some 8,000 miners were involved in picketing in the first week and 40,000 altogether.

Various figures give us a rough idea of how many pickets were involved in 1984-5. Over 11,000 miners were arrested. So if one picket in four was arrested, that makes over 40,000 pickets. On 290,000 occasions miners were stopped at police roadblocks (up to September, in England and Wales alone). If each picket was stopped an average of ten times at roadblocks, that makes about 30,000 pickets.

In 1972 there were about 3,000 miners at Saltley, and about 1,000 on the other big mass pickets in East Anglia. In 1984-5 there were dozens of pickets of that size.

Overall there were probably at least as many regular pickets in 1984-5 as in 1972. The difference is that in 1984-5 a lot of miners had to picket pits instead of power stations and coke depots; and that in 1984-5 it was much more difficult. The 1972 pickets in East Anglia and at Saltley shut their targets within a few days. The mass pickets in 1984-5 often failed to shut their targets.

More pickets would have helped. And, though Socialist Worker's claim that the

area NUM leaders were "sabotaging mass picketing" and "more worried about preserving their [union] machine than winning the strike" (SW, July 21) is overstated, doubtless the CP influence among NUM officials did hinder mobilisation. 'The Miner' on May 9 said: "The NUM position is clear: the [steel] plant[s] should tick over, but not produce any steel" — yet NUM area officials allowed massive supplies of coal and coke. Arthur Scargill often seemed to be on his own in appealing for miners to turn out to mass pickets, as at Orgreave. Scotland was notably sluggish about picketing.

But why could sluggish officials get away with it? (The NUM official structure was a lot more conservative in 1972 than in 1984). Why did officials who were militant picket organisers in 1972 become cautious and sceptical in 1984?

The repeated message, 'Be more militant', is not much of an answer to these questions. Doubly so, because the SWP rejects (as 'integration into the bureaucracy') any struggle to transform the official structures and replace conservative leaders. Socialist Worker lambasted the "militants' mistaken belief that betrayals can be avoided by winning control of the union machine. The reality is very different. Once in office, one-time rank and file leaders become prisoners of the machine they supposedly control" (SW, July 21).

Of course militant rank-and-filers do often become conservative once in union office. Just fighting for an 'alternative

leadership' is not enough: we need to fight for clear policies and to democratise the whole structure. But the SWP's view replaces any strategy to transform the labour movement by an iron law of bureaucracy. Any organised official leadership will always be conservative; *therefore* overall political strategy for the labour movement is always empty talk, and all socialists can do is champion rank and file revolts — urge the rank and file to be more militant or (as more often with SW these days) complain that it is not militant enough.

Political links with steel and power workers; political arguments about workers' self-defence which could have helped the pickets more effectively to counter the police — these were more useful contributions from socialists than just the cry "More picketing! More picketing! More picketing!"

And they could have helped to make more picketing possible, by getting to the roots of the problems with picketing.

There were problems with mass picketing: but both the CP/Tribune, and the SWP got them wrong. The CP/Tribune find direct-action militancy inadequate, and look vainly for something else to take its place; the SWP find it inadequate, and stridently and rather peevishly call for more of it. The real job is to unite direct-action militancy with a working class strategy.

We need to build a rank and file movement, uniting workers in different unions round socialist policies, and to commit the labour movement to workers' self-defence.

# Build a rank and file movement!

Students of British labour history will compare 1984-5 with 1926. The comparison will serve up to a point, as long as the aftermath of 1926 is studied soberly and accurately. It was not so unrelievedly black as is some-

times painted. Nor was everything lost when the General Strike failed — militancy continued into 1927. By 1934 trade union membership increased again; in 1936 there were more strikes than in any year since 1920.

The damage, moreover, would have been much less if not for the fact that the most advanced element in the labour movement then — the Communist Party, at that time still a revolutionary party — went on a self-isolating, self-destructive ultra-left binge after 1928, emerging from it in 1934-5 only to swing towards reformism. What the organised, active socialist minority does can make a huge difference to the effect of defeats on the whole working class.

In the wake of their victory in 1926, the ruling class strategy was to push through a policy, started years earlier, of splitting the militants and socialists from the rest of the movement, while embracing the trade union leaders and building up their positions against the shop floor.

The anti-union law of the day — the Trade Disputes Act — had as its guiding principle to "demand support of the great mass of public opinion, including moderate trade unionists". Just a few months after the end of the strike, top government ministers were proposing talks with Labour leaders using "reliable men" from the TUC and Labour Party.

This conciliatory attitude was also reflected in the press. Yesterday's Bolshevik agitator became today's responsible trade union leader.

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## Kinnock and Thatcher compared

Mrs Thatcher is tough, nasty, brutal, spiteful, single-minded and very hostile to the labour movement — but a good, tough, committed fighter for her own cause and capable of being an inspiring leader for her own side. Mrs Thatcher knows how to lead.

There is no double-talk from Thatcher about the miners' strike. She is out to beat us down and crush the NUM. She leaves her supporters in no doubt about it.

When Thatcher denounced "violence" she doesn't feel obliged to be "impartial" and denounce the police as well as the pickets who stand up to them. She denounces us — she praises, lauds and defends the army of police thugs she sends to beat us down. She knows a bitter class war is being fought — and she knows which side she is on.

The contrast between Thatcher's conduct during the miners' strike and yours, Neil Kinnock, is a devastating one.

You have rightly blamed the Tories for the strike. But your backing for the NUM has been vague and equivocal at best. You have added your voice to the vile chorus of Tory orchestrated propaganda against the picketing miners who are, in fact, victims of police thuggery. You denounce us for defending ourselves against the police and for trying to stop the police herding scabs to break our strike.

Whatever your intentions you thereby help Thatcher and MacGregor in their war to beat us down. You boost the Tory propaganda campaign which is designed to stop other workers giving miners the solidarity action that would make such a difference to our strike.

Thatcher is a Tory pig, but I find it impossible to compare Thatcher's performance on her side with yours on ours, without feeling a deep disappointment in you.

One reason why Thatcher knows how to lead is that she does know which side she is on.

From an open letter to Neil Kinnock by Paul Whetton, a delegate to Labour Party conference, September 1984

Inside the velvet glove was the iron fist. The shop floor worker was on the receiving end. Blacklists, sackings, speed-ups, settling of 'old scores' by management, were the reality for the workers.

The Tory government could not have pursued their policy without the support of the Labour leadership. Just as these people had rushed to betray the strike so they fell over themselves, too, in their scramble to support the government's policy.

At the 1927 TUC Congress the former 'left winger' George Hicks declared: "We should not be deterred by allegations that in entering into such discussions we are surrendering some essential principle of trade unionism". The "new realists" of the '20s were pushing through their policy of open class collaboration.

The "new realists", in their turn, got away with it because the lessons which many thousands of workers had learnt from the strike were squandered.



Kent pickets out Cortonwood. March 5 1985

## Our comment when Len Murray announced his retirement

Forget for one moment the miners' strike, the local council elections, Liverpool, even the future of the TUC. There is something far more important: the future of Len Murray.

After all, Len has given more than a decade of selfless service leading the trade union movement. For much of that time he's been forced to eke out some kind of existence on a miserable pittance of £30,000. Now is the time for all of us to show our gratitude; now is the time to give Len some real gravy. He should go to the House of Lords.

Lord Len of Warrington? Earl Murray of Cheltenham? They both have a firm ring about them. In fact, we could hold a secret postal ballot to decide what we should call Len, as some will have other, perhaps cruder, suggestions.

But I want to go further. I want to propose that Len should not be created a mere Lord for life, those are ten a penny

but a Hereditary Peer. This would have tremendous benefits for workers from Lands End to John O'Groats, and far further afield. It would show them that socialist statisticians are damned liars: social mobility is not dead, but even in this day and age the humble scion of the proletariat can still reach the very top.

All workers would feel that little bit better, clocking on at eight on cold mornings, knowing the Shropshire lad, still comfortably in bed, would soon be donning his mink and ermine underwear, hobnobbing with the toffs.

Most important of all, Len's entry into Debrett would show him in his true colours, the bend sinister, with a yellow stripe, crowned with a grovelling cart-horse: the colours for betraying his movement and being a traitor to his class.

Socialist Organiser, May 10, 1984  
Len Murray became a life peer in the New Year Honours List of 1985

The best militants of the day were in the Communist Party. Between 1926 and 1928, derailed by the misguidance of Stalin, the party moved from a rather 'soft' attitude to the TUC leaders to one of self-isolation, forming breakaway unions and reserving their most vehement criticism for the most left wing leaders, whom they called social fascists; such as the miners' leader A.J. Cook (the Arthur Scargill of the 1920s).

So the chance of building a political opposition was lost. The way was cleared for the right wing in the labour movement, and thus for the bosses and the Tories. But it was not all inevitable.

1921-2 is an instructive comparison, too.

In those years the British working class suffered defeats probably more serious than the one we have just had. The miners were locked out from March 31 1921; the rail and transport unions, on 'Black Friday', refused to honour their pledges of support; and the

miners were forced to accept defeat on July 1.

The engineers, in those days, were the second central militant section of the union movement. They had created and sustained the shop stewards' movement during World War 1. From March 11 to June 13 1922 they, too, were locked out and defeated. Militants were victimised wholesale. The shop stewards' movement was broken. From 1921 to 1926 TUC membership fell by one million — more than it was ever to fall in the aftermath of 1926.

Yet the movement managed to regroup after those defeats. In 1924 a Miners' Minority Movement was initiated by the Communist Party, and in August 1924 a cross-union National Minority Movement. The first Minority Movement conference had delegates representing 200,000 workers; by March 1926, MM conference delegates represented a total of one million trade unionists (the TUC at the time having only four million affiliates).

The Minority Movement linked together the rank and file, coordinated the battle for militant policies in different unions, and paralleled the fight of the CP for affiliation to the Labour Party. Without its work, the general strike of 1926 would probably never have happened; if it had not been derailed by the conservative Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow into softness towards the TUC 'lefts' (the 1926 equivalents of Buckton and Todd) at the crucial time in 1926, it could even have been the driving force taking that general strike to victory.

During the 1984-5 strike, the miners' leaders, for all their heroism, were hog-tied by the lack of any equivalent of the Minority Movement. They clearly found it difficult to

relate to the TUC: after they had coaxed the leaders in private and appealed to them in public, what else could they do? They had no mechanism for a campaign to stir up the membership of other unions, to prepare, for example, for a general strike.

This was not just an organisational oversight, but a matter of politics. The Minority Movement would never have emerged without the Communist Party as its backbone, strategist and coordinator. The modern Communist Party, a sad caricature of the 1920s CP but the most influential party in the miners' leadership, has abandoned projects like the Minority Movement as a matter of conscious policy. They prefer to work for niches in the bureaucracy.

To build a rank and file movement now we will need a political initiating minority — a group capable of incorporating the lessons of the miners' strike into a coherent socialist strategy. We need to build Socialist Organiser. Round that core we can then organise militants as broadly as possible.

Back in July Paul Whetton told a Socialist Organiser meeting:

"The fight has got to go on after this dispute is over, and it is vitally important that we get ties between rank and file members, from the pits to the docks to the railways and into the factories... The Triple Alliance fell flat on its face because it had been organised and conducted by full-time officials, and the rank and file did not get involved. I would hope that after this strike is over, we try to organise rank and file members in the pits, docks and factories, and take the arguments about a workers' government and workers' control and all that sort of thing forward..."

That is the task now.

## The Ridley Report

In an annexe to this report, Mr Ridley and some of his co-authors have been pondering how to counter any 'political threat' from those they regard as 'the enemies of the next Tory government'. They believe that in the first or second year after the Tories' election, there might be a major challenge from a trade union either over a wage claim or over redundancies. They fear it may occur in a 'vulnerable industry' such as coal, electricity or the docks and have the support of 'the full force of communist disrupters'. Behind the scenes, they would like a five-part strategy for countering this threat:

- Return on capital figures should be rigged so that an above-average wage claim can be paid to the 'vulnerable' industries.

- The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories, in a field they think could be won (railways, British Leyland, the civil service or steel).

- Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry.

They would like a Thatcher government to:

- a) build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations;
- b) make contingency plans for the import of coal;
- c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary;
- d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.

- The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be 'to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the union finance them'. But strikers in nationalised industries should not be treated differently from strikers in other industries.

- There should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. 'Good non-union drivers' should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection.

The Tories' 'Ridley report' on strategy, as reported in the 'Economist', May 27 1978.

# Their leadership and ours

The Tories set their plans for the miners' strike as long ago as 1978 (see box).

They carried out these plans ruthlessly. Some of the preparations — for example, for the police anti-picket operation — had been underway since 1972.

They did the public side of their preparations as well as the behind-the-scenes work. Week after week, from 1979 through to 1984, they banged out a clear, hard-edged message: there was No Alternative to the laws of market economics. More police and more profits were necessary to save Britain from moral and economic decay.

So the Tories prepared well. They had a leadership dedicated to their class.

And us? The top leaders of the labour movement prepared for 1984 by five years of dismal floundering.

In 1979 Labour fought a general election

on the uninspiring promise of the mixture as before.

In 1980, after the steel strike, the TUC quickly abandoned any real notion of mobilising against the Tories. From time to time TUC leaders would bluster about a fight back: they scarcely even bothered to conceal the escape clauses and provisos which made it all empty clamour.

They prepared for the miners' strike by betraying ASLEF (in 1982) and the NGA in 1983. They proclaimed the 'new realism' — in other words, their eagerness to surrender to the Tories, if only the Tories would please sign a surrender treaty with them.

Meanwhile, what were the Labour leaders doing? Witch-hunting their left wing. Replying to the Tories' crisp message with vague, unconvincing waffle.

The Tories have just inflicted a serious

defeat on the working class. They didn't outfight the heroic miners — they starved them back to work. But they outfought, outgeneralled, intimidated and ran rings around the rest of the labour movement. In the miners' strike the Tories gave the British working class movement a bitter lesson in serious class struggle politics. They will give us other bitter lessons, inflict other avoidable defeats on us, if we don't draw the proper conclusions from this one.

Before the strike many people argued that the young miners — with mortgages, cars, videos — would never fight. In fact, those young miners (the workforce in 1984 was younger than it had ever been before) were the vanguard of the struggle.

The same people will now tell us that the strike proved the working class no longer capable of solidarity. For sure solidarity was inadequate. But why? It was very *difficult*. Solidarity was possible, but only with a determined leadership that would link other issues to the miners' and show workers a coherent strategy for class mobilisation for jobs and democratic rights. In fact the leadership was cowardly and had no strategy. The rank and file solidarity, in the circumstances, was heroic.

There has never been a golden age when workers would risk their jobs and wages for solidarity at the drop of a hat, without organisation and leadership. Before 1972, the miners had *never* had national agreement from rail and transport workers to boycott scab coal except in 1925-6: and in 1926, when the TUC called a general strike to support the miners, it called it off after nine days.

### Solidarity

Solidarity in 1972 and 1974 was stronger than in 1984-5, but it was also easier. For solidarity against the odds, in the face of harassment by the bosses, the action during the 1984-5 strike of Leicestershire and Notts railworkers and of many seafarers and power station workers has few parallels in British labour history.

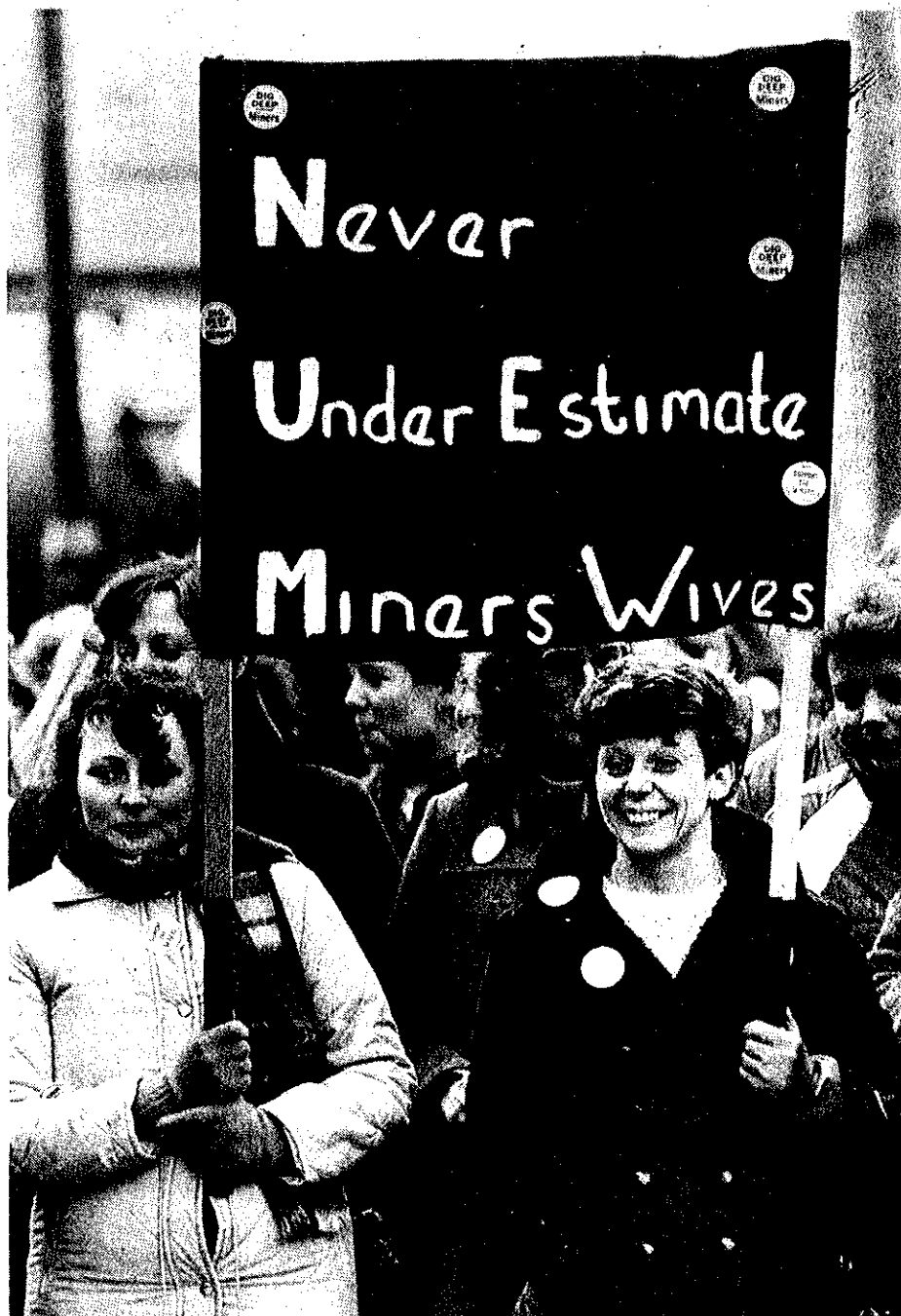
Far from showing the impossibility of solidarity, the strike showed the tremendous potential — given leadership.

'A leadership which fights for our class like the Tories fight for theirs' — the demand is obvious, but not easy to implement.

Poor leadership does not drop from the sky. And equally an adequate leadership cannot be got just by battles to replace sluggish officials by tougher militants. Many of today's sluggish officials were tough militants in their day: lacking perspectives and strategy, they have been overwhelmed by the day-to-day business of acting as a broker between workers and bosses. And where individuals keep their combativity and dedication, even that is limited as long as they are just individuals.

It is not just a matter of fighting this or that battle harder, but of transforming the whole labour movement — or at least a sizeable enough section of it — so that it operates according to a worked-out strategy against capitalism, rather than reacting blindly.

Industrial battles should be fought according to a strategy: why did we let the Tories batter the steelworkers in 1980, then isolate the miners, and now take on Labour councils and council workers separately too?



*How deep is the defeat? That depends partly on us*

Industrial militancy must be tied with a fight on the political front: why did we let the miners' industrial victory in 1974, forcing the Tories into an election which they lost, lead to such a wretched Labour government, with its IMF-ordered cuts and incomes policies?

Both industrial and political militancy must be reinforced with socialist ideas.

### Battle of ideas

Otherwise everything we do will be moulded by the ideas of the ruling class — the ideas which represent capitalist 'normality' and are reinforced by the media every day.

Throughout its history the British working class has generally let the industrial and political aspects of its struggle run without coordination, and neglected the battle of ideas almost completely. It has reacted, sometimes militantly, to the assaults of capitalism: it has never launched a coherent

offensive.

Thus for 14 years — from 1969 ('In Place of Strife') through to 1983 — the trade unions repeatedly beat back efforts to impose new legal restrictions on them. But they never did more than beat back the attacks. Each time the capitalist class had a chance to regroup and to come back more skilfully next time.

We cannot afford to continue like that. A new approach requires a new leadership, but it also requires more than that: a top-to-bottom transformation of the labour movement, both unions and Labour Party, in its ways of thinking and modes of operation.

And that, in turn, requires an instrument to carry through the transformation: a left wing coherent, organised, clear in its ideas but not dogmatic, and able to conduct a coordinated effort on all three fronts, industrial, political and ideological.

That is why Socialist Organiser exists and organises.

# Facts and figures of the strike

## Statistics for scabherding

Bent statistics were a weapon for the Tories and the Coal Board in driving the miners back to work.

As early as July 2 the Tories claimed that 60,000 miners were working. This wild exaggeration probably did them more harm than good. But from August the Coal Board started using figures more carefully and more effectively. Day after day, the television news would lead with apparently ultra-precise figures from the NCB on returns to work.

The NCB's own auditors refused to confirm these figures: but the media gave no prominence to that fact.

And the NCB was careful. It exaggerated, but it exaggerated within limits. When it said there had been a big return to work, in fact there had been — if not so big as the NCB said. Given the pressure put on the miners by the TUC's failure to deliver solidarity, the NCB figures thus tended to become self-confirming. If they said that there *had* been a big return to work, then that would help *produce* a big return to work.

In November, when the NCB was making a big push in North Derbyshire, they boosted their figures by including Bolsover colliery which is geographically in Derbyshire but comes under the Notts NUM.

The July figure of 60,000, it seems, was reached by including not only safety men and apprentices working with the NUM's permission, but also BACM, NACODS and APEX members.

Later figures may also have included safety men and apprentices. Miners on the sick were counted as breaking the strike. The NCB also took no account of miners who returned to work but then came back out on strike.

On top of all this, the NCB's *national* figures frequently clashed with its *area* figures. For example, in late February when the NCB was claiming 91,000

Date published	NUM figures		NCB figures	
	Out	Working	Out	Working
May 9	160,000	25,000		
July 31	153,000			
August 23	147,000		120,000	49,000
November 13			124,000	56,000
November 17	146,000	49,000		
November 19	NCB auditors' report shows 51,000 working			
November 24	140,000	48,000	126,000	63,000
January 8			118,000	71,000
January 17	140,000	56,000		
January 19			115,000	74,000
February 7	138,000			
February 28	116,000	80,000	91,500	94,500

miners breaking the strike *nationally*, its *area* figures only added up to 78,000.

When all these tricks are taken into account, the NUM and the NCB figures for the strike both give the same broad picture.

The biggest number of strikers was probably on March 16, when Notts struck briefly and the NCB only claimed 11 pits open. By the end of March the situation had settled down with the majority of Notts scabbing, but some 160,000 miners — over 80% nationally — on strike.

There was a slight increase in strikers after the NUM conference on April 19, and a slight decrease over the summer. The situation in early May was:

Scotland, Yorkshire, North-East, South Wales, Kent: 100% solid.

Notts: 12,000 striking, 18,000 working.

Lancashire, Staffordshire: great majority on strike, but sizeable scabbing.

Warwickshire: mostly scabbing, but sizeable numbers on strike.

South Derbyshire and Leicestershire: great majority scabbing.

Over the six months May-October, some 14,000 miners went back to work, according to NUM figures, in dribs and drabs. Staffordshire had weakened con-

siderably, Lancashire slightly; the numbers on strike in Notts had declined. But all the major coalfields except Notts were 100% or 99% solid.

A serious breach in the strike opened in November, though returns to work were then very slow in December and the first half of January. NUM figures show some 6,000 going back between mid-November and mid-January.

After mid-January, with the TUC openly abandoning the NUM, the return to work became worse. NUM figures show 24,000 workers lost to the strike between January 17 and February 28.

Even then, 116,000 miners were still not working — over 70% of those who had come out at the start.

The NCB figures actually confirm this broad pattern. Underneath all the ballyhoo, the NCB's figure for strikers on February 28 was still 76% of their figure for August 23.

One major element in the apparently huge gaps between NUM and NCB figures for particular dates is that they disagree about how many miners there were altogether, strikers, scabs, and others (off sick, apprentices, etc.) Even if they did agree, each would still have a choice of a number of different totals to give the striking/working figures as a percentage of.

As the table above shows, a confusing variety of totals were used — from 170,000 (the NCB's figure for the total number of miners), through 182,000 (NUM figure for total number of miners), and 186,000 (NCB figure for total NUM members including coke works, workshops, etc.), to 196,000 (NUM figure for total NUM members). The NCB claims that the difference between its total and the NUM's is accounted for by voluntary redundancies, retirements, deaths and sackings since March 1984.



Police escort scabs at Silverwood, Yorks.

# The cost

The cost of the strike to the government was equivalent to the entire housing budget. The total loss of income throughout the economy was equivalent to 5% of industrial production. The extra imports of oil and coal were more than double Britain's car exports.

The cost to the government (up to the end of January) is analysed as follows:

Cost in power industry (extra oil, etc.)	£719m
Policing	£189m
Loss of income tax which	

miners would otherwise have paid	£271m
Social security payments to miners' families	£47m
Cost of lost production in British Steel	£189m
Losses to NCB	£952m
Total of above items	£2367m
Other costs to the government in the form of nationalised industry losses due to the miners' strike but less easily identifiable could be an additional	£2300 million.

(Figures from Labour Research)

# Coal imports

Britain imported 9 million tonnes of coal in 1984 to try to beat the strike.

Major sources were:

USA	3 million tonnes
Australia	2 million tonnes
Poland	1.5 million
South Africa	0.25 million

(Financial Times, February 2)



Police occupy Houghton Main, February 1985

# 11,000 arrested

Over 11,000 miners were arrested during the strike. Up to February 15 (February 1 in Scotland) there had been 11,013 miners arrested.

Something near 1000 other people — collectors, supporters on pickets, etc — had also been arrested.

By February 12, 145 miners had received jail sentences and 25 had been sent to detention centres. Other miners were jailed awaiting trial. These figures cover only England and Wales, not Scotland.

Terry French is in Wandsworth Prison for five years for allegedly attacking a policeman. In Derby one miner has been given three years, and eight others 2½ years, for setting fire to an (empty) scab bus; in Stoke-on-Trent four miners have got two years' jail, another two years' youth custody, for the same.

Some 2600 miners were still awaiting trial as of February 12 (England and Wales, again). Many of these face heavy charges (including conspiracy) on which they could be jailed.

Most of the jail sentences so far handed down have been recent — over two thirds of them since November 13. The police and civil-court offensive against the miners in the last months of the strike was matched by vindictive criminal courts.

In the earlier period of the strike the police concentrated more on minor charges (obstruction, breach of the peace, etc., on which people can be convicted on the sole evidence of a police officer). In later months, these minor charges dropped to 58% of the total (October-January), as against 79% in March to May.

The minor charges were used to intimidate miners, to drain strike funds through fines, and to impose bail conditions which prevented them from picketing.

2424 miners got fines (up to February 12, in England and Wales). Most were large fines: half were £82 or more.

Standard bail conditions imposed on miners stopped them picketing anywhere else than their own pit. Up to

September some 1650 people had received such bail conditions at Mansfield (Notts) magistrates' court alone.

Throughout England and Wales, 3,800 miners were on bail conditions by October 2.

Kent miners' president Malcolm Pitt was jailed in May for defying such bail conditions, even though the charge that he was bailed on drew only a fine.

Up to September (according to police figures for England and Wales), 290,000 miners had been turned back at police roadblocks (some miners, obviously, are counted twice or several times in this total). Figures for Notts show two high points: from April 25 to May 25 (after Easter and the April 19 NUM conference), when an average of 1500 pickets were stopped each weekday; and from June 25 to August 10 (as the NCB did its first back-to-work drive) an average of 2200 stopped daily.

(Figures from: Labour Research; New Statesman; and articles by Nick Blake and Louise Christian in 'Policing the Miners' Strike', ed. Fine and Millar).

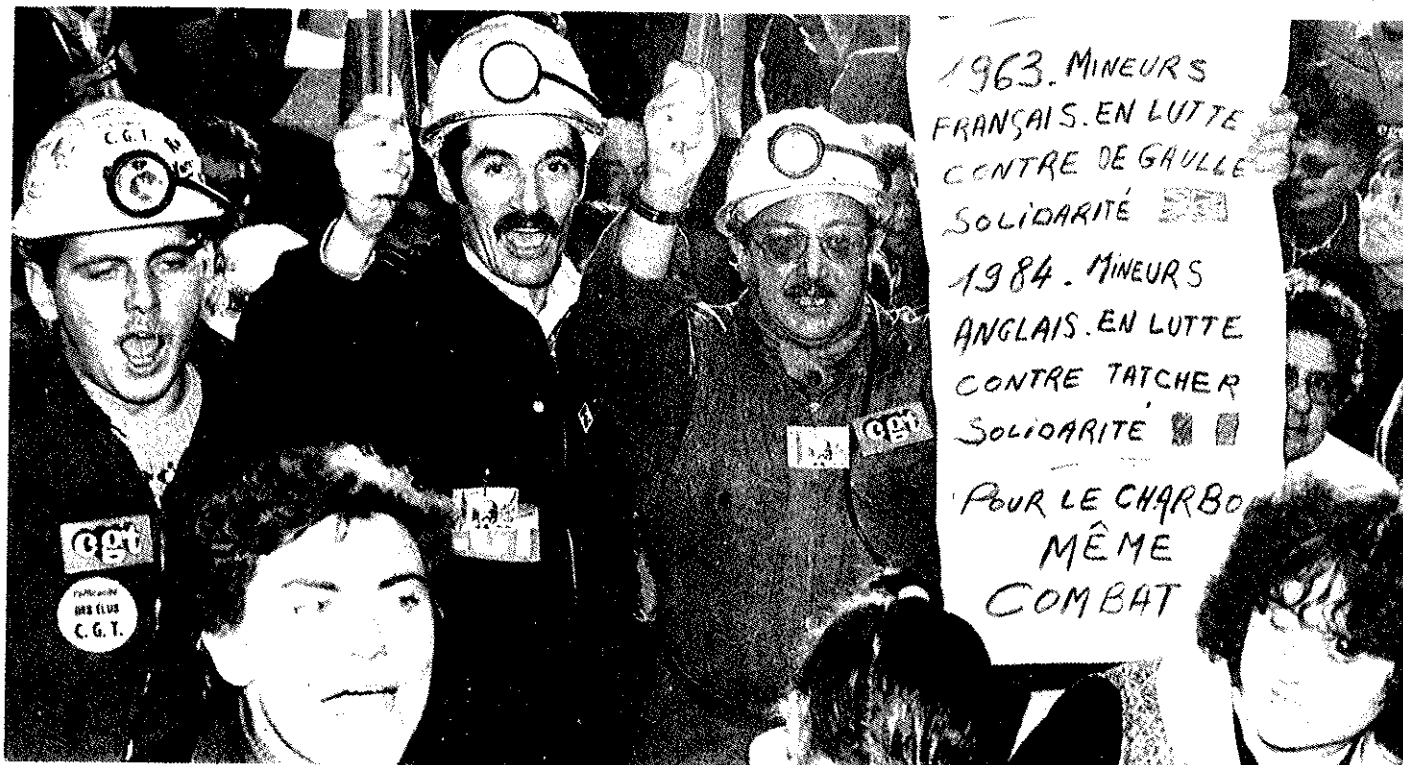


Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report.

# International solidarity

Workers in many countries showed solidarity with the British miners, by trying to stop extra coal exports to Britain or by contributing to collections. Above: miners from France on a solidarity visit to Aylesham, Kent. The placard reads — 1963: French miners in struggle against De Gaulle. Solidarity. 1984: British miners in struggle against Thatcher. Solidarity. For coal — same struggle.

The Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc also sent messages of solidarity, while explaining that because of the martial law it was not in a position to take industrial action. The self-proclaimed 'socialist' government of Poland sent large quantities of coal to help Thatcher defeat the British miners.

Socialist Organiser reported: "The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner. British miners . . . in the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in a position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain . . . that we are in solidarity with you."

Silesian miners, some of whose comrades were shot down when they struck in protest against the declaration of martial law in December 1981, broadcast this greeting to British miners over the underground radio in Upper Silesia on June 17:

"The Underground Provisional Coordinating Committee of Solidarnosc miners sends you fraternal greetings and full support and solidarity for your struggle for the right to work . . . we will do everything possible, including in action. The protest we have sent to the Polish government and parliament is an initial measure taken in support of your struggle."

NUM militants must see to it that the union throws its full support behind

Solidarnosc and against the bureaucratic dictatorship. The NUM should back the persecuted pioneers of independent labour movements in the USSR and other Stalinist states.

The British labour movement must support other workers against police state oppression wherever it occurs, whether in Chile, South Africa and El Salvador, or in the USSR, Poland and Cuba.

Another message from Solidarnosc read:

For four months the British miners have been on strike against a programme of mass closures of mines for economic reasons. The miners are threatened with unemployment. The government has rejected compromise solutions and has resorted to severe police methods against the strikers. Thousands of miners have been arrested; hundreds have been hospitalised and one has been killed.

The government of the Polish People's Republic, despite hypocritical condemnations of the activities of the British police in the columns of the regime's press, by the regime's pseudo-trade unionists, is profiting from the export of coal to Britain. It sells dirt cheap coal which has been mined in scandalously neglected working conditions and with reckless exploitation of the labour force and the coal field. The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner.

British miners! The true sentiments of Polish trade unionists towards the authorities of the Polish People's Republic and their practices was shown in the recent electoral farce which was boycotted by the workers. In the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in a position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain that as you have supported and are sup-

porting our struggle, so we are in solidarity with you.

We strongly oppose every case where force is used against workers struggling for their rights and interests.

Long live trade union solidarity!

Resolution of underground Solidarnosc, Mazowsze Region, June 26, 1984

In the past Arthur Scargill had opposed Solidarnosc (calling it 'anti-socialist'), and had maintained links with the state-run official 'unions' of countries like Poland. The experience during 1984, however, moved him to declared (on June 5):

"I think I owe Lech Walesa an apology".

In a letter to the Polish ambassador in November, Scargill spelled out his disgust:

The Jaruzelski government has dramatically increased the amount of coal imported to Britain and has totally ignored repeated requests from the NUM to stop exporting coal into Britain during the period of the miners' strike.

In doing so, the Polish government is giving direct assistance to Mrs Thatcher's government as it tries to defeat the miners' union.

The NUM has no intention of even considering the 'offer' to receive 100 striking miners' children for a holiday in Poland because we are aware that at the same time as such an offer is made the actions of the Polish government are directly assisting the Tory government in Britain to do all in its power to smash the NUM and the miners' strike.

Please convey to your government and trade union movement our absolute disgust and — even at this late stage — convey to them our request to stop all exports of Polish coal either directly or indirectly into Britain."

Letter from Arthur Scargill to the Polish ambassador in Britain:  
Socialist Organiser November 15 1984.