

# Workers Power

25p/10p strikers paper of the Workers Power group

# RANK AND FILE MUST FIGHT FOR GENERAL STRIKE!



ON MARCH 16TH the NUM wrote to the TUC telling it politely that it's services were not required at that moment. The reasons for this are not hard to guess. The initials ASLEF, NGA and GCHQ should remind us that the Judas kiss of Len Murray is fatal for any section of workers in struggle.

The enemies of our class recognise this as well. *The Economist* notes (April 21st), "Already the TUC has offered Mr Scargill its collective embrace. Thus do the trade union barons declare their interests in a strike, so as to manipulate the eventual settlement. In the 1982 rail strike, they offered themselves as honest brokers - enforcing a settlement on the train drivers by threatening withdrawal of collective support....Mediation of this kind would be a second-best outcome to a straight defeat of Mr. Scargill, which should first be tried."

The NUM executive was right to appeal at once for support to the unions most directly involved. Their response, however, has been patchy. The officials have dragged their feet. Real solidarity has materialised where militants in the railways, on the docks, in road transport have taken the initiative in making blacking stick, or where miners pickets have won it directly.

That Bill Sirs stabbed the miners in the back within hours of the ISTC pledging its support should come as no surprise. He did the same to his own members in 1980 and tens of thousands of them are on the dole because of it. That is why the steel workers are still suffering from demoralisation as they face the threat of another massive round of redundancies.

This is why they are asking for exemption from the blockade of coal. They don't believe their own union will fight for them let alone the miners. To a lesser degree this affects the other unions officially supporting the miners. They have suffered defeats, had militants victimised or been betrayed by either their own leaders or the TUC. The eruption of the miners into the battle against Thatcher has roused the trade union activists. It has given them a powerful ray of hope. The main task is to spread that message across to the whole workforce.

This cannot be done simply by appeals for solidarity and support for the miners. The great mass of workers will not move just out of union loyalty, out of bold appeals to be unselfish. They must be won to seeing that class solidarity can lead to a common victory and common benefits.

How can we do this? We must urge all sections to advance their own claims and struggles and take strike action now while the bosses, the government and the police have their hands full.

We must offer sections like the steel workers a common goal. We must set the end of steel plant closures as one of the NUM's strike demands.

The Triple Alliance and other unions must adopt a common platform of total opposition to further redundancies and closures.

This can act as a mighty lever to let loose an avalanche of working class action that can sweep the Tories away. Already - despite the brutal police harassment of pickets, the bosses are wary of using their anti-union laws to the full. They fear that if their judges seize the funds of the NUM, the ASLEF, the T&GWU a huge strike wave would

develop. We shouldn't leave this to chance or to spontaneous outrage, we should prepare for it now. We need to make every worker an active supporter of the miners.

We must organise for miners to address workplace meetings in every lodge, factory, power station, at every office, hospital and school. We must organise for collections, for levies, for the adoption of a pit. Each of these steps will help to keep the miners going and identify these workers with the miners' cause.

On this basis it will be possible to win these same workers to strike action when the courts and the police try to use the anti-union laws.

Whilst we need to build class wide action from below we shouldn't let the TUC leaders get away with total inactivity. Neither can we let them salvage

their consciences and avoid action with focus-less Days of Action like that being prepared by the Scottish TUC for May 9th. If we let them get away with doing nothing they will be free to 'intervene' at the first difficult turn in events or whenever they see a weak spot in the struggle.

The TUC should have declared a General Strike before the anti-union laws reached the statute book. They should declare one now in solidarity with the miners and to smash the Tory anti-union laws. Certainly the moment the courts operate and move injunction and sequestration orders every union branch, every shop stewards committee must bombard Congress House with the call for an immediate and indefinite General Strike to smash the pit closure plan and the anti-union laws.

Even then the danger would be far from over. We would have rolled out the mightiest weapon in our arsenal. But Murray, Duffy, Bassett and Moss Evans would be as bad a leadership as the General Council of 1926. Indeed there are several contenders for the role of Jimmy Thomas. In every city and town Action Councils would have to be formed of elected workplace delegates to run the strike. A National Action Council could alone provide a controllable and accountable body that could not scurry off to Downing Street to surrender at the first High Court injunction.

\* For a General Strike - not a pathetic day of Action, not a 9 day wonder 1926 style, but an all out indefinite strike until the Tories meet every one of our demands in full! Such a defeat the Tories could not survive.

## TURN THE TIDE AGAINST THE SCABS

THE MINERS STRIKE is entering a critical phase. In altering the undemocratic 55% ballot rule and calling for a national strike the Sheffield National Delegate Conference raised miners' spirits and encouraged the whole labour movement.

It led to a bad attack of the jitters in the bosses house magazine *The Economist* asked itself whether Thatcher could win. Its answer was, "still yes, but a hesitant one."

It outlined a gloomy scenario.

"Things will now get worse before they get better. Unless something dramatic occurs in the next fortnight, there will be noticeable industrial disruption during the summer, rising industrial (and policing) costs and a general mood of anarchy, which will contrast with the present optimism about impending economic recovery."

It foresaw "Tory-voting industrialists squealing for peace." It had little hope about the effectiveness of the anti-union laws, "an attempted bankrupting

of the whole union movement will be more likely to spread than squelch the strike." It gloomily concluded that, "Miners on strike in Britain have not been worsted since the war."

On ITV's *Weekend World* a long-faced collection of ruling class experts foresaw a total all out strike and a massive pro-strike vote in a ballot. Brian Walden - no friend of the unions - was forced to report the findings of a

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# THE LONG ARM OF THE STATE

DURING THE FIRST seven weeks of the miners' strike about 540 pickets have seen the inside of a police cell. A barrier of blue uniforms has prevented pickets having the slightest real contact with the miners still going in to work. Pickets have been the target of harassment, assault and legal frame-up.

Plain clothes police have acted as provocateurs egging pickets into prepared traps. Once arrested, pickets have been thumped and booted by the "snatch squads". In the police stations they have been detained for twelve hours or more, abused, interrogated about their political beliefs and fingerprinted. All details will, without doubt, find their way into the police computer at Hendon.

Magistrates have obliged the police by putting "no picketing" conditions on miners as a condition of bail. "Imprison yourself at home, in your welfare or your own county or its jail for you" is the message of the judges.

Miners have been repeatedly stopped and turned back hundreds of miles from their destination. The cherished rights of the "free-born Briton" have been shown up as cherished illusions and nothing more. When the Kent Miners had recourse to the High Court they were politely told to get stuffed. Labour MPs got short shrift when they sought redress from Parliament. No wonder then that miners leaders, Labour MPs, as well as ordinary militants are using the words "police state" to describe the situation.

## WHO ARE THE POLICE?

Police behaviour will have surprised many strikers. After all, is it not the case that from Noddy books to modern police serials the police are presented as the guarantors of law and order? Labour MPs and union officials talk of the police as if they were. Yet this dispute has seen the police blatantly acting as the armed force behind MacGregor's job cutting plans. It has shown the police to be acting as the direct representative of the government and the bosses against the miners.

What is the police force? The police force is separated off from the life experience and conditions of the vast majority - the working class. Even the freshest faced young constable on the picket-line is not an "ordinary bloke" or a "worker in uniform". Whilst a striking miner struggles to keep his family going on £12 a week social security the P.C. is getting £400-£500 a week during the dispute. Since Thatcher came to power five years ago police wages have risen by 60%. An average policeman in London receives £15,000 a year plus rent allowance.

From the moment a youngster joins the police force he or she enters on a process designed to separate them from the working class and turn them into a weapon against the working class. They are trained in separate colleges, where, as even police reports show, anti-trade union and anti-black racist prejudices run riot. Their living quarters and social lives, except in the smaller communities, separate them almost totally from the mass of the population. What little contact takes place is seen by the officers as a threat to "morale" - the term used by police chiefs to describe willingness to smash up working class people fighting for their rights.



The flying wedge in operation during the Steel strike

Andrew Ward (Report)

Whenever a major dispute flares, police from outside the area are drafted in. This is happening in Nottingham today where police forces from 17 different areas occupy the county. It happened in Tonypany in 1910 when 300 London police, backed by cavalry, were brought in to run amok, bludgeoning Welsh miners when they feared "local bobbies" might be too soft-hearted.

In theory Britain has no national police force, only local forces. This again is a fraud and a disguise. The Metropolitan Police and "Scotland Yard" have always acted as a national leading centre for Britain's police. Since the early 1970s this co-ordination and centralisation has been stepped up to meet the "challenge" of working class resistance to unemployment, wage-freezes and closures.

Their defeat at Saltley Gate set the police and the government organising to ensure that they would never face such a humiliation again. In 1972 the Tories set up a National Security Committee. In 1975 Wilson turned it into a Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) as a subcommittee of the Cabinet. It keeps updated files on Sixteen essential industries and services.

were able to intervene and arrest despite the huge numbers of very militant young miners. Why? Because there was no adequate disciplined body of stewards who could maintain what order was needed and tell the police in no uncertain terms to keep their distance. The "spontaneity" of the football stands is insufficient against snatch squads.

The defence of the picket line is now a harder task than ever before. Against the trained police riot squads we need disciplined workers' defence squads. We need our own "flying wedges" and anti-snatch squads, who know and trust each other in battle.

It is the urgent task of the unions at rank and file level to train the youngest and fittest workers, to recruit to our side the unemployed youth to help. Those older union members with military or TA experience or sympathetic ex-soldiers must be called upon to put their knowledge to use.

All of this can be done under the auspices of sports clubs, or through the miners' welfare. It is irresponsible to repeatedly send scores of young miners into battle ill-prepared and with only their courage to defend them. And it is disastrous to use arrests as a pretext for cutting down picket numbers as happened at the Port Talbot steel works. Organised defence must be our watchword.

In the early 70s Arthur Scargill and scores of young militants like him transformed picketing tactics. The police learned from their defeat. If we don't want to face defeat in 1984 we must make changes as bold or even bolder than those of 1972.

The plans of the CCU include provision for the setting up of road blocks outside the main metropolitan areas to cut off the centres of the working class from each other. They include cutting off 95% of the country's telephones and even a round-up of shop stewards and holding them in emergency camps like Rolleston. This unit liaises with the Association of Chief Constables.

In order to coordinate the different county forces in a major national dispute this Association was allowed to set up a National Recording Centre at Scotland Yard during 1981. It commands 20,000 police from different areas. Its present head - David Hall - put its purpose bluntly: "We are determined to enforce that mass picketing is not permitted."

Another important development in the 60s and 70s has been the setting up of special units within the police. These play the role of the riot police and special squads that exist in other countries to repress working class protest. But in typically British fashion they are disguised as part of the "ordinary" British police. The Special Patrol Groups were formed under Labour in 1965 and have since spread to every police force.

Their name has been altered after the foul reputation they gained at a number of demonstrations where they murdered Kevin Gately (1975) and Blair Peach (1979) - both under Labour Home Secretaries. Nowadays these thugs rejoice in a variety of names such as Instant Response or Tactical Support groups or units. They are trained in the use of snatch squads, flying wedges, shield and truncheon wielding assault formations. Increasing numbers of them have received arms training and could be armed very rapidly indeed. The Metropolitan "Blue Berets" proudly displayed as the latest elite unit at the Libyan Embassy siege is only the latest of these special groups.

The British ruling class has equipped itself with a continental style gendarmierie with hardly a squeak of protest from the leaders of the British Labour Movement.

Now the full force of this development is being felt in this strike. One miner has died already. If more deaths, injuries and jail sentences follow, the "guilty men" within the Labour movement who initiated and presided over this need to be brought to account.

Many on the left talk as if the police are somehow "exceeding their legal powers" and departing from traditional practice in this strike. Shadow Home Secretary Gerald Kaufman has protested that: "the police force was not an arm of the state but the servant of the community." Tony Benn claims that we "have moved two giant steps towards a police state." (*Labour Herald* 20.4.84) The truth is that the police's legal powers are almost without limit and have always been that way. As one deputy Chief Constable told *Labour Weekly* (23.3.84) "We can do all sorts of things, and the legality of them can be determined later."

Under common law the courts have given police enormous powers to detain and arrest. Obstruction, breach of the peace or a "reasonable suspicion" that a criminal offence may occur give the police the power to do almost anything.

Thus it is not a question of the police "exceeding their powers". The police are used by the government to instantly respond to resistance and put it down and contain it. Whether they can get away with it or not is decided by how hard we struggle. If we show the slightest weakness then the judges will let them run riot. If proof is needed then the present Police Bill, about to become law, gives us ample evidence.

The passivity and retreat of the labour movement over the last five years has allowed the Tories to pass a law that greatly widens the powers of the police to "stop and search", ban demonstrations and arrest and hold before charging or bringing to court.

In the light of all this to declare that we have moved towards a "police state" is to miss the point. This is the way the state under capitalism is.

The state is an instrument for defending the interests and enforcing the will of the ruling class. The Police force, and the army, whose real nature will also be revealed the moment that the development of the struggle gets beyond the powers of the police are the reality of the state. They may not be normally used; because they are not needed. But they are the essential bedrock of the state which exists to defend the interests of the bosses, the bankers the landowners and their highly paid servants, the judges, politicians, top civil servants.

## FACADE OF DEMOCRACY

It is the "normal" facade of Parliamentary democracy that is the sham. It conceals the real seats of power of the ruling class and saps the reserve and energy of the working class and the organisations of the Labour movement. It is the enormous strength of the organised workers that has obliged the ruling class to maintain this facade for so long. That generations of ruling class politicians have been able to keep up this facade is because the official leaders of the unions and the Labour party have been prepared to participate in this charade. They have done so because they gain their livelihoods from it. Without employers there would be no well paid trade union negotiators with them. Without parliament there would be no well-paid speech makers to debate with the bosses' representatives.

However the ruling class does not have to rule through parliament. In many countries where the economic situation for the bosses has become desperate, and where the strength of the workers' organisations has been broken, the ruling class has resorted to naked dictatorship, dispensing altogether with elections, Parliament etc. Then the police and the army are in total command. We have not reached this stage in Britain yet. To say that we have is false radicalism. It suggests that a battle has been lost that is yet to be fought. It sounds very militant but underneath, it is deeply defeatist. On the other hand workers everywhere must learn from police action in this dispute and recognise the police for what they are - organised squads for protecting the bosses from the working class.

by Keith Hassell

## For workers self-defence

JACK COLLINS HAS declared that: "The Government are not acting from a position of strength but from weakness. They know that the working class is strongest and the level of police operations is, in fact a testimony to our strength." This confidence is misleading. The striking miners far outnumber the 8,000 police who have walled off the scabs in the Nottingham coalfield. They have been able to do so because they are a disciplined and organised force. Discipline allows a numerically inferior force to defeat a far greater number of opponents.

In workers' struggles, the picket line is often vital for the success of a strike. The best and most effective form of picketing is the mass picket made up of thousands of workers who have struck in solidarity. This was the key to success at Saltley Gate, Birmingham, in 1972. Moreover a mass force is the best guarantee that violence will not occur since scabs are not inclined to cause trouble on their own and the police will think twice before attacking it.

Yet if size were all there was to it then the Grunwick dispute of 1977 and the Warrington pickets against Eddie Shah should have been victorious. Since the early 1970s, however, the bosses have sought to put an end to effective picketing through the training of special squads. They smash picket lines and demoralise pickets through snatch arrests of the leading militants.

When the miners' executive and the Special Delegate Conference met in Sheffield the police

# IMPERIALISM KEEPS ITS TOEHOLD

GEOFFREY HOWE'S STATEMENT that Britain cannot expect to continue its administration of Hong Kong after 1997 is little more than a recognition of reality on the part of the British Government. Separated from China by a few hundred yards of water and dependent on the mainland for food and water, Hong Kong is not the Falkland Islands.

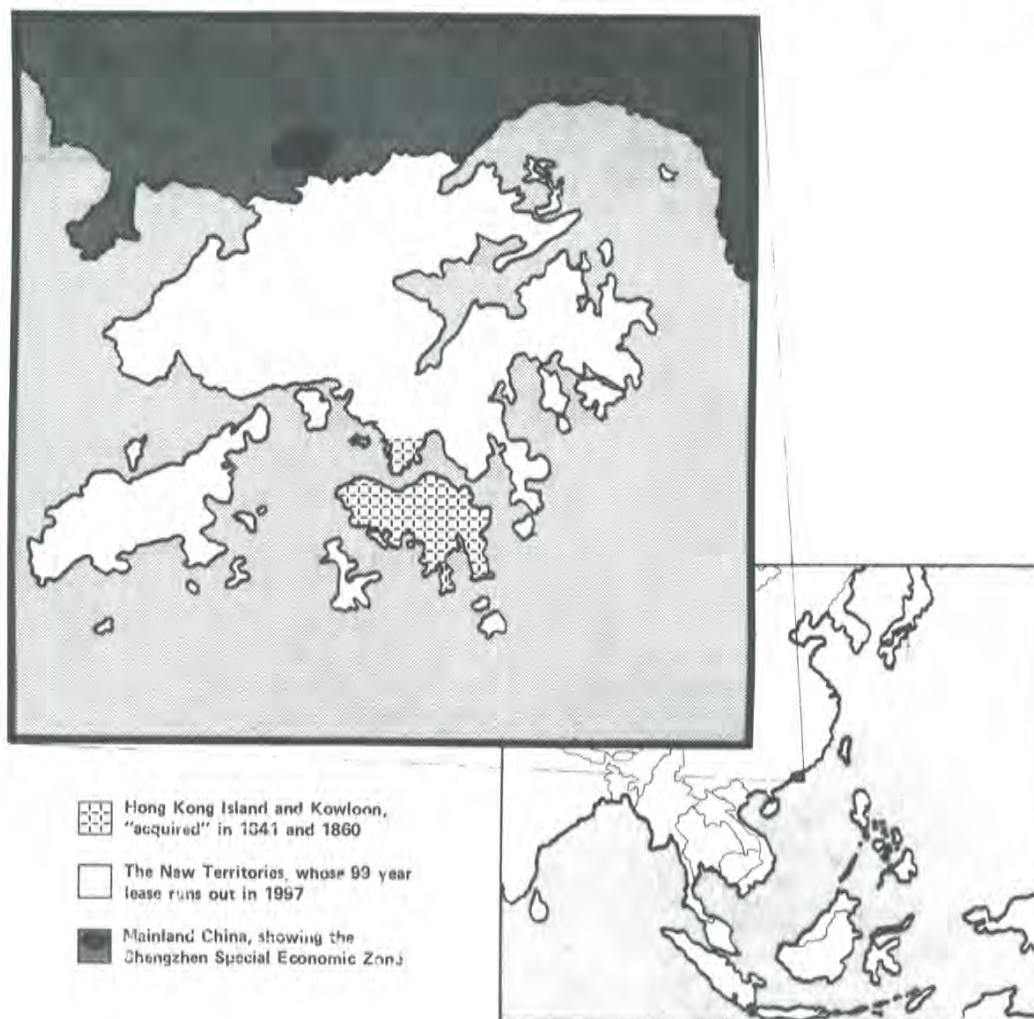
Although the ostensible subjects of negotiations between Beijing and London have been the return of sovereignty to China and the form of administration after 1997 their real content is more likely to have centered on the period up to then. Whatever is said or signed now no one is in any doubt that China, as the sovereign and dominant power, could impose her own wishes at any time. If China wants to give 'guarantees' to world and Hong Kong capital these will have to be in the form of concrete concessions in the here and now.

Equally there can be little doubt but that the Chinese Stalinists do want to reach a lasting agreement with foreign and Hong Kong based capital. The very existence of Hong Kong as a British colony since the Revolution of 1949 is testimony to the willingness of Beijing to compromise with British imperialism in a period when the USA was unwilling to offer such a compromise.

Hong Kong has always been a Thatcherite paradise. Capital can come and go as it pleases and is guaranteed a large and cheap labour force. Unions are weak, protective factory legislation is minimal and unenforced, state supported welfare systems virtually non-existent and workers' housing appalling. All of this has made Hong Kong vastly profitable for British and international capital.

From the British point of view, Hong Kong's primary importance has been as a base for finance capital in the Far East. Thus while in terms of trade with Hong Kong Britain takes third place behind the US and Taiwan, British based banks and finance houses accounted for some 70% of Hong Kong's finance capital operations (banking, insurance etc). The importance of British capital within Hong Kong can be judged by the effect of Jardine Matheson, the biggest of the British companies involved, deciding to move its registered office to Bermuda. The Hong Kong stock market fell by 118.85 points within two days, knocking millions off the value of Hong Kong traded shares.

In the long term, then, Hong Kong's role for British capital is as a staging post in its desire to open up the Chinese mainland, the world's biggest potential market. Indeed, this is already under way. In 1981, David Newbiggin, then head of Jardine's, estimated that between \$3 and \$5 billion



dollars had been invested from Hong Kong in the Shengzhen Special Economic Zone (basically a very large industrial estate close by the border). In 1982 a further \$1.75 billion was invested in the same area. (Figures from *Far Eastern Economic Review* January 1983)

In addition to protecting their own position Britain's negotiators have also been acting on behalf of imperialism in general to ensure that the political administrative framework for future investment will enable them to extract the profits, and impose the laws, upon which their system depends. In the last month China has been obliged to allow Hong Kong receivers to oversee the winding up of a failed business venture in Shengzhen. Such rights, in reality a modern form of extra-territoriality that the foreign powers enjoyed in pre-Revolution China, will be demanded by all foreign capitalists before they will invest in projects such as the Dayu Nuclear Electricity generating plant, also near the Hong Kong border.

All the signs are that Beijing will accept these demands in order to gain much needed capital and modern technology.

Whilst any workers' state (whether a healthy one such as the Soviet Union in the early Twenties or a degenerate one such as China) has the right to make compromises with foreign capital in order to allow economic development, the present policy of Deng Xiaoping and company has nothing in common with that of the Bolsheviks in the 1920's.

The Shengzhen experiment and the proposed Special Administrative Region for Hong Kong (by which the area would remain as a capitalist enclave under Chinese sovereignty) are not taking place in a vacuum. Unable to develop China's huge resources by either bureaucratic command planning or by voluntarist adventures like the Great Leap Forward, China's Stalinists are increasingly turning towards market mechanisms to get the economy going. In effect they are following a distorted version of the New Economic Policy of the early and mid Twenties in the Soviet Union. That policy, introduced in 1921 as a stop gap measure following civil war, imperialist intervention and famine, rapidly created a class of rich, labour-exploiting peasants and

merchants who, by 1927, were demanding that their economic influence be matched by political power.

By echoing Bukharin's famous slogan for the Russian peasants, "Enrich yourselves!" and, at the same time, inviting in foreign capital under foreign control, Beijing is creating a Trojan horse - with China in the role of Troy. The first target of attack is likely to be the state monopoly of foreign trade. If this can be broken down, and it has already been seriously weakened by allowing regional autonomy in dealings involving foreign trade, then China can be brought under the direct influence of the world market. The Chinese economy could not stand up to competition from the far more advanced and capitalised countries but, in attempting to compete, the wages, working conditions and social welfare of the mass of China's population would be driven down below the miserable standards of the sweated workers of South Korea, the Philippines and Latin America.

However, while Mao's successors are playing the capitalists' game they are not a capitalist class. Sooner or later their bureaucratic privileges and control will be attacked directly by the capitalists they are presently wooing in alliance with the "NEPman" and rich peasants. Capitalism does not need a caste of exclusively parasitic bureaucrats, indeed it must attempt to remove them and their control. The present concessions which the Chinese bureaucracy are making to imperialism can only strengthen the restorationist forces in China. In any such clash with imperialism and its agent, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao left under effective capitalist control will become spearheads of the counter-revolution.

For the workers and peasant of China, the present course of the leadership of the CCP demonstrates yet again the urgency of building a genuinely revolutionary party of the Chinese proletariat - a Trotskyist party. They will advance a programme of defence of the gains of the Chinese Revolution via the creation of workers' and peasants' soviets, the building of a revolutionary workers' army and the overthrow of the political rule of the bureaucracy.

A quarter of humanity lives within China's borders. In the last 60 years they have shown themselves capable, even under Stalinist mis-leadership, of prolonged and determined class struggle. When the conflict with capital, at present being prepared via the negotiations and compromises over Hong Kong, breaks out, revolutionary leadership of those masses as an independent political force will ensure that today's agreements will be no protection for either imperialist or bureaucracy.

by Steve McSweeney

## TURN THE TIDE...

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

special poll that well over 60% of miners would now vote for a strike in a national ballot.

Yet it soon became clear that the unity of the Conference was more apparent than real. The overwhelming majority of Nottingham miners remained at work despite the Conference and the call of their own area executive. While the Conference represented an enormous step forward in that, at last, the leaders called for a national strike, it did not arm itself to turn the call for a national strike into the reality of one. That is why the Conference could not break the logjam of disunity in the dispute.

To date a national co-ordinated effort to shame and picket Nottingham out, with huge demonstrations as well as mass pickets, has also failed to overcome the divisions.

Workers Power has always been for a national miners strike. We have also always said that the NUM left's position on the ballot was profoundly mistaken because it offered no way to get an all out strike. In refusing point blank to call for any form of national vote for or against a national strike, Scargill, Taylor and Co have left themselves without any weapon for winning over Nottingham miners except mass picketing and demonstrations.

It has handed the scabs and waverers in Nottingham a 'democratic' excuse for not joining in. It has allowed the bosses' men in the union leadership to pose as the defenders of their members' rights

and hide the fact that in reality they are not 'democrats' but strike breakers.

The traditional NUM ballot is a very bad way of rallying a majority for a strike. We agree with the militants on that. But there is another way of taking votes in the workers movement - a mass meeting with full debate followed by a show of hands. That is how this action got going in most coalfields before or after the placing of picket lines.

**A national call from the leaders for mass meetings in every colliery and a show of hands for or against the strike call would certainly gain a thumping majority for a national strike.**

While Nottingham and Leicester will probably vote against a strike, the militants in those coalfields, backed by a decisive pit head vote for the strike, would be in a far stronger position to use the nation wide democratic majority to finally persuade the waverers in the Midlands coalfields. They would then be able to reduce the scabs to being a tiny minority or eliminate scabbing altogether.

The Conference was right to change the rules. It was right to call for a national strike. The leadership should now call for mass meetings to endorse that strike call. It should go to the Nottingham miners together with speakers from Yorkshire, Wales, Scotland and Kent. That is the way to avoid the old type of bosses ballot and overcome disunity in the NUM's ranks.

Without any form of direct national vote, the ballot continues to hang over the militants like the sword of

Damocles. No wonder militants have grown to hate it. But it can still be removed as a threat by the means we suggest or, if there was no other way out, by only taking a ballot vote at the end of mass meetings. NUM militants have shown themselves to be courageous enough to not be completely hidebound by rules and customs and practice. They should do so once again.

**It is by no means impossible that Scargill's mass rallies, marches and nationally co-ordinated picketing may turn the tide. Everything must be done to make sure they do, but valuable weeks and resources have been wasted.**

Reports from South Wales suggest that despite the presence of 15,000 miners at Arthur Scargill's rally in Cardiff on the 28th, picket numbers are having to be cut for financial reasons.

Failure to overcome disunity in the NUM's ranks has meant that picketing energies have had to be diverted into the Midland coalfields. This has delayed a serious turn of picketing to the power stations and the coal and coke depots. It has also delayed a breakthrough to mass support from other sections of workers.

When Scargill or militants like those we interview on our back page say that the miners can win without Nottingham, they forget that the stand of the Midland coalfields makes it that much more difficult to organise the support the miners will need if they are to win.

The formation of a Rank and File Strike Committee in the Nottingham

coalfield is a giant step forward. Starting from pits like Ollerton, Blidworth, Creswell and Bolsover, an organisation covering the striking miners in 17 collieries has been formed. On 16th April its second meeting drew between 400 and 500 miners and elected a committee. Everything must be done to help this organisation spread and win a majority.

In Leicester a brave minority of striking miners have formed their own strike committee. Jack Jones, odds on favourite with Ottey and Bell for the post of chief skunk on the executive, has refused to see them. He is doubtless prepared to help management discipline them. All these miners need every support we can give them.

At the moment between 7,000 and 10,000 Nottingham miners are out. They must be got onto and kept on the picket lines. That means money. They can expect little help from their own officials. They should get massive support from the national leadership but should not rely on it.

In fact, ironically, this organisation from 'backward' Nottinghamshire shows the way forward for other, more advanced areas. Mass rank and file involvement and organisation needs to be built. Such organisation can and should direct the picketing on a local scale, build links with the rank and file militants in other industries, help build the Wives organisation and keep any vacillating officials in line.

**Independent rank and file organisation can make sure that Arthur Scargill,**

**Peter Heathfield and the left on the executive keep firmly to their pledge of no negotiations over job losses or pit closures.**

"Arthur Scargill - we'll support you evermore" is OK if it means we'll support you as long as you fight to the bitter end for our demands. If it means we'll support you whatever you do then it is a recipe for disaster. The cult of Arthur Scargill's personality is no use to anyone. He is an intelligent and powerful advocate of the miners' cause. He is a tireless organiser but - despite his widely sung ability to walk on water young miners would be very unwise to wait for Arthur Scargill to work miracles.

**A nation-wide rank and file organisation of miners can harness the enormous strength of the miners to bring the strike to a victorious conclusion. It can also - after that victory - be an irresistible force for transforming the NUM into a union ready for action at all times.**

A rank and file movement can win the abolition of the compulsory secret ballot rule and replace it with the workers democracy of the mass pit-head meeting. It can develop internal democracy in every NUM area, removing old corrupt officials and making all officials regularly electable and recallable. It can make sure that the miners are vanguard fighters within the working class at all times. It can ensure that the militants of this strike become permanent fighters for socialism and working class power.

ARTHUR SCARGILL HAS justly been compared with Arthur J. Cook, the secretary of the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) from 1924 until 1931. During the miners' great struggle of 1926 no figure came to represent the anger and determination of the miners more than A.J. Cook. He was adored by the militants in every coalfield as a tireless and selfless fighter for the cause of the miners. He was hated by the right wing trade union leaders. He was pilloried in the bosses' press.

Yet throughout 1926 militant miners had to remain organised and vigilant in order to check Cook's vacillations and to stop any backsliding on his part. Like any trade union official who is not directly and immediately responsible to the organised rank and file, Cook periodically succumbed to the pressure from the government, the employers and their agents in the Labour movement. He displayed major political weaknesses. Miners today must learn the lessons of that period if they are to win full victory against MacGregor and the Tories.

An essential part of the tactics for victory is the ability of militants not only to choose good leaders in the first place, but also to correct their errors and replace them if their conduct threatens the struggle with defeat.

The militant Arthur Cook came to political maturity in the great battles in the South Wales coalfields before the first world war. Arriving in the Rhondda from Somerset, Cook broke with organised evangelical religion and joined the Independent Labour Party in 1905. He played a prominent part in the Unofficial Reform Committee which led the struggles in the Cambrian combine in 1911 and 1912 against the coal owners



and the right wing leaders of the South Wales Miners Federation. This grouping around Ablett, Hay and Mainwaring produced "The Miners' Next Step". Cook was involved in the initial discussions around the document. It was on the initiative of the Unofficial Reform Committee that in 1911 Cook was sent to the Central Labour College which had been established by the Plebs League as a challenge to anti-Marxist indoctrination courses taught at Ruskin College. As well as being a working miner and union activist, Cook gave regular CLC classes in Marxism on his return to the Rhondda.

The militant activists in South Wales - Cook included - were heavily influenced by syndicalism. As against the weak-kneed reformism of the early Labour Party which had become a mere appendage of Lloyd George's Liberals in the House of Commons and against the conservative trade union leaders seeking only to strike deals with the bosses on behalf of the skilled workers, the Syndicalists had a bolder class perspective. Their view was of continuous militant union struggle which would step by step drive the bosses to the wall. But it was utterly vague about how the bosses could be deprived of political power - ie. of their control over the forces of the state. It remained in the end "pure trade unionism", which had no answers when either the economic conditions for offensive trade union struggle deteriorated or when that struggle reached such a point of generalisation that *political tasks were posed*. Last but not least, whilst it had a perspective for rank and file control of the union leaders, it had no overall programme for transforming the unions up to leadership level. Whilst Cook himself became a

# A.J. COOK - THE 'KING A OF THE 1920s

union leader and a member of different political parties, he never outgrew this non-political militant unionism, a fact which led him to disaster in the end.

The generation of militants of which Cook was a part became increasingly prominent in the South Welsh Federation as a direct result of the battles of the South Welsh Miners. By January 1914 Cook was Chairman of the Coedcae Lodge and the Lewis-Merthyr Joint Committee. By 1919 he had been elected full time miners' agent for Rhondda No.1, the largest district within the RWMF. In 1921 Cook became the South Welsh representative on the executive of the MFGB.

Cook's apprenticeship as a militant trade union official coincided with major realignments in British working class politics. The Russian revolution, and the formation of the Communist International in 1919 served to break many syndicalist militants from their previous total rejection of "political activity". They were won to the formation of a Communist Party. Cook was

## DISCIPLE OF LENIN

present at the meeting organised to form a Communist Party in South Wales linked to the British Communist Party. Later in his life he was still to call himself "a humble disciple of Lenin". But Cook's adherence to the communist Party was subordinate to, and potentially in conflict with, his syndicalist inspired Trade Unionism. This became clear as early as 1921.

In 1921 the coalowners locked out the miners in a bid to push wages back to 1914 levels. The Triple Alliance backing from the railway and transport workers collapsed on the notorious "Black Friday" of April 14th. The miners were left to battle alone for ten weeks after which a ballot of the members still rejected the employers terms by 434,614 to 180,724. Despite the ballot, the MFGB executive voted to accept a modified version of the terms with the support of Cook. While the Communist Party militants were fighting under the banner of "no Surrender" Cook's trade unionism led him to accept a major surrender given the isolation of the miners and his view that their bargaining position as trade unionists was effectively undermined. Cook left the Communist Party in 1921 after it had criticised his role in the 1921 settlement. He returned again to the Independent Labour Party.

Despite his break with the Communist Party Cook continued to work alongside the best communist militants in the coalfields. In March 1921 Unofficial Reform organisations from South Wales, Fife, Lancashire and Yorkshire were welded together into a National Miners Reform Movement committed to fighting wage cuts, the six hour working day, one union for all miners and affiliation to the Red International of Labour unions. By 1924 this had been renamed the National Miners Minority Movement with its own paper, "Mineworker" campaigning to organise militants in the MFGB under an open Marxist programme. It was this Miners Minority Movement that nominated and campaigned for A.J. Cook as

secretary of the Miners Federation and secured his election in 1924. Over the next years Cook continued to work with the minority movement's network of communist-led militants.

In background and experience Cook was very much like Arthur Scargill. Moreover, Cook's election represented a very real victory for the militants of the battles in the coalfields since 1910. Scargill's election was also secured by the network of militants who had secured victory in 1972 and 1974. An important difference however was that the movement that secured victory for Cook remained in existence with its own distinct organisation. This was to prove a real advantage in the years ahead. The militants who carried Scargill to power lacked the same degree of conscious and independent organisation across the coalfields. They still lack it today.

Cook's election co-incided with a new offensive by the employers seeking a further reduction in wages and increase in the length of the working day. One quarter of the workforce were already unemployed. The rest faced a drastic deterioration in their living standards and working conditions. During 1924 and 1925 Cook tirelessly toured the coalfields urging the miners to stand firm and prepare for struggle. His speeches played a vital role in galvanising the miners, as Arthur Horner who toured the rallies with him said: "He was the burning expression of their anger at the iniquities which they were suffering."

## BOSSSES' SHOWDOWN

The miners won a nine month respite in 1925. On "Red Friday" in July the government and coal owners backed off from a fight in the face of a TUC commitment to strike support for the miners. In August a Royal Commission was instituted to look into the state of the mining industry. In September the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) was established by the government. Under the guise of concessions, the bosses were preparing the ground for a decisive showdown.

Unlike most other Trade Union leaders Cook was not lulled into inaction by the Government's reprieve. He warned the miners against complacency: "*Next May, we shall be faced with the greatest crisis and the greatest struggle we have ever known, and we are preparing for it...I don't care a hang for any government or army or navy. We have already beaten not only the employers but the strongest government in modern times.*" Here again we can see Cook's great strength as against the other union leaders, his willingness to fight. Here also we can see his weakness, his blind faith in militant trade unionism alone. The miners faced a struggle with the *Government*. To win they had to have solidarity strike action from millions of other workers - a general strike

in short. This was no longer simply a trade union but a political fight. Decisive here would be the actions of the leaders of the other unions. From the outset no militant miner could be in any doubt what the likes of J.H. Thomas and Ernest Bevin would do if they could get away with it. Their position as bureaucrats and their reformist politics meant they would do everything they could to avoid a clash with the government.

The truth is, however, that while rank and file miners expected a showdown and the bosses actively prepared for it, the TUC leaders did nothing and the miners' leadership made no meaningful effort to force the TUC to fight.

## THE INDUSTRIAL ALLIANCE

The MFGB did attempt to create an Industrial Alliance composed of the major industrial unions. Given that at the 1925 TUC Congress, right wingers such as Jimmy Thomas and Pugh were elevated to the Industrial Committee at the expense of the left-wingers, the Industrial Alliance was understandable as a bid to organise effective solidarity. But it too floundered on the fact that the Alliance was left in the hands of the union officials. A November 1925 Conference drew up a constitution but an extremely lengthy bureaucratic ratification procedure in each component union meant that the Alliance never took on any real life by the time the crunch came. And Jimmy Thomas of the NUR was also able to sabotage the scheme by insisting that a condition of membership should be schemes for fusion between the unions in any given industry. This was aimed at preventing ASLEF and the NUR from actively participating in the Alliance together.

## UNPREPARED FOR STRUGGLE

These bureaucratic manoeuvrings in search of the Industrial Alliance effectively left the rank and file of the unions unprepared for struggle and gave the TUC Industrial Committee a free hand to sabotage active preparation. It was not until February 1926 - six months into the nine month subsidy period - that the MFGB executive had its first joint meeting with the TUC's industrial committee. When the Samuel Commission predictably declared in March that it was for wage cuts and against government subsidies, Cook and the MFGB Executive went along with the TUC and Government requests to delay any reply from the miners. Cook accepted a request not to pronounce on the report. Instead he urged miners and their wives to study the report and held an MFGB conference which made no comment on the report and agreed to adjourn for a four week period of consideration.

Once again the TUC leaders were effectively given a free rein to try and avoid a showdown through negotiations with the government. At the same time the coal owners, taking heart from this muted response, insisted on an increase in the working day and district wage agreements in addition to the Samuel proposals. They prepared to lock the miners out by announcing that all existing employment contracts would be deemed to have expired on April 30th 1926.

## FATAL MISTAKE

In their perhaps most fatal mistake the Executive of the MFGB handed the conduct of the negotiations with the government over to the TUC on the basis of the flimsiest of promises that they would back the miners. As Cook was to put it later in "The Nine Days": "We handed over our case to the General Council to defend our present position, on the understanding that they would adhere to their decisions of February 26th."

Miners were told to expect full backing from the TUC which was empowered on May 1st to call a General Strike by a conference of Trade Union executives.

In fact the TUC - with the backing of Labour leaders MacDonal and Henderson - did everything in their power to get out of any commitment. They entered negotiations



Cook (centre) with Smith and Richardson - on their way to Downing St - 26/8/26

# ARTHUR'

with Baldwin on May 2nd that recognised the Samuel Report as the basis of a settlement "with the knowledge that it may involve some reduction of wages." Cook was right to later describe MacDonald and Thomas' speechifying in Parliament as "the most humiliating crawling and pleading such as has never before been witnessed." But at the time the MFGB leaders raised no calls to the rank and file to organise to fight against the treacherous leaders.

Eventually it was the government that broke off all negotiations and left the TUC with no alternative but to go through with their General Strike call. Once that strike had begun the only concern of the TUC leaders was to get it called off at the shortest possible notice and on any terms they could get. The nine day General Strike amply proved that rank and file trade unionists were prepared for a fight. The country was paralysed. But the more this became evident the more the TUC leaders frantically searched for a way out of the showdown. In negotiations containing no miners' representatives the TUC clutched at a cosmetically revised recommendation from Samuel as the basis for a settlement. They then ordered the miners to accept on the basis that the TUC had fulfilled its part of the bargain, had struck and negotiated on the MFGB's behalf. The very body that Cook and the MFGB had handed over the running of the dispute to, stabbed the miners in the back. It called the General Strike off and left the miners to struggle alone.

## POSSIBLE WAGE CUTS

There is evidence that Cook himself had privately accepted possible wage cuts in discussions with the TUC surrendering his famous slogan "Not a penny off the Pay! Not a minute on the day!". More importantly Cook's leadership had failed to warn miners or rank and file workers against the TUC's impending betrayal or issue any call to fight against it when it happened. However fine Cook's speeches may have been and however committed he may have been to the miners' cause, his militant trade unionism led him to make disastrous errors during the General Strike.



1926 strikers

Despite the sell-out of the TUC Cook was still not prepared to take up the cudgels to fight the TUC leadership. Stage by stage the Trade Union leaders distanced themselves ever more sharply from the struggle in the coalfields. In June, for example, union executives refused to place an embargo on coal movements. They closed ranks against any attempt to examine or criticise their role in the betrayal. And Cook played his own part in the cover up.

Cook had produced his own account of the betrayal in his pamphlet "Nine Days". It openly attacked the role of the Labour and TUC leaders. It chronicled the deceitful means by which the miners' leaders were excluded from the proceedings of negotiation with the bosses. It ended by declaring "We will continue, believing that the whole rank and file will help us all they can."



Yet Cook agreed a pact with the TUC leaders to withdraw that pamphlet from circulation. At the September TUC conference Cook stuck to that agreement and stood shoulder to shoulder with the TUC leaders against the left. Minority Movement supporters urged a reference back on the General Council's whitewash report on the "Mining Situation and the General Strike". Cook denounced attempts to wash dirty linen in public helping to secure the defeat of the reference back by 3 million votes to 775,000.

Basically Cook's hope of victory failed once the Trade Union bureaucracy as a whole decided against the miners. He did not dare break with them and mobilise the rank and file of the other unions against the TUC betrayal. With his support the rank and file in the other unions might well have turned the tide and brought the likes of Thomas to account.

## COMPROMISE

In the aftermath of the General Strike Cook tried on several occasions to seek a compromise way out of the dispute despite the resolve of the majority of the miners to strike until victory. In the aftermath of the failure to secure an embargo on coal movement the MFGB accepted the proposals of a collection of Churchmen that there be a return to work pending four months negotiations and compulsory independent arbitration should no agreement be reached. Communist Party and Miners Minority Movement activists campaigned against the agreement securing its rejection against the executive in a district ballot.

By August - increasingly physically exhausted and politically disorientated - Cook was counselling retreat. He had been rebuked by the executive for conducting his own private negotiations with Liberal Politicians in July. At the MFGB's conference he was openly advocating the acceptance of district by district agreements: "It seems to me if we sit still, it gradually becomes a question of district by district, and pit by pit. I do think it is better to face this now than in a month's time when we realise we are beaten, and have imposed on us something a lot worse...I ask you to face the position or produce some alternative, or at least prepare some other means to get to victory."

A.J.Cook had no alternative to going down to defeat quietly.

## CLASH

In both October and November Cook clashed with the Minority Movement over executive attempts to end the dispute. The rank and file were still able to block Cook even if they could not directly control him. In October Minority Movement militants persuaded a delegate conference to reject further negotiations and instead escalate the dispute by withdrawing safety men, stepping

up a propaganda campaign in the weaker areas, blacking imported coal and demanding a levy from the TUC. A district ballot endorsed this by 460,000 to 284,000.

In November a MFGB conference voted to authorise unfettered negotiations with the Government and district by district negotiations with the coal owners. By now one quarter of the miners were back at work as demoralisation and division spread in their ranks. The leadership had signalled several times that it no longer had the will or ability to fight to victory. The more backward areas responded with a drift back to work. The Nottinghamshire Miners Council, led by G. Spencer MP, took unilateral action and negotiated their own District settlement. Once again, however, the militants were able to swing the coalfields against surrender. A November ballot rejected the conference terms by 460,000 to 313,000 after another campaign by the Miners Minority Movement and the South Welsh Miners Federation. But by late November however, the MFGB's ranks were forced to accept defeat. After seven months of bitter struggle, after betrayal by the TUC and vacillation on the part of their own leaders the miners were driven back to work.

## NO PEACE

It would be false to say that Arthur Cook had made his peace with capitalism or its agents in the Labour movement. As Labour leaders Snowden, Thomas and Clynes took 20 guineas apiece from the Daily Express to extol the virtues of patriotism and class peace once the dispute ended Cook replied to the Express and its hirelings in his own pamphlet "Is it Peace?" He denounced patriotism under capitalism as meaning "not to be true to your class, your wife and your children, but to be true to the capitalist class, his wife and his children at the expense of your own."

He retained his sharpest vitriol for the Labour traitors who pontificated in the Express: "Judah at least had the decency to hang himself in Aeldema; he did not write articles recommending peace and co-operation with Herod and the Romans; that he left for the Scribes and Pharisees."

## REARGUARD ACTION

He did attempt to fight his own particular rearguard action against the craven capitulation of the Trade Union leaders in 1927. Emboldened by the defeat of the miners the government pushed through its own Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act whose provisions bear a remarkable similarity to the Thatcher Government's past and future anti-union laws. It became illegal to extend strikes beyond "the trade or industry in which the strikers are engaged" and to intimidate blacklegs. Civil servants were prohibited from joining TUC affiliated unions. In the face of this attack the union

leaders started to talk of the need for a "new spirit" and participated in a series of talks with ICI Chairman Mond and the preparation of a National Industrial Council launched by a Burlington House conference in January 1928.

Himself now a member of the General Council, Cook attended Burlington House and raised the only voice against the whole affair. He published his own denunciation of Mondism - entitled Mond Moonshine, with a sequel Mond's Manacles - in which he declared "You cannot be a socialist and at the same time help the employers to rebuild capitalism. Capitalism and socialism are antagonistic terms. We must either decide to stand by capitalism and abandon socialism, or the work for the destruction of capitalism. There is no middle ground."

## THE MOST LEFT LEADER

Cook still remained the most left trade union leader of the 1920s. By comparison those around him were fakes and shams. Of today's trade union leaders only Arthur Scargill stands any comparison with the commitment and militancy of Cook.

Yet as we have seen, Cook had major weaknesses throughout his career as a trade union leader. To some extent those were the result of the fact that any trade union official who is not under the permanent control of the rank and file will be subject to the pressures of the class enemy and tend to vacillate. More importantly the tradition of trade union militancy that gave birth to Cook and which again moulded many of today's NUM leaders, had tremendous strengths in terms of hatred of the class enemy and commitment to working class interests. But its political weakness became more apparent as the class struggle sharpened into an all-out struggle with the government.

## CUSTOM AND PRACTICE

Whilst Cook distrusted the TUC leaders, he left all the cards in their hands. When they chose to play them, Cook's commitment to the customs and practice of traditional trade unionism meant that the rank and file was never prepared or organised to fight the betrayal. The tradition of rejecting "political action" and depending on trade union action alone led to increased wavering and vacillation on Cook's part as the miners were left to fight their battle alone. In this situation he became increasingly disorientated.

Cook was the "miners' idol." He sacrificed his all for the miners' cause and derived no personal gain from the tenure of office. He was hated and despised by the stuck-up parliamentarians who saw the miners' struggle as futile and doomed. But none the less militant miners had to organise to foil a series of retreats that Cook tried to negotiate. Only the organisation of the Militant Miners' Minority Movement prevented these retreats. That this was the case should make militants all the more wary of ceding all initiative to Arthur Scargill as the new miner's hero. Like Cook he's committed to defending miners jobs and wages. He hates capitalism too. But that does not mean that miners do not need a rank and file movement in the tradition of the Militant Minority Movement. If the Minority Movement itself proved inadequate it was because it itself placed too much trust in Cook and the other lefts on the General Council of the TUC.

## RANK AND FILE

Arthur Scargill is openly dismissive of the record of the Minority Movement. As he once said in an interview "it didn't turn out to be all that effective and there were many weaknesses in it." He does not want to repeat the experience. True enough there were major weaknesses in the Minority Movement. But it was able to organise to resist the vacillations of a left leader. Its problem was that it was not strong enough! The lessons of the 1926 strike are all too clear today. The rank and file militants must organise themselves not only to resist the right wing leaders and coerce the most backward workers. They must organise with other rank and file workers to force the TUC to act and turn their fine phrases into deeds. They must warn against and actively resist the betrayals of the Trade Union leaders. And last, but not least, they must organise to hold the most fiery left leaders to account as well.

by Dave Hughes

# LPYS Conference: Business as usual

LABOUR PARTY YOUNG Socialist Conferences have normally been Militant run rallies where youth are told at length about the evils of Toryism and the advantages of socialism. This year's conference at Bridlington proved to be no exception. Again and again Militant showed how it hides its constant accommodation to reformism behind a smoke-screen of abstract socialist verbiage. Paul Mason Leicester South LPYS delegate reports on the major issues at the conference.

## MINERS AT THE CONFERENCE

For one brief moment it looked as if the miners strike had jolted the YS and its dominant Militant tendency into the reality of the class struggle. An NC statement on the miners' dispute was pushed to the top of the agenda, the floor was thrown open to visitors from the NUM and other unions. Speaker after speaker condemned the Labour leadership for doing nothing in support of the NUM. The platform statement outlined the elements of practical solidarity action; while many YS branches had been involved in building that solidarity, getting over 100 young miners from the picket lines to the conference.

But after the vote was taken and the applause died down it was back to normal. The debate on the miners did not herald a change in the LPYS - rather it was a prime example of what is wrong with it.

The conference dealt with none of the actual problems facing the miners' strike. Instead young miners were treated to the usual diet of abstract calls for "socialism", only shouted a bit louder. It was "Workers' Power's" conference bulletin alone which took up the arguments for rank and file strike committees, that argued alone amongst the left for organised defence against the specially trained police picket busting squads. Most importantly it argued the need for an all out general strike to smash the Tories anti-union laws and the necessity to declare it the moment they were used against the miners.

This was not just a set of "abstract demands". If the miners at the conference could have been won to them, and organised to fight for them, if they could have been explained and argued in the Young Miner bulletins the YS has been producing, this would have laid a firm foundation for a militant rank and file movement in the coalfields. Sadly but not surprisingly *not one* speaker was taken who opposed the Militant line. As usual Militant members who, pushed into a corner, will sometimes agree with such demands "in theory" retreat into arguing the "time is not right". Of course for the opportunist who can only tail the workers' militancy the time is never right to raise such vital questions.

## LETTERS

### Why I've left Militant

Like Many other Militant supporters, I was recruited directly through the LPYS. As this was the first real contact I had had with left politics, I found the Militant's programme impressive and straightforward. Gradually however, I found that I could no longer accept that Militant supply the programme and leadership that the working class will need to overthrow capitalism.

The major task facing Trotskyists today is the building of a revolutionary party, nationally and internationally. I believe that Militant have shown themselves to be incapable of this, and are becoming more and more tied to the Labour Party and the left Labourite tradition. Entrism, which was originally posed and is still only useful as a *short-term tactic*, has been raised to the status of a long-term strategy, even a principle. Leading comrades have affirmed that even in a pre-revolutionary General Strike situation, entry work would continue.

The question comrades should be asking is: will Militant ever leave the reformist party? If the answer to this is *yes*, then individual comrades must be told of this, and made quite clear of the situation in advance, to avoid disaster when the time comes. If the answer is *no*, then the organisation is wholly tied to the perspective of capturing the Labour Party lock, stock and barrel. This strategy is utopian and incapable of building a revolutionary party; it is not enough to take over the Party and union bureaucracy.

It is equally inadequate to hope that the reformist party will be transformed under the pressure of events, and to postpone the whole question until then. Revolutionary parties are not formed by accident. We must not rely on the objective process to do our job for us, but must ourselves build a revolutionary party that can challenge reformism. Militant's strategy is opportunist, and capitulates to Labourism.

As comrades have repeated so often with reference to other Left groups, opportunism is merely the other side of the sectarian coin. Un-

The task of the YS with its "Marxist" leadership and "socialist policies" was to attempt to give *political leadership* to young miners. The first day of the conference signalled its dismal failure to do this.

## WAR

Militant's position on war and how to fight it starts from a completely false picture of the world: "World war is ruled out at the present time because both sides realise that the result would be mutual annihilation and, more importantly the power of the organised working class prevents any lunatic adventures by the generals." (Resolution on Defence Policy.) This fool's paradise could be taken straight from Kautsky's writings just before World War 1 and is about as useful to the working class.

Imperialist capitalism is driven to war in its search for markets, resources and profits. Since the 1970s US imperialism has been preparing a *winnable* nuclear war. That's what Cruise, Trident Pershing are designed for. Militant formally recognise the cause of the war threat: "the fundamental contradiction between the planned economies of the Stalinist states and the capitalist economies". Yet **nowhere - not in any resolution, any speech or statement - is the logical conclusion drawn: that Marxists stand for the defence of the Stalinist states, for their victory in any war against imperialism.** This should be no surprise. "Defence of the USSR" is yet another of the Militant's "secret policies" they agree with but prefer not to argue for in the working class, where such positions, given capitalist propaganda, are "unpopular."

Against Militant's complacent optimism the Socialist League's "Revo Youth" and Socialist Organiser's "Class Fighter" offered an equally bankrupt strategy to combat war. This self-proclaimed "revolutionary" opposition uncritically pushes YCND and "Women's Peace Camps" as the organisations which can defeat the war drive. In the words of a Revo resolution workers' action such as pickets, strikes, blacking "may also be considered"

All three organisations ignore the need to build an anti-militarist youth organisation which rejects all forms of pacifism and recognises the indissoluble link between capitalism and war. Such a movement would fight to win working class action against war as the only way of defeating the imperialist war plans. You can proclaim as Militant does, that "only socialism will end war" right up to the day war starts. But unless you mobilise youth *now*, not tailing behind Greenham Common and "Stop the City", but in militant opposition to imperialism, war fever itself will sweep you away. Even the mild jingoistic campaign around the Malvinas proved this, when at the last YS

fortunately Militant are guilty of both these errors. Extraordinary measures are taken to ensure that serious political debate and polemic with other tendencies in the Labour movement does not take place. Campaigns that are not Militant-controlled are simply not participated in (Police Bill, YCND, etc.) Abuse replaces political argument with opponents, whose organisations are "insignificant and on the fringes of the Labour movement", despite the fact that if no small group could ever evolve into a more influential one, there would be no Militant Tendency today. History has shown that large organisations are capable of being wrong. Dangerously low levels of cadre training also serve to insulate comrades from oppositional views.

Most serious of all accommodations to the Labour bureaucracy has been the total abandonment of any principled opposition to imperialism. During the Falklands war, on the Middle East, and most notably over the whole question of British rule in Ireland, Militant has shied away from confronting imperialism and the chauvinistic tendencies propagated in the class by the bosses. It is a serious situation when "Marxists" refuse to demand the return of an imperialist fleet, offer not even conditional support to Palestinians fighting the expansionist and racist Zionist state, and characterise the national struggle in their own bourgeoisie's oldest colony as a "sectarian conflict" which is a "barrier" to the workers' socialist struggle against the state! Comrades who see the unacceptable nature of these positions must ask themselves why the organisation came to adopt them in the first place.

I have produced this statement to show comrades that I am not "dropping out of politics", but will be maintaining my commitment to Trotskyism. Indeed I have left because I no longer believe Militant to be a Trotskyist organisation. I hope that this statement will cause comrades to think hard about what sort of organisation they are in. Eventually I hope that serious comrades who want to see the building of a revolutionary international will also leave Militant and begin discussions with Workers Power. I believe this group, despite their modest resources, are the only group to offer an alternative to the past mistakes of the "Trotskyist" left.

Richard Gerrard



Young miners

conference Militant even refused to call for the fleet to return to port. And not only Militant! Half of Class Fighter voted for "socialist" economic sanctions against Argentina as well!

## ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

The series of debates on anti-imperialist struggles merely highlighted Militant's opportunism and hypocrisy. Lautara Sandino, representing the Sandinista Youth of Nicaragua received rapturous applause from the conference. The YS voted quite rightly to support the Sandinistas in their struggle against CIA-backed contras. But when it came to struggle against British imperialism, a good deal closer to home, the very same conference not only refused to support the legitimate right of the IRA/INLA to fight British imperialism in Ireland, they virtually shouted down any delegate who argued in favour of this in scenes bordering on chauvinist hysteria.

When delegates argued that the YS should take the side of the PLO in its war against the expansionist Zionist state of Israel, we were told "You have no concern for human life. The reason the Lebanese working class is so small is that they have all been slaughtered by the PLO!"

## A REVOLUTIONARY OPPOSITION?

As usual opposition at YS conference was not easy. Manipulation by the platform guaranteed that 90% of the speakers were Militant supporters. Foot stamping and jeering greeted those few opposition delegates who managed to get to the rostrum. Non Militant resolutions - on YTS and Young Women - completely disappeared from the agenda. Whilst Militant resolutions which fell in composition mysteriously reappeared as NC "statements". A vote to discuss an emergency resolution on harassment of gays was retaken and reversed after militant delegates were unceremoniously herded

into the hall by "Young Socialist" trustees pushing retirement age.

However despite the organisational difficulties of opposing the Militant, the real weakness of "Revo/Class Fighter" opposition - which took 69 votes in NEC elections (25% of votes cast) - lay in its politics. Revo youth avoided political confrontation with Militant preferring to prove they could build a bigger and better LPYS. Their project for a "broad" Briefing type opposition to Militant was summed up when Val Coultas declared it would aim "to criticise Kinnock when he is moving right, but not when he is talking left." A position which even won them the support of the rightward-moving Labour Co-ordinating Committee which instructed its delegates to vote for the Revo candidate.

Class Fighter provided no alternative either. This tendency, like its parent organisation, SO, now takes an ambiguous position on the Irish right to self-determination, peddling a "federal solution" to the Irish question. It rejects a class based analysis of women's oppression, tailing along behind the feminist movement. Their reformist use of the Workers' Government slogan was highlighted at the conference. The amendment from Manchester Central LPYS on the economy was in fact no better than Militant's original left reformist programme for a Labour government committed to "socialist policies." Indeed their call for a "workers' government...under the control of the labour movement" managed to say *nothing* about what such a government would actually do. This is no accident. It is deliberately designed to appeal to left-reformists like the Bennites who think that a Benn led government would indeed defend the interests of the working class. Class Fighter only sows illusions in such a perspective.

Militant's bureaucratic grip on the Young Socialists certainly needs to be broken. The working class certainly needs a fighting revolutionary youth movement. Easter's LPYS conference proved once again that the centrist opposition around "Revo/Class Fighter" is incapable of doing either.

## WHAT'S ON

### SUNDAY 6th MAY

"Remember Kassinga". In May 1978, South African troops attacked a Namibian refugee settlement at Kassinga, Angola. They killed over 600 people. Plays and discussion led by SWAPO  
Africa Centre, 38 King Street, London WC2 at 7.00pm

### WEDNESDAY 9th MAY

Stop the Deportations Now! Muhammad Idrish must stay!  
Demonstration organised by NALGO and the Muhammad Idrish Defence Campaign for Muhammad's Court hearing.  
Assemble 11.30 am in Temple Place, London (by Temple Underground Station). March to Jubilee Gardens.

### FRIDAY 18th MAY

Sheffield Workers Power Public Meeting "Strike With the Miners!"  
7.30pm, Red Deer, Pitt Street.

### SATURDAY 19th MAY

Labour Movement Conference on Palestine.  
Venue: County Hall, London. Credentials (2 delegates max per organisation) £2 from: Labour Movement Conference on Palestine, c/o PSC, BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX

# DON'T LET LABOUR SELL THE MINERS SHORT

FOR MANY MINERS, the conduct of the Labour Party leadership during the present dispute must have been an eye-opener. Leader of a party claiming to represent the interests of the working class, Neil Kinnock has become notorious for harping on about the national ballot whilst rushing to assure everyone that he "condemns violence on the picket line." It has been hard to find genuine words of support from him.

Kinnock's behaviour has led to criticism from NUM leaders. At a South London rally in support of the miners (ironically organised by local Labour Parties), Jack Collins, secretary of Kent area, felt moved to offer this advice to Kinnock: "stand by your class in the same way that the vast majority of the Labour Party are doing."

Kinnock's purpose is not to add the weight of the Labour Party to the miners' strike. On the contrary he wants to prove to the ruling class that his leadership will ensure that any future Labour government will be acceptable to them.

When, on April 26th in the Commons, Kinnock demanded that Thatcher "applies the powers which the House knows she has to resolve the dispute satisfactorily" he had two aims in mind. In the short term to suggest that a resolution "satisfactory" to both the NCB and NUM is possible, and in the longer term, to underline that, if he were Prime Minister he would apply his powers to dampen down the strike.

All the Labour leaders promote the idea that the government should be neutral between the forces of labour and capital. But the government and the police and all the other parts of the state machine - are there to defend the interests of the ruling class.

Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley, who fancies himself as a bit of a literary gent, complained that: "The Home Secretary, in his capacity as Uriah Heep, has commented on the dispute in a way which is intentionally provocative and palpably prejudiced." (Guardian 23.4.84). Hattersley would no doubt be pleased one day to be a Labour Home Secretary. We would be pleased - and very surprised - if Hattersley too was "intentionally provocative and palpably prejudiced" - against the bosses! It is hardly a surprise or cause for complaint that Tory ministers support the bosses and attack the workers. Labour leaders should be responding in kind!

The myth of the state as a neutral body that can harmonise the interests of the two sides of industry lay behind Labour's nationalisation policy in the coal industry. The NCB, with a balance of former coal bosses and ex-union bureaucrats, might have appeared neutral but in its action its class basis was clear enough. In 1947, its first year, the NCB lengthened the working day by 30 minutes. Miners still had no control and working conditions were still under attack.

Nearly 40 years later it appears that the Party leaders have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Industry spokesman Stan Orme is plugging away at the idea of a "commission" to discuss the problems of the coal industry. That is, another "national" state body where the class struggle can be smoothed away. At best, Labour's plans for state intervention would mean short term gains for the miners at the expense of long term "restructuring" in the interests of the bosses. At worst, such a "commission" would be a quick road to a sell-out.



Tony Benn meets the miners

Labour's recent record in office with regard to the miners is a sad one. More pits closed under Labour in 1974-9 than under Thatcher. Arguments that these cuts were less severe than Thatcher's, because pits were left intact in each locality, miss the point. As with other areas of public spending, Labour's attacks in 1974-9 paved the way for Thatcher's policies. As far as the bosses' interests, cuts and closures are concerned, there is a basic continuity between the action of the Labour and Tory governments.

This is shown clearly by the notorious productivity deal, finally foisted on the miners by Gormley in 1978. This deal has been the cause of increased injury and deaths, and has also been ruthlessly used by the NCB to split the NUM: The Minister of Energy from 1975-9, and architect of the NCB's productivity proposals was Tony Benn. His actions in power showed that, at that time at least, his politics were in the final analysis of a piece with those of the Labour leaders.

Now that Labour is in opposition, Benn has found it easier to distance himself from the leadership line and to stand squarely with the miners. Together with Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn stands at the political centre of the miners' struggle with Thatcher. Benn has been rapturously received by miners and other workers in meetings up and down the country. His support for the miners and for the possibility of bringing down Thatcher comes like a breath of fresh air after the cringing evasions of Kinnock and the pompous bleatings of Hattersley.

Scargill and Benn see the miners' strike as a

force that could bring down Thatcher and place their brand of socialism on the agenda. As Benn says "This time it is for real." The problem with the politics of Benn - and Scargill - is that they do not have a way of successfully carrying the struggle forward and dealing a decisive blow to the bosses' system. For all his undoubted sincerity, solidarity and hatred of the Tories, Benn remains wedded to the parliamentary system, to the peaceful reform of capitalism and to the mixed economy.

In his speeches, Benn concentrates on what he calls his "Ten Noes": opposition to redundancies, to the destruction of mining communities, to nuclear power, to privatisation, to media distortion, etc. Whilst this is a fairly accurate description of the breadth of the Tories' attacks (although he misses out the anti-union laws), it in no way forms a programme for action, for winning the strike or for smashing the Tories. *Benn does not call for the basic demands of solidarity strike action or the blacking of all coal.*

To this type of criticism, Benn would reply "But that's the function of the trade unions. I'm a political leader."

This supposed division of labour between economics (the unions) and politics (the Labour Party) is a dangerous weakness. It allows trade union leaders to argue against the use of industrial militancy for political objectives. It allows political leaders a monopoly on the questions of government and policy.

The miners' strike itself shows how every "economic" struggle raises political questions, and any half-way decent political solution must involve

trade union action and working class struggle. If we want to resolve this dispute quickly and successfully, and to do for the Tories while we're about it, then the dead weight of eighty years of labour movement routine will have to be thrown out of the window and the economic/political division dissolved into a fight for a set of answers which can take rank and file workers forward in the fight for jobs, and for the control of the whole of society.

The desire amongst rank and file Labour Party members for a successful conclusion to the miners' strike and for the bringing down of Thatcher is clear enough. Tens of thousands of pounds have been raised from Labour Parties up and down the country. Rallies and meetings have been organised together with leafletting and solidarity campaigns. But there is much more to be done. Labour can become an important focus for building solidarity action with the miners.

\* Estate meetings to build solidarity and collect the 50p per member per week levy.

\* Campaigns in the workplaces for every political levy payer to give at least 50p per week.

\* Constituencies should ensure that affiliated unions make regular donations and discuss the strike, solidarity strike action, and the action they should take if the anti-union laws are used against the NUM.

\* Workplace branches must decide how to organise solidarity strike action and fight against the anti-union laws.

\* Where support committees do not exist, CLP's should take the initiative, calling on all affiliated unions to send delegates to a regular weekly meeting to organise solidarity action.

\* Labour councils covering mining areas must freeze rents and rates for miners for the duration of the strike. During school holidays the schools must be kept open, together with free school dinners.

\* The Co-operative societies must provide free transport for food collections, free credit in village shops etc.

\* "Twinning" Labour Councils or Constituencies with mining villages can be used to increase working class solidarity and material support.

\* Campaigns around the Euro-elections and the abolition of the metropolitan counties must be fused with the fight for solidarity action with the miners and should explain the class - and Europe - wide nature of the current attacks.

\* Walworth Rd must be swamped with resolutions demanding unequivocal support for the miners' struggle against the Tories, and for solidarity strike action.

\* Labour MPs must throw their weight behind the miners. They should organise speaking tours of local factories and hospitals, arguing for solidarity strike action and the widest support for the miners. They must take all possible measures to delay and disrupt the passage of all Tory legislation in the Commons until the strike is won.

The miners have no need of talk about government intervention or compromise. They have to struggle, they have to win. The Labour Party must do all it can to support them in their fight, and to generalise the battle into a class-wide onslaught on Thatcher and her system.

by Matthew Cobb (Norwood CLP)

## Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

### is founded

Representatives of Workers Power, the Irish Workers Group, the Gruppe Arbeitermacht and a group of comrades around the French publication "Pouvoir Ouvrier" met in conference on April 21st and 22nd. The task of the conference was to establish fraternal relations between the groups as a step towards the creation of a democratic centralist international tendency. The fraternal relations group has been named the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI).

The groups involved have always recognised that it is a key task of communists to build a revolutionary international. Only an international organisation based on a common programme able to not only discuss but also direct and lead the work of its national sections, can counteract the national pressures and one sidedness that inevitably arise from national isolation. The decision to found the MRCI flows directly from our belief that Trotsky's revolutionary Fourth International founded in 1938 had collapsed irrevocably into centrism by 1951. That the epigones - Mandel's USFI, Lambert's FI(IC) and Moreno's IWL (FI) - have proved themselves hopeless centrists who, if they ever gained the leadership of significant sections of workers, would lead them to disaster.

Workers Power has always argued that a principled regroupment of revolutionary forces can only come about on the basis of programmatic agreement. This means reaching agreement not only on

fundamental Marxist principles but on major operative tactics in the international and national class struggle. Every attempt to circumvent this necessary task, to find a short cut to building an international tendency, has ignominiously collapsed. Most recently, the farcically short lived Moreno/Lambert FI (IC), the effective collapse of the FIT and the rapid disintegration of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, all bear witness to the weakness of these opportunist regroupments.

The groups which make up the MRCI have been collaborating politically for a considerable period of time. The "Declaration of Fraternal Relations" passed at the conference outlines the areas of political agreement between the groups summed up in the document "Fundamental Principles of Our Programme" (see *Permanent Revolution* No 1) which has been adopted by all the groups. The level of agreement has been further underlined through the development of common positions on key tests in the international class struggle - on the Polish crisis, Nicaragua, Iran, Grenada, the Malvinas war and our response to the cold war hysteria around the downing of the South Korean spy plane over the territory of the Soviet Union. The Easter conference further agreed positions on the latest developments in Central America and the Caribbean,

on the EEC and the coming Euro elections, and on the growing imperialist war drive. Resolutions which will be published shortly.

In adopting a declaration of fraternal relations as a step towards the founding of a democratic centralist tendency the declaration recognises that, "it is necessary for revolutionary groups to develop an organisational framework within which collaboration and private discussion can take place. Within such a framework autonomous groups of communists can test their ability to generate pro-



Leon Trotsky, founder of the Fourth International

grammatic advance, to adopt common responses to current political problems, to create a leading cadre and organisation worthy of the trust and loyalty of the various groups". The establishment of fraternal relations does not preclude the adoption of different positions, on some questions, by the fraternal groups, if internal discussion fails to resolve the differences. But all the groups recognise this as a transitional stage and are committed to continuing the necessary work which will allow the construction of a democratic centralist tendency with an authoritative international leadership.

The formation of the MRCI is a small, but essential step towards rebuilding a revolutionary communist international. In the present period when imperialism is wracked by economic crisis, when it offers the world proletariat and peasantry only increasing misery, and threatens to drag the planet to nuclear catastrophe, while the working class finds itself, once again, led by traitors and vacillators, this task becomes even more urgent. We urge all those - workers and intellectuals - who agree with our positions, who will fight alongside us in the class struggle, to join us in completing this task.

FORWARD TO THE REFOUNDING OF A  
LENINIST-TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL  
FOR A WORLD PARTY OF SOCIALIST  
REVOLUTION

# "GO STRAIGHT TO THE RANK & FILE"

Workers Power talked to 4 South Wales miners on the day of the Special Delegate Conference. We talked to Vivian Jones of Blaenau Lode, Robert Lewis and Michael Brown of Treforgan Lode, and Gary Lewis of Aberpengo Lode. All 4 were on picket duty in Birmingham.

**WP:** In South Wales when the votes were taken in the branch meetings, at the beginning, there was a majority not to strike.

**Mike:** Yes. Nobody wanted to strike because nobody supported us from Yorkshire. Because Yorkshire wouldn't support us last year, the majority this year said, "Why should we support them because they didn't support us last year." My opinion was forget about that, we're all out now - let's do it now.

**Robert:** What they said was, "Give it a fortnight - see what's happening - then we're coming out."

**WP:** You wanted in particular to see what way Nottingham miners were going?

**Robert:** No, as soon as the Kent miners said they were behind them, South Wales said - right that's it, we're out. We're with them all the way. And we'll stick this out all the way too.

**WP:** You never had any illusions in Nottingham?

**Mike:** Nottingham, it's a waste of time, talking to them. They don't want to know you.

**Robert:** What you've got to understand is the Nottingham miners are saying, "My pit is going to close next year, I'll go to another pit." How the hell can they flood all these men into the pits that are left - because they are going to be overcrowded - uneconomical, they'll shut it and this is what we have got to try and put over to the Notts miners. We can understand it everywhere else but we just can't get it through to them.

**WP:** What would you say your success, if any, has been in being in Birmingham?

**Robert:** To get the backing of the other unions up here - marvellous.

**Michael:** The reception we have had up in Birmingham is fantastic. But we're talking to the converted. We're talking to people that will listen to us - but we're not talking to those people who won't listen.

**Robert:** Your committees up here are doing a marvellous job. But can you get it some way that we can go to the rank and file of the other unions? We want to get in and talk to them and tell them our policies and what this bloody government is doing to us and to all unions. They're trying to smash the unions.

**Michael:** At last night's meeting some South Welsh lads said we've got to go to the top before we can talk to the rank and file.

**Robert:** I think that's wrong. You should be allowed to go straight in and talk to the rank and file - you've got closed doors. It is as if someone is



just shutting you out and saying speak to us and we'll tell them. That's wrong we should go over them and go straight in and talk to the rank and file. I think we'll get support from the rank and file. When you're talking to the shop stewards - 4 or 5 people are there, they go back, have a discussion. If you could get through them to the people and speak to them themselves then you can have say 500 people there. If you can convert 200, they will go and spread it around between the other 300 and they will talk about it with each other and say, "Yes there is a bloody cause here." - Our union is going to be smashed - Maggie Thatcher is out to smash us. If she can break our union, if she can break the NUM - that's the end of it, that's the end of all unions. You can forget the TUC and Len Murray.

**WP:** How do you think the decisions of today's conference will assist the strike? It decided to change the 55% rule and against a national ballot.

**Michael:** I think it's a really good decision.

**Robert:** It's the right decision.

**Michael:** Because if we have a ballot, we've got COSA, the white collar workers voting with us - they are voting for our jobs. And they work on the surface in offices.

**Robert:** COSA in S.Wales they have actually gone through picket lines. Yet those men and women have got the right to vote on the NUM national ballot - which is bloody disgusting, I think, what right have they got to vote on a national ballot when they are crossing picket lines and holding their own meetings? What they should have done today is kick them out. Let COSA have a union of their own, not within the NUM. Then have a ballot.

**WP:** NACODs voted 54% for strike action.

**Robert:** In S.Wales, there was 67% to come out. But they lost it - they were over the majority. Over the majority is as we think it, 50%. Anything over 50% should be out.

**Mike:** My own opinion is you may as well carry on now. If you're out on strike now, we've been out now for the last six weeks. Carry it through now, there's no point in going back.

**Robert:** We're out forever now. If we've got to see two Christmases through - we're out. We're not going back.

**Mike:** Viv was saying earlier today that we might have a bit of money now but give it another month or a fortnight and we won't have any money. What are we going to think then? You start to feel the pinch. In the 1926 strike, everybody came out and there was nothing then, was there? We had soup kitchens. It's the same now.

**WP:** So, you're prepared for that.

**Robert:** Yes, and my wife. What my wife wants to do is have a march - she wants to have one and get up there and do something.

**Mike:** My wife wants to go as well, she said she'd go away. I'm proud of that.

**Robert:** And I'm proud of that too. She's fighting, not like the Nottingham women. The women know its not only our jobs that are going, its their living and our children's living.

**Gary:** Don't blame all the Nottingham miners.

**Mike:** There are 7,000 Nottinghamshire miners on strike. But remember there are 30 odd thousand scabs up there. Scabs, not anything else, but scabs.

**Gary:** Blame the leaders.

**Robert:** Yes. Their leaders said in the beginning go through picket lines. They were roughed up in Sheffield last week and they turned round now and said I'm bloody fed up with all this being pushed about, come on boys, don't cross picket lines.

**Mike:** They never told them the truth, what's going on, have they?

**Robert:** They have still got the bloody Spenser union up there, the scab union.

**WP:** You call the Notts miners scabs but Gary is making the point that you've got to blame the leadership. What do you think can be done?

**Mike:** I think now, we can never turn them. All they want is a ballot and they're hiding behind the ballot. We started talking to one or two men at Battersley. They said, "We'll have a ballot and I'll vote for strike." But why can't they just come out on the picket line and say, we're out. Why have a ballot?

**WP:** Do you think that you can win without 30 odd thousand Nottingham miners?

**Mike:** Yes, we can still win it. Of course we can. Leave them at work.

**Gary:** As long as we have support of the other unions.

**Viv:** We've got to have the support of the other unions.

**Robert:** When it boils down to about 50% of the people will be unemployed in S.Wales. You think about it now. Its going to have a snowball effect - and nobody's going to have a job. They want to shut 20 pits. There'll be 6 pits left in South Wales. Don't ever anyone tell me that they're going to shut 20 pits in S.Wales and from all these 20 pits they are going to cram all these men into 6 pits. It's a load of bull and I'm fed up with it. I'm out and I'm going to stay out. MacGregor is only there to do one thing. He did it to the steel industry and he is going to try and do it to the mining industry. But I'm going to tell him now - you're not going to succeed.

## WORKERS IN ACTION

### Great Ormond Street

Another Struggle against privatisation at a London hospital has already begun. The plans were being prepared by the Governors of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children to be considered at in 19th April meeting. Two days before the Joint Shop Stewards Committee called a mass meeting. Over 80 NUPE, COHSE, GMBTU and ASTMS members gathered to hear the chairperson explain how if privatisation went ahead it could mean wage cuts, staffing reductions, loss of benefits, deterioration in the quality of service and attacks on trade unionism.

Two strikers from Barking Hospital spoke to the meeting and gave living proof of what happens if privatisation isn't prevented. Ninety domestic staff have been on strike six weeks now. The administration put the fate of the hospital cleaning in the hands of Crothalls. Crothalls boasted they could do the job cheaper than the NHS itself.

**There was only one snag. It meant slashing pay by a third and cutting back holiday and sick pay entitlement!** The patients suffered too. Hospital wards - cleaned daily before - were now cleaned once a week only. Even the standard of cleaning materials was cut to make sure profits were squeezed out of the workers.

In addition two Kent miners - Chris and Peter - from Snowdown Colliery addressed the meeting. They correctly argued that a miners' victory was essential for the whole labour movement if the Tories were to be stopped. They appealed to the health workers to recognise that they were all involved in the same fight.

The mass meeting unanimously passed a resolution to oppose privatisation plans at Great Ormond Street and to organise a lobby of the Board of Governors meeting two days later. A collection of £68 was taken which was split between the Barking strikers and Kent NUM. This was in addition to a £46 collection at an earlier meeting with the JSSC.

Strengthened in resolve by the mass meeting the lobby on Thursday 19th April impressed the administration with its determination. About 50 workers occupied the room and remained while the twenty governors met. They forced the privatisation plans to the top of the agenda and witnessed three documents on the questions "discussed" and approved in twelve minutes! Only 2 governors voted against the decision to put the service out to tender.

The next few weeks will be crucial in the campaign to halt the privatisation plan. The JSSC must draw up battle plans and put them to a mass meeting. To begin with absolutely no co-operation must be given to the contractors as they roam the hospital in preparation for drawing up their tenders.

Secondly, the union must not hurry to cut its own throat in an attempt to prevent being murdered! Six weeks ago the Governors at Queen Elizabeth Hospital (linked with Great Ormond Street) rejected privatisation plans because the union surrendered up its bonus scheme, accepting a productivity deal and 'natural wastage' of staff.

**Instead of this a commitment to strike action is needed from the moment any tender is agreed to by the Board.** In the meantime the District Shop Stewards Committee involving the Six linked hospitals must pledge its firm support when it meets.

Crucially, Great Ormond Street workers should do all they can - including joining the pickets to stop the scabs - to help the Barking Hospital health workers deliver a crushing blow to Crothalls and the parent company Pritchards. United industrial action alongside all workers under Crothalls' tyranny is the best guarantee that Great Ormond Street workers have for halting the privatisation threat in its tracks.

Pickets at Barking Hospital (Upney tube) start 6:30 am.

## AROUND THE COUNTRY

### Birmingham

ASLEF MEMBERS OF the Birmingham Saltley depot responded to the miners' strike with a vote to refuse to move coal trains. 12 drivers were suspended for this action. When some scab drivers agreed to move coal trains NUR signal men at the Saltley power box refused to give them the green light.

This action not only stopped the coal trains but threatened to bring the entire Midlands rail network to a halt. Faced with such action management backed down and have not been asking drivers to take out coal trains again.

This joint solidarity action must be stepped up. British Rail have offered a humiliating pay offer to ASLEF for April. ASLEF militants must build on solidarity action with the miners and organise for an all out fight for the full claim now..... alongside the miners. BLACK THE COAL. WIN THE FULL CLAIM.

To do this links must be built between all the depots that are taking action. Militant depots must forge links with individual militants in depots that are still moving coal - in some Nottingham depots for example. In addition ASLEF must build on the joint solidarity actions with NUR to confront BR with the fighting unity of all rail workers.

NUR West Midlands area council, for example, voted on the 25th of April for a major rail stoppage. They called for a series of one day strikes as a ges-

ture of solidarity with the miners. Divisional officer Jack Lanwarne declared, "The miners cannot win this fight alone. We are determined to help them and we believe this could lead to a General Strike.

Now is the time to extend the backing for the miners and fight for the interests of railworkers against BR management.

ALL OUT ALONGSIDE THE MINERS

### Reading

In the face of bitter opposition militants on Reading Trades Council committed the Council to launching a miners support committee. One successful public meeting has already been held and the committee is campaigning to secure the maximum number of delegations from Trade Union branches.

### Leicester

Leicester Miners Support Committee has written an open letter to the Labour controlled Leicester City Council. The Labour leaders have profited from the miners' struggle to the tune of £8000 they took for hiring buses to the Police who are occupying the Leicestershire coalfield. The Committee has demanded that the £8000 be given to the miners. that the council withdraw all facilities for the police and that it provide office recreation and canteen services for the flying pickets.

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