

**SCARGILL WAS RIGHT**



**SOCIALIST**

**ORGANISER**

*Unite the left!*

**Save  
the  
pits!**

**DRIVE  
OUT THE  
TORIES!**



***Now is the time to fight!***

## Should we call for a General Strike?

### THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Jack Cleary

**T**o call for a General Strike now is not to live in the real world. It is a diversion. The TUC will not call such a strike, and conditions are anything but favourable for a general strike from below.

Talk of a general strike is heard now in a number of quarters: from some of the discredited scabberding leaders of the UDM, who say - meaning that *nothing* can be done - that only a General Strike will do any good; from the Socialist Workers' Party; and, sometimes, from miners who want to fight.

We too would like to see the labour movement rally around the miners and strike to defend them. We advocated a general strike during the 1984-5 miners' strike. But right now the labour movement is only beginning to pick itself up after a long, long prostration.

Far better, then, to concentrate on advocating concrete and realisable things, such as building links between miners and rail and power workers, than advocate an unrealistic "big bang", a sudden, miraculous leap over all the stages of reviving working-class militancy.

It is very unlikely to happen. Nothing the Left can deliberately do now will make it happen in the calculable future. To call for an unrealistic General Strike can depress and demoralise people who might, however, by acting now in their own industries, bring a general industrial confrontation with the Tories nearer.

Talk of "General Strike" now is for both the right fakers and the left irresponsibles - a retreat up the ladder of abstraction and generalisation.

From the SWP - who do not believe a General Strike remotely possible - the call for a General Strike is just another way of saying *nothing can be done*, which is what they have said for most of a dozen years, and even for the first half of the 1984-5 strike. Nothing can be done in the broad labour movement, not much in the mines: the slogan, however, sounds clear-cut and "logical" ("what we would do if we led the TUC") and good for recruiting inexperienced students to the SWP.

It is throwing in the towel, but in such a way that the good "party-building" slogans written on it catch your eyes. It is not serious working-class politics.

Nor is it intended to be: during the miners' strike of 1984-5, when the idea of a general strike did have some sense to it, the SWP would have nothing to do with it!

Revolutionary socialists, basing themselves on the experience of the Marxist movement, put forward ideas, proposals, and slogans for the labour movement, and mean what they say: we do not use ideas that cut against the realities facing the working class, and which cannot conceivably be realised, as come-ons. The General Strike slogan is a slogan for millions, or it is a nonsense. The Marxist organisation relates to the working-class movement, to the real logic of its development, and to the necessary stages in the struggle, or it condemns itself to an existence on the fringes as an irresponsible sect.

The SWP uses slogans the way an advertising agency does: not to express the logic of the class struggle, and as tools for intervening in it, but as decoration, to create an "image": oddly enough, though its ultimate goals and its target audience are different, the SWP uses the same advertising-agency approach as the Labour Party used in the last election.

This is not serious working-class politics. Spontaneous general strikes do occur: they are not started by antics such as these.

# We need money for the fightback

**S**ocialist Organiser needs your help to back the miners!

The bosses' newspapers are backing the miners - for the moment. Vicars and Tories are "horrified" - for the time being.

But Socialist Organiser will be with the miners - all

the way.

The labour movement needs socialist ideas and a socialist press which can put forward a workers answer to the capitalist crisis. Socialist Organiser puts forward working class politics; a socialist counterweight to the

hypocrisy of the Sun and the sanctimonious pomposity of Winston Churchill MP.

But we have not got the backing of Rupert Murdoch. We are not stinking rich like Churchill.

We need your support to publish leaflets, papers and

hold meetings to back the miners. Our resources are stretched. Why not send a donation to our fund? It is a practical way to help the struggle.

This week we received £284.80 towards our fund drive target of £5,000 by the end of January 1983.

Our current total stands at £1,523.80.

Thanks this week include cheques for £50 and £20 from two readers in Manchester.

Send cheques/POs (to "Socialist Organiser") to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

# Miners need your support

**John Waddington from Bentley NUM, Yorkshire, spoke to SO**

**B**entley pit has broken all productivity records. Last year we produced over 1 million tonnes of coal, we made £6 million profit, this year we have already produced £3.5 million profit. Our colliery manager announced we would at a canteen meeting. Everyone was absolutely sickened. People were very demoralised, quickly resigned to the fact that there would be nothing we could do. Most men felt that a strike would be useless given that there are 40 million tonnes stockpiled at the pit head and power stations, three times the stockpile at the beginning of the '84 strike.

But very quickly the mood

began to change. This was entirely due to the unprecedented support that we began to receive. Not just the press and Tory backbenchers, but from the communities, other trade unionists and people in general. This support began to give us a lift.

We held a meeting last Saturday attended by over 400 miners. This meeting decided that we had to really campaign to get our message across to all other workers to build a mass campaign. We had to keep up the momentum. People felt that it was no use attracting only the "10p in a bucket" support we had in 1984/85. We need more than money. We will need mass demonstrations, marches, and action from other trade unionists.

I believe that a ballot for strike action of the NUM would

be defeated. Indeed if we end up balloting on our own I believe we will have lost our campaign. We need other trade unionists to take a lead for us, showing by taking action that we have their support. In these circumstances we could win, and our members would undoubtedly vote for action. I think the key is solidarity. We did not get it in '84 and that's why we lost. It is essential we get it now.

The meeting was split over the UDM. Half of the men believe they are scabs and that we

should have nothing to do with them. The other half, including myself, believe that it is vital to have unity with rank and file UDM members. United our chances are much greater. However, I do not believe we should have anything to do with Link or Prendergast, the people responsible for splitting the NUM and helping towards our defeat.

I believe the Tory announcement to delay closures means nothing. I think they came in through the front door last

week, and now intend using the back door. What we need is permanent jobs. I still feel they are treating us like men in condemned cells. Instead of dying today, they want us to die tomorrow. However, the announcement is significant in that it shows the government are on the run. All the more reason to step up the action now to ensure a complete victory. Our task is only beginning. We need the support of all trade unionists and the public to finish off the task.

## Alliance for Workers' Liberty meetings 'How to fight the pit closures'

### Wed 21 October

**AWL London Forum.** Speakers include Paul Whetton (Secretary of Notts NUM rank and file strike committee 1984-85) and John O'Mahony (editor Socialist Organiser) 7.30pm Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road.

### Thurs 22 October

**Brighton AWL meeting** 7.30. Unemployed Centre, Tilbury Place

**York University AWL** 1.15 Room V120

**Leeds AWL meeting** 7.30 Adelphi Hotel.

**Middlesborough AWL** Details: 0642 218274

### Kent University AWL

7.30 Peter Bird Room, Eliot College.

### Hull University AWL

7.30 Student Union.

### Glasgow AWL

7:30 Langside Halls

### Fri 23 October

**York AWL meeting** St Johns College 5.00

### Sat 24 October

### Nottingham AWL Dayschool.

Major sessions on: Miners' strike of 1984-85 and How to Stop the pit closures. 10.30-4.30 International Community Centre, Mansfield Road.

### Sheffield AWL meeting

1.00. Unemployed Centre, West Street.

### Tues 27 October

**Manchester AWL meeting.** 7.30 Town Hall.

### Wed 28 October

**Luton AWL meeting** 12.00. Luton College students union

### Thurs 29 October

**Newcastle AWL meeting** 7.30 Rossetti Studio, Leazes Lane

**Westminster University AWL** 12:00 Room 2.6 Student Union

### Fri 30 October

**Lancaster University AWL** 7.30 student union.

## Students back the miners

By Paul McGarry

**S**upport for the miners is strong amongst students. The backing given to the miners in the 1984/5 strike will be repeated.

As soon as the closures were announced supporters of Left Unity took the initiative in organising 'students support the miners' groups in colleges. In Newcastle, Left Unity members are organising a rally in defence of the miners. In Sheffield, Left Unity supporters collected over £200 for the miners in just a couple of hours.

Students should follow these examples. Invite NUM members to speak at union general meetings, Labour Clubs and rallies.

NUS Women's Officer Alice Sharp told SO that, "Lorna Fitzsimmons, NUS President, has been telling student unions not to book coaches for the NUM lobby because it breaks the law. Student activists are ignoring her. They want to act to help the miners. Fitzsimmons has refused to organise an emergency NEC meeting that Left Unity has called for. Constitutionally she has no right to refuse."

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## PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

**T**he following statements were drawn up last week by the editors of the *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Sun*, *News of the World* and *Star*. For some unaccountable reason they have not yet published them:

### Mr Scargill - an apology

On one or two occasions over the last ten years our newspapers may have implied that Mr Arthur Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers, was in certain respects a less than admirable character, not wholly deserving of public sympathy or support. Headlines such as "Scargill's Jackboots Set to Trample Democracy" and "Power Crazy Arthur Menaces Civilization" may have been interpreted as criticisms of Mr Scargill's political views and style of leadership.

We now fully accept that there is not a scintilla of truth in such suggestions. Mr Scargill is, in fact, an outstanding patriot, democrat and leader of men. His political acumen is beyond question.

Furthermore, any suggestion that the National Union of Mineworkers is made up of "Bully Boys", "Thugs", "Luddites" etc, that may have crept into some of our coverage over the years, is similarly erroneous and misleading.

The NUM is, in fact, a great national institution and bastion of democracy, made up of Britain's Finest, the Salt of the Earth, National Heroes, etc.

We wish to unreservedly withdraw all our previous coverage of the mining industry and apologise to Mr Scargill and his members for any distress that may have been caused to them.

### Mr Major - an apology

On certain occasions - notably the first week of April 1992 - our newspapers may have contained material suggesting that Mr John Major was in some respects an able and compas-

sionate man, quite fit to be the Prime Minister of Britain. Furthermore, it may also have been implied that Mr Norman Lamont was a competent administrator with a sound grasp of basic economics.

We now fully accept that there is not a scintilla of truth in such statements and we wish to withdraw them unreservedly. We apologise for any distress that may have been caused to the population of Great Britain.

Signed: Kelvin Mackenzie, Max Hastings, Andrew Neil, Charles Moore, Nicholas Lloyd,

Eve Pollard and others too numerous to mention.

## Solidarity

400 construction workers at the Drax power station in Yorkshire plan to strike in support of the miners on 21 October. They are working on the de-sulphurisation plant. Many believed they had 25 years work lined up modernising coal-fired power stations, but not any more.

## March and rally for jobs

Sunday October 25 London

Assemble from 11am at Embankment

March 12.30pm

Rally 2pm,

Trafalgar Square

Called by the TUC



Anti-poll tax protest outside Labour Lambeth Town Hall. Labour's role in implementing the poll tax was shameful. The anti-poll tax movement was a missed opportunity for the labour movement. We cannot afford to miss the tide again. Photo: John Harris

# We can get them on the run!

The Tories have turned tail and run! Don't be fooled, though: it is a retreat, not a surrender of their plans for the mining industry. They intend to fight another day. They have only postponed the closures.

Yet it is a tremendous victory! The loud public outcry of shock and disgust at the Government's decision to kill off a large part of the mining industry, and 30,000 mining jobs, forced Major and Heseltine into a panicky retreat. The alternative, probably, was defeat in the House of Commons.

Tory MPs too were outraged, and Tories throughout the country. Casually, like farmers deciding to give up an unprofitable line of livestock, Heseltine and Major decided to throw 30,000 miners and their families, together with thousands of other workers in ancillary industries, on the scrapheap.

Almost absentmindedly, they blundered into a major political crisis. That there would be a large-scale outcry was, it seems, totally unexpected by them, taking them completely by surprise. For them it was "just business". The market decreed it — and who can defy the market? Have they

not spent 13 years educating the British people to accept "market discipline"? Have their press not demonised miners and miners' leaders, teaching people to hate and despise them?

A mixture of arrogance, callousness, and divorcement from the gut feelings of ordinary people, rendered the members of this Government incapable of seeing the enormity of what they proposed to do until other people's outrage brought it home to them.

In the House of Commons on Monday, Heseltine was quite candid in explaining where the Cabinet thought they had gone wrong: they had underestimated people's reaction, and were therefore retreating. It was not that what they proposed to do to miners and miners' families was wrong, but that there was so much objection to it from non-miners that it posed a threat to the survival of the Government.

This political crisis is not about the miners, though it has been triggered by the attack on the miners, in

defence of whom the whole labour movement must now rally. Nor is it about Maastricht, the ERM, or the economy. It is about all these things, but it is deeper than any of them. It is about the whole stewardship of the Tory Government, the whole philosophy with which they administer the affairs of Britain.

What is in human terms the sheer madness of this Government's callous worship of blind market forces was

**"The Tories thought they could do what they liked, get away with anything. They have just discovered that they are mistaken."**

brought home to people startlingly by the decision to stamp out 30,000 miners' jobs. What was detonated by that announcement was the widespread

outrage at the workings of the same crazy philosophy all through the society over which the Tories rule — the slow death of the National Health Service, homelessness, unemployment, the growth of inequality.

That other Britain, at the core of which is the organised labour movement, has long been hammered, beaten and terrorised into a remarkable silence by the ascendant Tory minority. The Tory victory at the recent General Election seemed to underpin and strengthen their hegemony over the other Britain, so much so that there has scarcely been a peep out of the official Opposition, John Smith's Labour Party, since April.

The Tories thought they could do what they liked, get away with anything. They have just discovered that they are mistaken. The decision to slash the mining industry has proved to be "the cut too far". It triggered the outcry which has forced them to turn tail and run, for now.

The fact that the government has been beaten back is a fact of tremendous importance. Since the early '80s,

widespread belief in the invincibility of the Tory Government has helped deter workers from fighting. The myth of Tory invincibility has been shattered. They can be beaten. We can get them on the run.

In 1984-5 the miners fought one of the greatest strikes in working-class history, under the slogan "Coal Not Dole". Rejecting and challenging the politics and economics of the Tories, the miners insisted that general social and human concerns should take precedence over the narrower economic considerations championed, on behalf of the bourgeoisie, by the Tory Government.

In that confrontation the miners represented what Karl Marx once called "the political economy of the working class": production for need, not profit.

The labour movement let the miners fight alone, and stood idly by while the Tories beat them down. In the intervening eight years the triumphant Tories have subjected the people of Britain to an orgy of unashamed "capitalist political economy", devastating the welfare state. The majority of the British people — to go by opinion polls on the NHS, or on general attitudes — never wanted that. Had the Labour Party or the trade unions done their job, millions of people could have been brought into active opposition to what the Tories have been doing.

Continued on page 5

## Don't trust the Tories!

The government has retreated. They have not surrendered. A historical parallel is instructive: the events that led up to the General Strike.

On June 6 1925 the coal owners (it was before nationalisation) gave notice to the Miners Federation (the predecessor of the NUM) to give notice terminating the existing agreements. They wanted:

- big wage cuts;
- an end to the principle of the minimum wage in the industry;
- an end to national agreement and a reversion to regional agreements.

(The NUM gave this to the Coal Board in 1977, thus preparing them for the split with Nottingham in 1984-85).

Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin backed the owners. All workers in Britain needed to have their wages cut, he said. A subsidy of the mines was simply unthinkable!

The labour movement forced him to think about it. The Miners Federation said that they would not even talk to the owners until their demands were withdrawn. The TUC General Council backed the miners, so did the TUC Conference.

The transport and rail unions pledged support: if the owners locked out the miners they would stop all movement of coal, and give maximum solidarity support to the miners.

On Thursday 30 July 1925 a conference of trade union executives unanimously endorsed plans for resistance. The labour movement was on a war footing.

On Friday 31 July — known ever afterwards as 'Red Friday' — the government buckled. It would now provide subsidies for 9 months, while a Royal Commission on coal, under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Samuels investigated the situation.

Victory! Or was it? No, the government was buying time. They used the 9 months to prepare; the labour movement did not.

In early 1926 the Samuels Commission reported, more or less backing the owners demands. The miners still refused, and were now made to look unreasonable. They were locked out.

To back the miners, the TUC called a general strike. After 9 days, though the strike was still solid and growing, they called it off. The miners were left to fight on alone for 9 months, to defeat.

The great miners leader AJ Cook said on 'Red Friday': "This is the first round. Let us prepare for the final struggle". Cook was absolutely right.

We must prepare now! Occupy when they try to close a pit.

Build alliances of coal, rail, power, transport workers. Don't trust the Tories.

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*"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."*

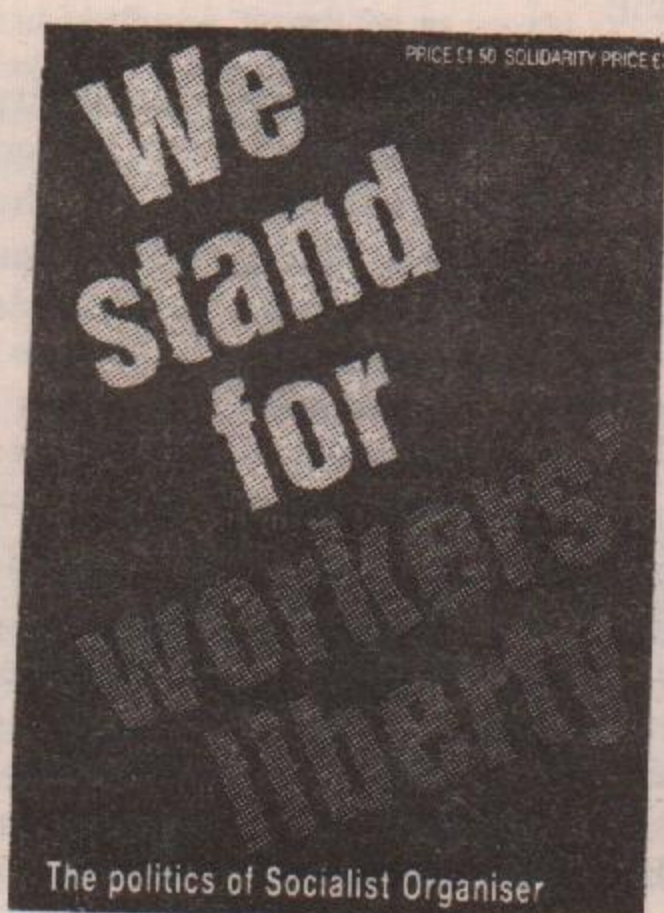
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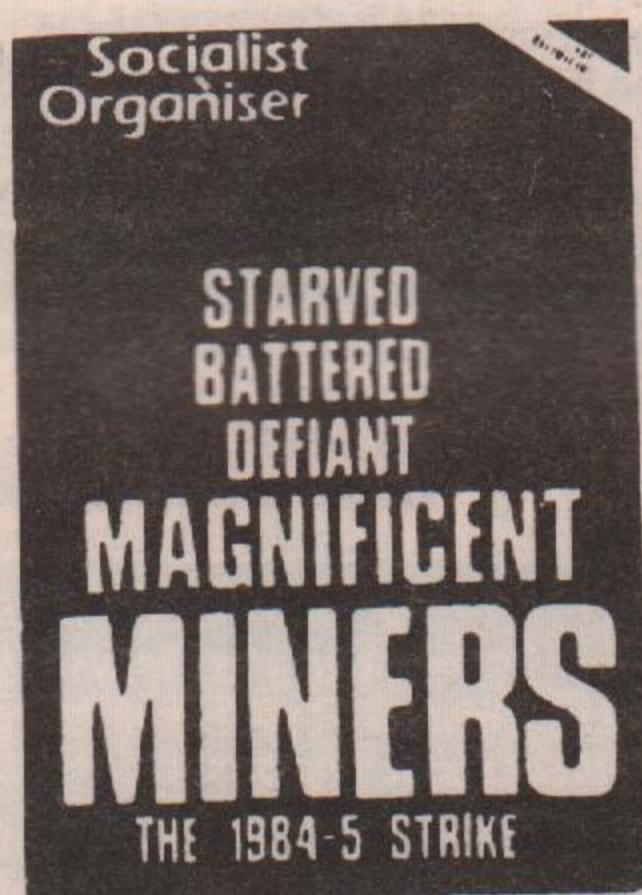
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The market means human waste and suffering. Whilst the homeless try to survive on the streets, the rich buy another mansion

# Throw off the slavery of the market!

**Martin Thomas indicts the capitalist market economics of the Tories, and argues for the socialist alternative — democratic planning.**

**H**omeless people need houses. Millionaires “need” three or four mansions.

Hungry children need food, and in the prosperous industrialised Britain of 1991 some half a million children still go hungry for lack of cash every month. Millionaires “need” banquets in expensive restaurants.

Barefoot children, or children whose feet have grown need shoes. Imelda Marcos “needed” thousands of pairs of shoes.

The free market tallies supply and demand, more or less. But it always ranks the whims and indulgences of millionaires as more urgent than the needs of the poor — because demand is only effective if backed up with cash.

And the existence of millionaires and poor people is a logical, inevitable result of market economies.

The person with more money can buy goods at the cheapest price, at the best time, and then resell at a profit. The poorer person, living hand to mouth, cannot choose when and where to buy, and has to pay higher prices.

Once the richer person has reached a certain level, he or she can become a capitalist by buying not just goods but the labour power of other people.

A week’s labour produces two or three times the value of a week’s wage — and the employer pockets the gain. The rich become richer on a grand scale, and the poor poorer.

In modern capitalism the greatest, quickest fortunes are made not by employing productive labour, or by trading goods, but by borrowing

and lending money between productive capitalists.

This “casino economy” is not an aberration, but a logical product of market capitalism.

Inequality between those who have something to sell in the market — be it only their own labour power — is only half the inequality generated by the market system. Children, old people, parents or carers occupied full-time by care duties, and people unable to work because of sickness and injury, all count for nothing in the market. They are dependent on the “other” system which the free market needs as back-up — the family.

Children, women, old people, disabled people are natural losers in the free market economy. Their “dependent” status also fosters all sorts of mistreatment and injustice in the private, shut-away family circle.

**“Given the overthrow of capitalist rule, and the democratically planned reorganisation of production we can distribute things free”**

All welfare safety nets in a market economy are limited by the axiom that a market must hurt in order to work. In Gore Vidal’s phrase, “It is not enough that I should succeed. Someone else has to fail”.

And the market’s distribution of hurt and punishment is very rough justice indeed.

Ross Johnson was boss of RJR-Nabisco, a huge food and tobacco

corporation in the US. He had little or no interest in improving production — his one new product venture was an expensive flop — and he spent millions on salaries, expenses, bonuses and flashy offices and company planes for himself and his cronies.

Financiers saw the company as ripe for a buy-out. Johnson was pushed out, and a “leaner” management was brought in. Here was the market “punishing” inefficiency as it is meant to do.

Yet Johnson didn’t really get punished. He got a huge pay-off, and went off happily to start a new business. Hundreds of RJR-Nabisco workers who did their jobs well and conscientiously, and who had no share in Johnson’s debauches, were punished. They lost their jobs. The story is told in a best selling book, *Barbarians at the Gate*.

The blind, half-random, penalising of inefficiency does give a market economy some dynamism and drive towards efficiency and growth. But it is very erratic.

Crises are built in to the system. At one time everyone strains the limits of their credit to buy and invest more — at another everyone holds on to their cash, and saves it for a better day. Both boom and slump, once underway, tend to snowball.

In the crisis, unsold stocks of goods, and unemployed workers capable of producing more goods, stand alongside terrible shortages and poverty. That, again, is no aberration; it is a normal, regular product of a market economy.

In a market economy, people do not meet each other as people. They meet each other as breadwinners and dependents (in the family) or as appendages of such-and-such amount of money, goods, or labour power. In the market economy, money buys everything — and the corollary is that human needs and wishes “buy” nothing (outside the

family). Markets make a bleak, brutal, heartless world. They make a world in which human beings are slaves to production.

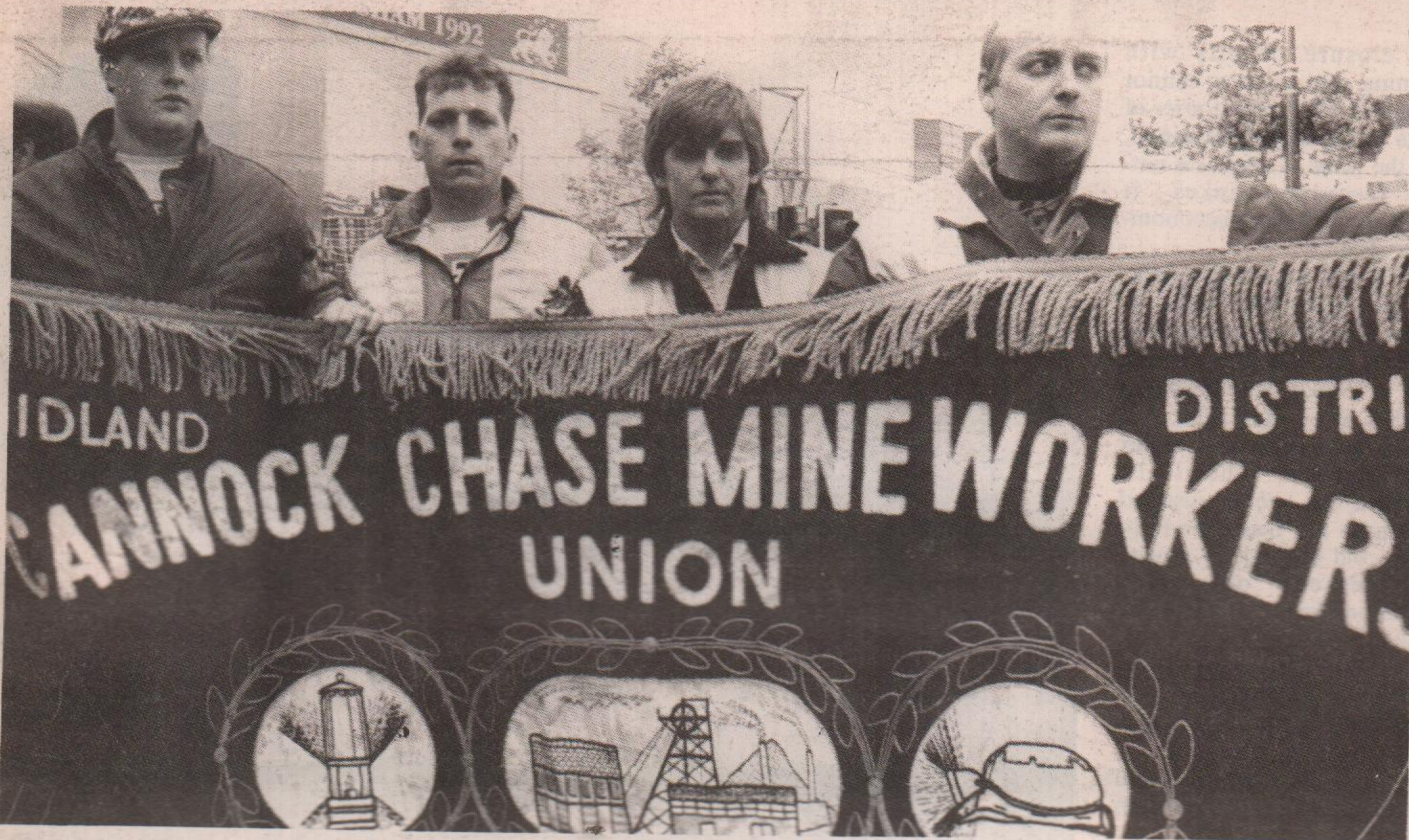
Free market economics assumes an “economic man” (*homo economicus*). (“Economic woman” and “economic child” are back stage...). The “economic man” can choose different foods, different clothes, different gadgets. But he cannot choose a viable environment policy; decent public transport, health or education; control over his working life; or security of livelihood.

Technology has progressed far enough for us not to have to make the choice between the cruelty of the market and the oppression of rationing. Production of the necessities of individual consumption — food, clothing, housing — requires only a small proportion of the present productive resources of humanity.

Given the overthrow of capitalist rule, the democratically-planned reorganisation of production, and the shift which will follow in human nature, away from capitalist competitiveness and acquisitiveness, we can distribute such things free, with no more worry about people taking too much and wasting it than there is today at the dinner table of a halfway prosperous working class family or in a subsidised works canteen. The production and distribution of those items of individual consumption will become a routine and minor chore, and no longer a degrading competitive scramble. The bulk of our time and energy, no longer taken up by that scramble, will be given over to providing communal facilities and enjoying leisure in whatever ways we individually choose.

The day we finally whittle market forces down to nothing will be the day that the pre-history of humanity ends and our true history begins.

# March for the miners!



Miners from Cannock Chase demonstrate outside the European ruling class summit in Birmingham. Photo Mark Salmon

**Arthur Scargill gave this speech at a rally after a demonstration in Chesterfield last Saturday, 17 October**



**T**his demonstration is an indication of deep feelings amongst all walks of life in Britain against the most brutal way working men and women have been treated since the end of the Second World War.

When British Coal announced - with the support and on the instruction of a few Tory Ministers - the slaughter of a viable and valuable national asset, and said callously, to 30,000 miners at 31 pits, that in five days time they would have no jobs, they outraged people across Britain.

I believe the British people are saying we've had enough!

I heard Heseltine talking. He said he felt sorry for those made redundant. He

does not understand.

We are not talking about statistics. I do not believe that Heseltine and Major can possibly understand the human tragedy they are inflicting on the British labour movement.

Someone said to me - from a newspaper which suddenly found I was telling the truth - do you think that public opinion can win the battle? I said that if people's power can win fundamental change throughout Eastern Europe, the people's power can change the government's policy.

I worked for 20 years as an underground miner. I have worked for 20 years as a union leader. And I have never seen the level of support which this outrageous declaration has brought from the British people.

This is not just about the British miners. There are not just 30,000 miners jobs at stake. There are an additional 65,000 jobs in engineering, power stations and road and rail transport on the line.

They talk about people finding new jobs. Who are they kidding? There are four million people who cannot find work.

We now need as much unity as possible. We all need to march for the miners. When we march for the miners we are marching for all working men and women.

The TUC have called for a mass demonstration on Sunday 25 October, in London. They have called for total support for the miners. They are considering a massive day of action for the miners.

I have been told time and again about

the economic case against coal. But the figures are these. They want to spend £2.1 billion of taxpayers' money to create 30,000 redundancies, to close 31 pits and decimate the mining industry.

Nuclear power is 350% more expensive than electricity generated by coal. Even someone from the *Sun* can understand that this is more expensive! They receive a subsidy of £1.3 billion. It is the equivalent of a subsidy for coal of £50 per ton. Imagine what we could do with such a subsidy. We could give our coal away free and make £500 million profit!

This is the economics of the madhouse! We have won the economic and social arguments. In the coming weeks we will win the political arguments.

They talk to us about democracy. But Heseltine has not even consulted the Tory cabinet about the closures.

Those miners who crossed our NUM picket lines in 1984 were misguided. If they had stayed with the NUM we would not be in this mess today. I appeal to every miner to leave the Tory sponsored UDM and join the NUM!

This is not just a fight for the miners. It is a fight for the British people. We are fighting for human dignity.

I saw a man in tears at the pit head. He had worked at five different pits in the last four years. Each time he was promised a job for life. Is it any wonder that a man who has helped increase production 155% in six years was in tears?

Here is anger and frustration about human beings being treated by a government without an ounce of compassion.

I want every woman and man in Britain to join the march for the right to work and the right to dignity.

*We can get them on the run!*

From page 3

**T**he Tories - who have never won a majority of the votes in any election - could have been forced out of office.

It is as it should be that the miners, who tried valiantly to beat Thatcher, are now the catalyst for what seems to be a large-scale revolt against the "political economy of the bourgeoisie", on whose altar the 30,000 miners were to have been sacrificed.

But Labour continues to dawdle and mumble. So much so that a central place in opposing the Government fell to Tory MPs like Winston Churchill.

Had the leaders of the Labour Party had the sense and the courage to lead the revolt against the Tory poll tax, then Labour could have won the last election. Labour's leaders missed that tide. Labour must not repeat that experience. The labour movement should demand that the Labour leaders fight to dislodge the Tories.

This government is now in deep disarray. Major is generally believed to be a lying, incompetent placeman.

Factional divisions are deep and bitter. (The desire to discredit Heseltine probably spurred some Tories to oppose his plans for coal). The Government can be driven to an election, or at any rate inhibited in what it does, by a vigorous opposition.

The fact that large layers of active Tories, as well as Tory voters, have come out against the Government is good for the labour movement. It has encouraged the miners to resist. It has, we believe, helped turn the tide.

But the idea that the political answer to the Tory Government can be an answer the labour movement gives in common with Tory businessmen and church leaders is absurd. Even for a good cause like the defence of the miners, "left/right" unity offers no way forward.

It is one of the ways Labour can miss the tide. Working-class politics here consists in campaigning to drive out the Tories and put in a Labour Government. Anything less than that is inadequate or treacherous.

The miners must not be disarmed by the Tory retreat. They will be "coming back". The labour movement must help the miners refuse to accept pit closures. Miners should prepare to occupy the pits to stop closures.

A tremendous anti-Government campaign could be built around such occupations, especially if the Labour Party can be got to shed its paralysis. Even right-wing local Labour Parties have begun to move in defence of the miners.

We are beginning to have a labour movement once more!

*Pit vandals squander precious natural resources*

# Spiteful Tory

**Closing down pits with rich remaining reserves, on the pretext that imported coal or gas are cheaper just now, is economic vandalism and short-sightedness.**

**Once closed, a pit is very expensive to reopen. And coal is an immensely valuable natural resource, for many purposes other than burning, as Les Hearn explains.**

Coal is the heated and pressurised remains of giant ferns that died, but did not decompose, some 300 million years ago.

More recently deceased plants are preserved as lignite (brown coal) or peat.

Coal comprises the same elements as living things — carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen and sulphur — but has become carbonised by its treatment. Thus instead of the original 10% of carbon, coal ranges from 60% to almost 100% carbon (anthracite). But even now, the exact chemical structure of coal is imperfectly understood.

Gas and oil (and nuclear power) have displaced coal somewhat as mainstays of the energy and chemical industries, but since all are likely to run out within the lifetime of 50% of *Socialist Organiser* readers, coal is set to make a come-back. Conservative estimates put exploitable coal reserves at 300 years' worth.

The closure of pits with remaining coal reserves cannot be justified. The present price of coal is politically determined, while the value of coal as a natural resource makes it worthwhile to keep 'uneconomic' pits open.

Once closed, a pit deteriorates, so it becomes expensive or impossible to re-open. For instance, the Thorne colliery, closed in 1956, was reopened in the 1980s, at a cost of £200.

Coal is a mixture of complex and valuable chemicals. Burning it can only be justified if attempts are being made to replace coal burning by renewable methods of energy production, freeing coal for the chemical industry.

Extracting chemicals from coal has usually been a byproduct of coke-making. Coal is heated strongly without air to drive out coal tar, oils and coal gas, leaving almost pure carbon (used in iron production).

**"Once closed, a pit deteriorates, so it becomes expensive or impossible to re-open."**

Coal gasification (known for over a century) can take the process further. The hot coke is blasted with first air, then steam, to make 'water gas', a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen (also called 'syn-gas'). This technique fell into disuse with the discovery of huge natural gas fields, but will



Lewis Merthyr, closed in spring 1983. A closed pit is a wasted natural resource, and very expensive to re-

become popular again as the gas runs out.

Modern research is building up an extensive repertoire of chemical reactions based on syn-gas.

Ways have been found to encourage carbon monoxide from syn-gas to combine with methanal (wood alcohol), itself produced from syn-gas, to make such useful products as acetic acid, anti-freeze, ordinary alcohol, and even a high octane petrol (a replacement for lead in petrol?).

At present, research into coal gasification (and liquefaction) is starved of cash. The National Coal Board had to abandon plans for a syn-fuel plant in job-starved North Wales when the Government refused to advance promised funds.

Nevertheless much coal cannot be mined because it is under the sea, the seams are too thin or are faulted (broken up), or just too deep.

But this important resource

can be exploited — by a technique praised by no less a person than Lenin, coal gasification *in situ* (i.e. underground).

Bore-holes are drilled and oxygen and steam injected. Some of the coal burns and the heat causes the surrounding coal to break down into methane or react to make carbon monoxide and hydrogen (syn-gas). This can be collected from the bore-holes and burnt or used for making chemicals.

**"Gas and oil are likely to run out within the lifetime of 50% of *Socialist Organiser* readers."**

This technology could possibly make it unnecessary to send people underground and could reduce working hours.

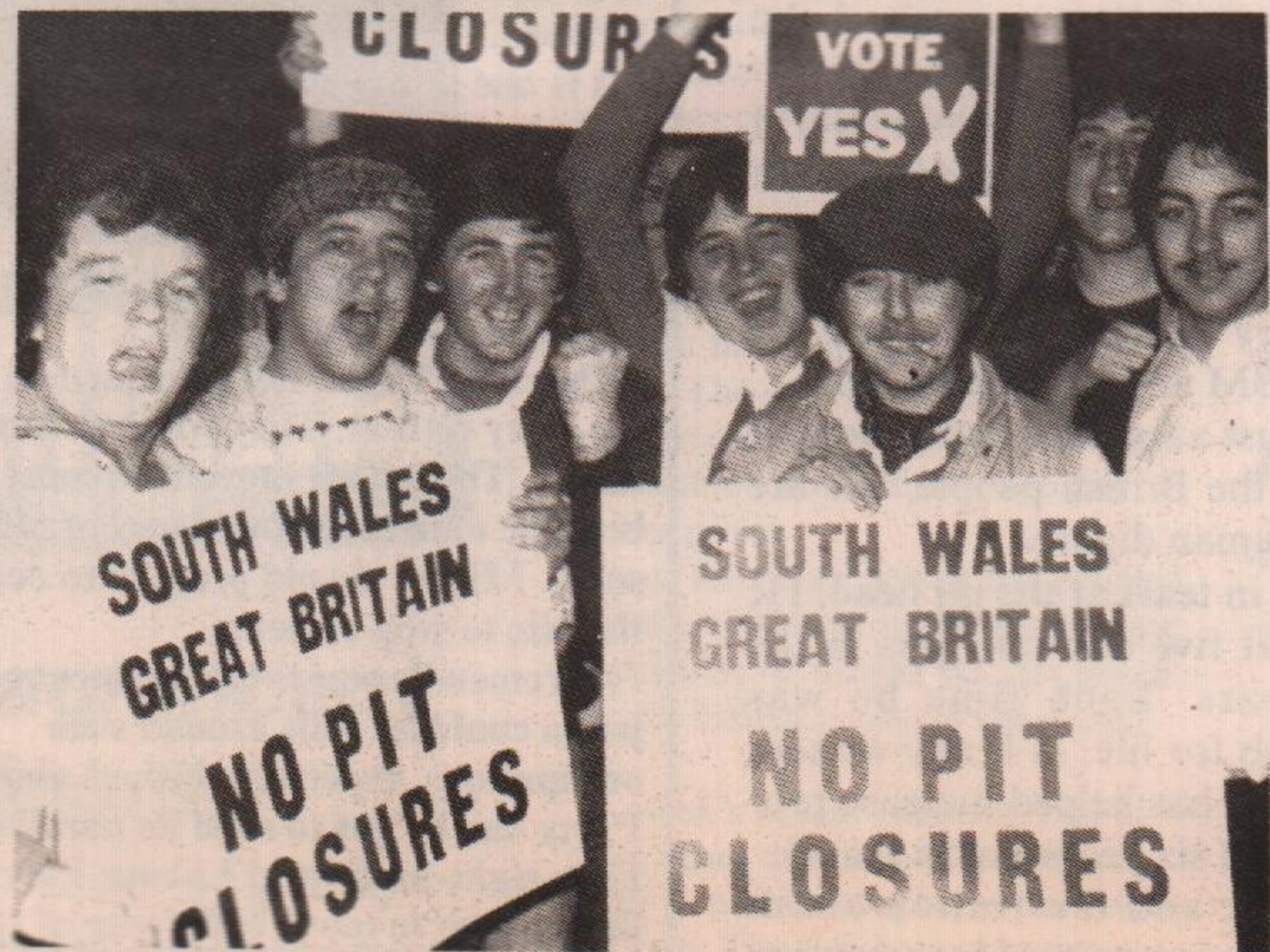
It could also increase exploitable coal reserves from 300 to 1,000 years' worth.

Continuing coal extraction and burning makes it essential to deal with mining waste, subsidence, acid rain and miners' health. At present, economic arguments allow the Coal Board to litter the land with slag heaps and the Central Electricity Generating Board to pour sulphur dioxide into the air.

Coal gasification *in situ* would avoid slag heaps and subsidence, while ultra-modern pits remove miners from the most dangerous parts of the mine.

'Clean coal' is the solution to air pollution. Most acid gases can be removed from flue gases by 'scrubbing', a technique that is resisted for 'economic' reasons (though Battersea Power Station possessed it). Coal can be pulverised, and washed to remove half the sulphur.

In Fluidised Bed Combustion, pulverised coal is mixed with



Closing pits is spiteful butchery

# Burglars



Fluidised Bed Combustion, and acid rain (which the Tories refuse to admit is largely caused by power stations).

An integrated system of coal, oil and renewable energy would be crucial for a socialist state.

Our priorities would be the health of miners, the prevention of pollution, and the survival of mining communities where pits are genuinely worked out.

***"Coal is a mixture of complex and valuable chemicals. Burning coal for energy is like living on our savings, and we would wish to go over to renewable energy alone, using coal as a source of valuable chemicals."***

But burning coal for energy is like living on our savings, and we would quickly wish to go over to renewable energy alone, using coal as a source of valuable chemicals.

Those who would close pits are, as EF Schumacher (economic advisor to the Coal Board for 20 years, and author of *Small is Beautiful*) said, like "the spiteful burglar who does not merely pinch the valuables, but in addition destroys everything that he cannot take".

Having been forced to retreat partly from nuclear power, they are now turning to gas — for the same, basically political, reason.

Therefore only peanuts is available for research into coal gasification and liquefaction,



The Government's subsidy to the nuclear industry is massive. The decision to favour nuclear was political, part of their programme to smash the miners

crushed limestone. A stream of hot gas keeps the powder fluid, so the coal burns more efficiently, at a lower temperature. The limestone combines with the sulphur dioxide, reducing pollution by some 80%.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), representing most industrialised countries, has reported that lack of research threatened coal's future as a major replacement for oil. Research dropped by over a quarter at a time when solutions to acid rain were urgently required.

Much more has been spent on research into nuclear power, supplying only one-twentieth of IEA members' energy.

In Britain, the Tories made a political decision to favour a nuclear programme which "would have the advantage of removing a substantial portion of electricity production from the dangers of industrial action by miners and transport workers".

# The fate of the pet pig

## AGAINST THE TIDE

By Sean Matgamna

The fate of Roy Lynk, President of the UDM, reminds me of an affecting scene in Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*. I was surprised to find myself moved by this scene, but moved I was, and it remains in my mind after many years. The scene concerns the butchering of a pet pig, told with great sympathy, the author empathising with the pig.

Reared close to the family, as was common in nineteenth century England, the pig was well-treated, mothered like a pet and fed on tit-bits — all the better to fatten it up so that it could at the right moment be turned into as much pork and bacon as possible. The pig is happy and contented, not knowing its place in the human scheme of things, until one day the indignant, bewildered animal finds himself seized and hauled up by his hind legs, squeaking and kicking air.

Then, with relief — Hardy presents it from the point of view of the poor betrayed pig — he sees the woman who had petted him and favoured him with tit-bits approaching, a long shiny thing in her hand. She cuts his throat. For her too, the fat pig, who had thought himself a member of the family, was just so much potential bacon!

Lynk was the Scab-Herder General in Mrs Thatcher's 1984-85 war against the miners, with a vital part to play. The press, radio and TV denounced the miners for their "violence". The militarised police broke miners' skulls and terrorised the mining villages. Scab-Herder Lynk organised the Nottingham "Working Miners" to break the strike.

Lynk was an important man. So were they all, the "Working Miners", all important men. Then. They were petted, and fêted by the press. Some of them, no doubt, were given special tit-bits now and again.

Mrs Thatcher called the striking miners "the enemy within", but Lynk and his friends were part of the national family, at the head of whose table sat the Tories.

The scab and the Scab-Herder were, for a while — the period during which the government bludgeoned and starved the striking miners — the heroes of the British national family as defined by the Tory press, in fact, the typical heroes of Mrs Thatcher's brave new Britain.

Remember? The capitalist press would highlight some poor fellow who went back to work because he — or his family — could no longer take what the capitalists, the press, and the police were dishing out. The broken man would be given some glamorising nickname — remember "Silver Birch"? — and presented as a hero for ratting on his comrades.

He did what the media, the TUC leaders and the politicians — Labour included — were screaming at him to do. So he was a man of independent mind. He decided under pressure to abandon the strike and scab on his mates. That proved he was a man possessing great strength of character, like all the others. They were all fine, independent, strong, the scabs, great guys, special people. Thatcher was proud of them.

The "Working Miners" would be taken care of. Notts coal had a future, they could be sure of that! The Tory Nation would not forget.

None were more special than the Notts "Working Miners", and Roy Lynk was the extra-special leader of this "special breed of men".

And now look at Lynk! Look at the Notts miners who listened to the Tories and to the Lynks who pimped, touted and scab-herded for them!

The majority of Notts miners scabbed because Notts pits were very rich in coal, highly modern, and very productive, and because the Notts miners thought, therefore, they could escape the problems which drove other miners to take on the Coal Board and Thatcher. That was the real reason; their dispute with the leaders of the NUM about "union democracy", was merely a "good reason", the one they could most easily live with.

Because they, unlike most miners, felt secure in their jobs, they listened to people like Lynk and sided with the government against the rest of the miners. They heard with hostility and contempt, or refused to hear at all, the two great socialist truths about the capitalist world we live in, which the NUM lived and fought by in 1984-5.

Workers exist in the eyes of the capitalists and of capitalist governments to be exploited. The worker's right to a job, and even to life, is subordinated to that fundamental role: workers are profit or potential profit, or else those who own the means of production will not allow them to be workers at all. Whether the capitalists and their governments pamper workers, or cut their throats, the general principle governing their behaviour is always the same: the workers' place at a given moment in the system of profit-making.

***"The Notts 'Working Miners' did not know their place in the scheme of things, that there is no such thing as a 'National Family', but only a society split into classes. They played the role of traitors to their own side in the war whose outcome made possible what the Tories have just tried to do to them."***

The Notts "Working Miners" did not know their place in the scheme of things. They did not know that there is no such thing as a "National Family", but only a society split into classes, in a condition of latent or open class war. Refusing to recognise the class war and take their proper place in it, they played the role of traitors to their own side in the war whose outcome made possible what the Tories have just tried to do to them.

Like Thomas Hardy's pet pig, Lynk is shocked to discover his place in the capitalist scheme of things! The pampered, tit-bit fed, pet workers' leader, having served his purpose, got no more favourable treatment than Scargill did.

Unlike Lynk, many UDM miners, some of whom were not miners during the strike, are learning to know their place in the capitalist scheme of things. Some of them are saying: "Scargill was right". Some of them must be saying: "F\*\*\* Lynk!"

I confess I do not feel the sympathy for Lynk, hiding down a pit, that I felt for Hardy's poor, dumb, unoffending pig. Lynk is responsible for what he did during the miners' strike.

The best thing to do with Lynk would be to leave him where he is now, wall off that section of the pit, and put up "POISON" notices all around him!

# The greatest strike in modern British history

The miners' strike of 1984-85 was the greatest strike in modern British history. Here below we tell the first part of the story.

In the small hours of Monday March 12 1984, hundreds of Yorkshire miners moved across the border from Yorkshire into Nottinghamshire. Their destination was Harworth pit, and by the evening shift they had picketed it out.

Over the next few days, hundreds of Yorkshire pickets came down over the border again and spread out across the Notts coalfield. Their mission was to persuade Nottinghamshire's miners to join them in a strike to stop the pit closures announced by the National Coal Board chief, Ian MacGregor. Their tactic was to picket Notts to a standstill.

In the great miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, miners had picketed coke depots and power stations. In 1984, for reasons which we'll examine, it had to be miners picketing out miners. That fact dominated and shaped the course of the strike.

Within hours, 1000 extra police had been thrown into Nottinghamshire against the picketing miners. Within days there would be 8000 extra police - highly mobile, centrally-controlled, semi-militarised police - moving around the coalfields of Nottinghamshire.

The state had spent a dozen years preparing for this strike and everything had been made ready. Plans to beat mass picketing had been refined; police had been trained; special equipment had been assembled; and a national police nerve centre had been prepared and readied for action.

The Tory government had manoeuvred for years to avoid a premature battle with the miners. In 1981 sweeping pit closures were announced, and then withdrawn when a wave of strikes swept the coalfields. The Tories were determined that the battle would come when the government was ready and thought the time right. In 1981 they weren't ready. The labour movement had not been softened up enough. So Thatcher backed off from a showdown with the NUM. In 1984 they were ready. Now they would provoke the miners to fight back by giving them the alternative of surrendering and letting the NCB do as it liked with the industry.

After years of slump and mass unemployment the labour movement was in a weakened condition. Its morale was low, its combativity



Miners celebrate the announcement of the call for a national strike

declining, its leaders more concerned to undercut, sabotage and burke militancy than to fight the Tories. The NUM had been weakened too.

Between the miners' bloodless victory over Thatcher in 1981 and March 1984, 40 pits had been closed or merged. Morale had been eroded. The closures of Kinneil (December 1982) and Lewis Merthyr (March 1983) provoked only limited local struggles.

Arthur Scargill was elected NUM president in December 1981 with 70 per cent of the vote; but in January 1982 miners rejected a leadership proposal to strike over pay by 55%. In October 1982 61% of miners voted not to strike over pay and pit closures - despite a campaign by Arthur Scargill for strike action. In March 1983, when the strike over Lewis Merthyr began to spread from South Wales, the National Executive Committee called for a national miners' strike, but 61% of miners rejected the proposal.

Arthur Scargill repeatedly warned miners that the NCB had a secret 'hit-list' of 70 or so pits marked down for closure, but

either he lacked credibility with men or the miners no longer had the stomach to defend themselves.

***"Within days there would be 8000 extra police - highly mobile, centrally-controlled, semi-militarised police - moving around the coalfields of Nottinghamshire."***

That's how the Tories read it. So they decided that the time had come for a showdown with the miners.

In September 1983 Ian MacGregor became chair of the NCB. MacGregor had carved up the steel industry for the Tories. In America in the 1970s he had masterminded the employers' campaign in one of the most brutal labour wars of recent American history - the successful war to break the miners' union in Harlan County. MacGregor

was to be the Tories' pit-butcher and union-buster. His appointment was undisguised preparation, if not an outright declaration, of war.

But was the NUM ready for war? The election for NUM secretary in January 1984 showed only a small margin in favour of the victorious left-wing candidate, Peter Heathfield, over his right wing opponent John Walsh. The miners still seemed in the mood to retreat; the militant leaders of the NUM increasingly out of line with their movement.

So the Tories attacked. On March 1, when local management announced the closure of Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire, South Yorkshire miners immediately went on unofficial strike. On March 5, with half the Yorkshire miners already out, the Yorkshire area council called an official strike from March 9.

But South Wales miners had come out over the closure of Lewis Merthyr - and Lewis Merthyr had nevertheless closed. More than local action was needed. Miners had been this far towards confrontation before without an all-

out fight.

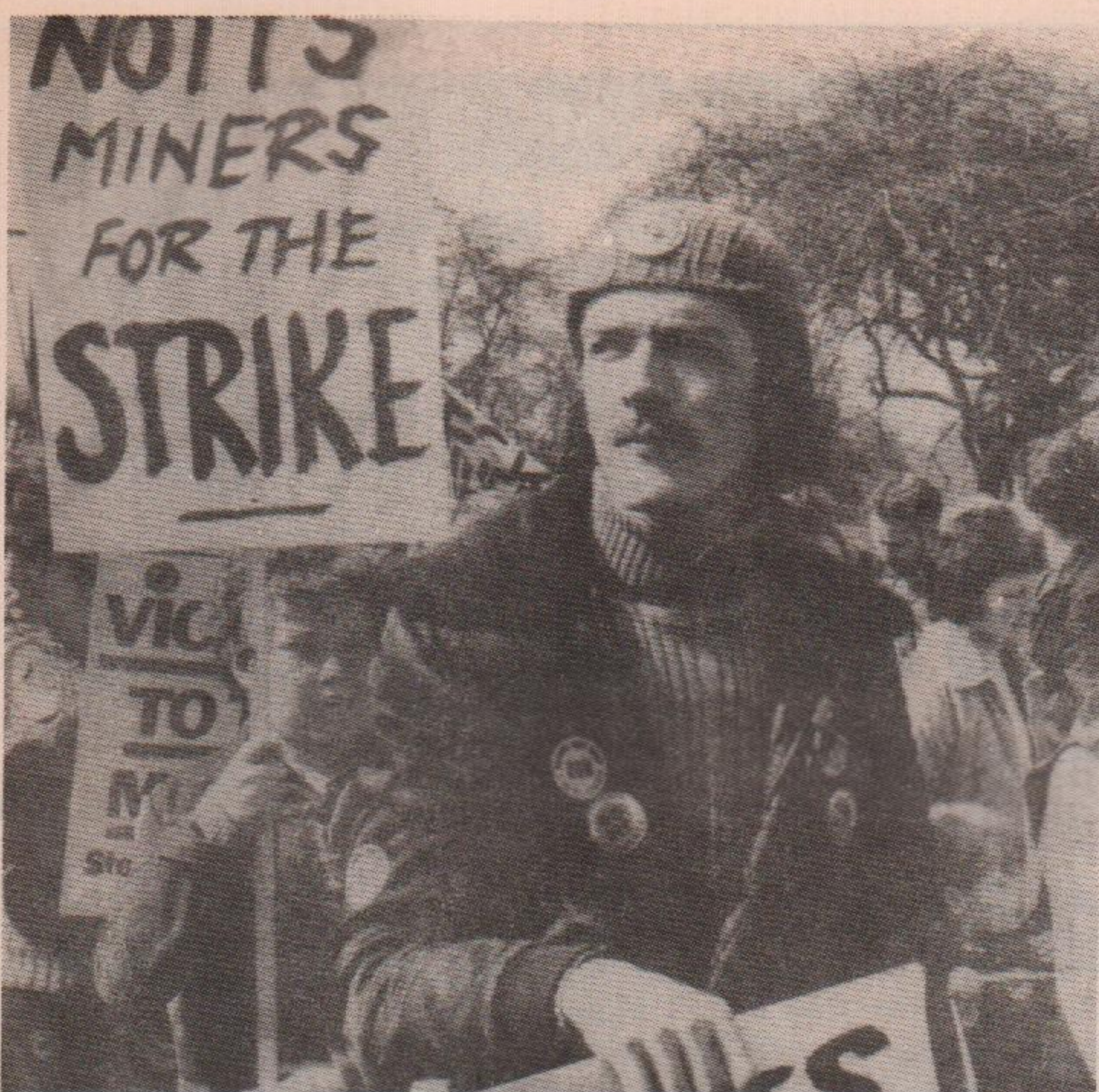
On March 6 the Scottish area council called on Scottish miners to strike from March 9. Polmaise pit had already been out for three weeks against closure.

Now Ian MacGregor took a hand, pouring petrol on the fire. On March 6 he told the NUM that 20 pits would close in 1984, that 20,000 jobs would be cut, and that there might be compulsory redundancies.

MacGregor was telling the NUM either to back off, or to try to stop him closing down 20 pits. The Tories, not the miners, chose this fight. But - after the rejection of their proposal for a national strike over Lewis Merthyr exactly a year before - did the NUM national executive have any alternative but to back off and let the Tory juggernaut roll unopposed over the 'uneconomic' pits and coalfields? To their eternal glory they thought they did have an alternative.

On March 8 the executive endorsed the decision of the Yorkshire and Scottish areas to strike, and they endorsed in advance the decision any other area might take for strike action.





The Notts miners who did strike felt they didn't have the right to vote less successful areas out of a job

# Picket or ballot?

Should they have a national ballot? The executive was in the business of mobilising the miners to resist MacGregor's attack, not out to demobilise those who had decided to act. So the executive voted 21 to 3 against a ballot. They were 100 per cent right to refuse to go to a ballot at that point. It was the responsibility and the duty of the executive to respond to MacGregor's attack and to give a fighting lead - not to paralyse the NUM in the face of the challenge thrown down by the Tory hit-man MacGregor.

If Britain were engaged in a conventional war, having to respond to an attack, and with battles raging over a wide front, then the Tories, and the Neil Kinnocks, would reject with indignation and scorn the idea that a national plebiscite should be held to determine whether the people wanted to fight or not. They would say that anyone who wanted such a plebiscite intended that the country, and in the first place its 'leadership', the government, should be paralysed, and was, therefore, deliberately or unknowingly, helping the enemy. They would be dead right about that, from their point of view.

The advocates that the NUM should have held a plebiscite instead of immediate action when the Tories unleashed the war they had spent many years preparing against the NUM either wanted the NUM to be paralysed or didn't care whether it was or not. None of them demanded of MacGregor and the Tories that there should be a ballot to see how many miners voted for pit closures. Neither the establishment politicians, nor the press, expressed indignation in 1977-8 against the introduction of area incentive schemes despite a national ballot vote against such incentives. They were keen to take advantage of a division among miners which, in part, resulted from those schemes. In the case of Notts, this was a major factor in the strike.

The miners' NEC refused to let themselves be paralysed. And now that the lines were drawn, the miners responded magnificently.

Encouraged by the executive, the strike spread. On March 9 Durham and Kent called area strikes. A South Wales delegate conference recommended that South Wales should strike, but over the weekend of 10th-11th pits in the area decided by about two to one not to strike.

A MORI opinion poll showed 62% of miners wanting a strike.

The Notts delegate conference declined to take action before an area ballot, and the Northumberland and Leicestershire leaderships voted against a strike.

That was the situation on Monday March 12 as flying pickets went into action to make it a national strike and to enforce the area strike decisions. Despite their branch votes, most of South Wales came out immediately. The South Wales miners would prove to be obdurate, solid and immovable throughout the long year of hardship and deprivation that was to follow.

***"To make a national ballot the essence of democracy here was to make democracy into a tyranny"***

By Wednesday March 14 the NCB admitted that 132 out of 174 pits had been shut.

But Notts was the major problem. The Yorkshire flying pickets had some initial successes. When Yorkshire miner Davy Jones was killed picketing at Ollerton, on Thursday March 15, the Notts leaders called an area strike - until the following Sunday.

By Friday March 16 only 11 collieries were working normally,

# The miners divided

The militant, fighting part of the NUM now had to appeal for basic working class solidarity in defence of their jobs and their communities first to other miners, to members of their own union. That solidarity was refused them.

Scab miners crossed picket lines, sheltered behind the police, played the media's game against the strikers, and used the bosses' courts against their own union and its embattled members and leaders.

Notts scabs claimed they scabbed because they were refused a national ballot. That was the 'good reason', not the real one. It keyed the Notts working miners into the Tory propaganda offensive against the strikers, and it allowed the scabs to think of themselves as peaceful democrats and not as scabs. The real reason was that they were scared by the daunting battle ahead, they didn't feel their jobs were threatened, and they had been doing well under the area incentive scheme.

They made a religion of the national ballot because they needed a respectable excuse for refusing to help the threatened

miners to defend their jobs and communities.

A majority of both South Wales and Notts voted against the strike. That's what they had in common in March 1984, though their motives were most likely very dif-

***"And something else was new - organised scab-herding, on a vast scale backed up by a very loud barrage of propaganda."***

ferent. The magnificent one-year stand that the miners of South Wales can look back on in March 1985 pinpoints where the difference between them lay - in the

absence of gut class loyalty among the majority of prosperous, unthreatened Notts miners. Only a minority of Notts miners had the selfrespect to stand with their class.

The scabbing in Notts shaped the strike. As well as supplying coal throughout the strike, the 'working miners' gave the NCB a powerful hard core of scabs to build on. Without Notts the Leicestershire and other scabs would not have counted for much. When Notts went back to work on Monday March 19, after one day out, the NCB could claim that 42 pits were working normally.

With the miners split, the fate of the strike would be determined by the outcome of battles on two fronts - the battle of the pickets against the centrally controlled semi-militarised police, who turned some coalfields into something like police states; and the political battle in the labour movement for solidarity from non-miners. In the battle for solidarity the propaganda front was the decisive one.

Never in the living memory of the

continued on page 10



Picket injured at Ollerton in Notts during police rush to get a scab day shift into the pits

according to the NCB itself.

On Thursday March 15 and Friday March 16 ballots were held in many areas. Northumberland voted for a strike. Right-wing Cumberland, Midlands, South Derbyshire, Lancashire, Notts and North Wales voted not to strike. So, narrowly, did North Derbyshire. On Sunday 18th a Notts delegate conference decided to go back. On March 20 the result of a ballot showed 90% against a strike in Leicestershire.

The miners were split, without a common line. What happened next would be determined by the strength of the picketing by striking miners and their supporters, and by how the miners in areas which voted not to strike would respond when confront-

ed by pickets from the striking areas. The press and politicians set up a tremendous din, telling the miners that they should not strike without a national ballot. The ballot was democracy and anything else was not democratic.

Newly elected Peter Heathfield put the issue squarely when he said this about the demand for a national ballot: 'Can miners in successful areas have the right to vote miners in less successful areas out of a job?'

To make a national ballot the essence of "democracy" here was to make democracy into a tyranny, and to deny the right of a minority - if miners who wanted to strike were in fact the minority: an opinion poll said that 62% wanted to strike - to

defend itself.

The call for a national ballot was never a democratic demand, but a demand to repress and straitjacket the militants.

Once the militants had struck they had every right to appeal for basic working class solidarity to other workers - and in the first place to miners. South Wales, which voted not to strike, showed what was possible here.

Of course a united NUM would have been better by far. The fundamental thing about the NUM in March 1984 was that it was not united, and nevertheless its leaders and militants had to fight back against the well timed Tory offensive.



## The miners divided

continued from page 9

labour movement had the police behaved as they did in the miners' strike. They concentrated in large masses, deployed and controlled from a centre at Scotland Yard. They set up roadblocks to stop Yorkshire miners moving into Notts and Kent miners into the Midlands. They stopped, searched, and arrested at will. They used thuggery and violence on a scale not known in any modern labour dispute in Britain.

They behaved as wreckers and bully-boys in certain pit villages as if they were understudying the British army in the Catholic parts of Northern Ireland.

And something else was new – organised scab-herding, on a vast scale backed up by a very loud barrage of propaganda.

Many railworkers and dockers refused to move scab coal. On March 29 the transport workers' leaders recommended a total blockade of all coal. But decisive solidarity lay in the hands of the power workers and steel workers to give or withhold – and they withheld it. On March 21 the power unions (including the GMBU) advised their members to cross miners' pickets. Steelworkers, fearful for their industry and bruised and battered from their own 1980 strike, crossed miners' picket lines.

The propaganda war against the miners was waged fiercely so as to limit and to try to stop workers supporting the miners. Picketing miners who were at the receiving end of the violence that police officials had spent years preparing for, were pilloried and denounced as purveyors of mindless and gratuitous violence. Miners fighting for their jobs were denounced as undemocratic because they were on strike without sanction of a national ballot – and those who denounced them were industrial autocrats and dictators who were using massed armies of police to try to force the miners to accept the ruin of some of their communities!

Though the Labour Party gave

its support to the miners, the high-profile leaders of the Party hemmed and hawed, joined in the calls for a national ballot – the cutting edge of the propaganda war – and denounced violence, meaning pickets who stood up to the police.

By Monday March 26, when the NCB claimed that 38 pits were working normally, the strike had reached a steady level. The strike would strengthen slightly after the NUM conference on April 19, but the contours of the battlefield were already visible, the areas of strength and weakness of either side known, the balance of forces stabilised. An unbudgeable minority of miners – the NUM said about 25,000 – refused to strike. Scabbing miners, picket-crossing power and steel workers, and far too limited general solidarity, forced the miners to dig in for a war of attrition. They knew it would take time. They could not have guessed just how long their war of attrition with the Thatcher government would be.

The 1974 miners' strike lasted just over a month – from February 9 to March 11. Just over a month after the start of the 1972 strike, Saltley coke depot was closed by mass pickets and the government was on the run.

By late March it was already clear that 1984 would be a much longer and more grim affair. Miners talked about "staying out until Christmas". The Times reported (April 18): "Mrs Margaret Thatcher is willing to spend any amount of money to ensure that the Government is not again defeated by the miners' union". Chancellor Nigel Lawson would later publicly explain that the money spent on beating the miners was a "worthwhile investment". They would spend over £2 billion on it directly, with indirect losses of perhaps another £3 billion.

Arthur Scargill appealed to workers: "Stop merely saying you support us. Come out and join us. We are facing a fundamental challenge to the whole working class, not merely miners. We are facing the organised might of the state machine" (Nottingham, April 14: SO 175).

# April-June: The strike gets stronger

There was now a surge of solidarity. The rail and transport unions had promised to boycott scab coal. Railworkers in Coalville, Leicestershire, enforced this boycott throughout the strike, in the midst of the most solidly scabbing coalfield in the country (30 strikers out of 2000 miners). Notts railworkers began stopping coal trains on April 16.

The Labour Party national executive voted on April 25 to support the strike and to ask every Party member to donate 50p a week.

From May to August the strike was at its peak. About 80% of miners were out. There was some drift-back in this period (the strike was already a long one by usual standards): but it was marginal. Notts suffered a drift-back after the High Court, on May 25, ruled the strike unofficial in the county: by late August only 20% of Notts miners were out, as against maybe 40 or 50% at the peak. In Staffordshire the strike was fraying at the end of May, and over 50% were scabbing at every pit except Wolstanton by early August. Lancashire weakened.

In the vast majority of pit communities, however, the strike was solid, and becoming more determined and confident.

This was a strike in which something in excess of a hundred thousand workers and their families found themselves up against a pitiless, relentless, determined government which had all the advantages on its side; entrenched power and wealth; the police; the deprivation and sometimes hunger that gripped miners and their families a few weeks into the strike. To stay in the fight the miners and their families had to find in themselves reserves of strength, determination, fortitude and creativity. The mining communities had to rouse themselves completely and throw everything they had into the class war. The strike had to become more than a mere strike. And it did.

The outstanding new thing in the miners' strike was the involvement of the women of the mining communities.

By early May the pit villages were full of militant women's groups.

The women's groups ran communal kitchens or food-parcel centres – and many of them went out on the picket line: that hadn't happened before. On April 30 there was a 150-strong women's picket at Thoresby colliery, Notts. They broke through police lines twice, and a local miner commented: "If the women had been there from the beginning, the strike would have been won by now" (SO 177).

***"For a lot of people, the strike shook up their ideas in a way that normally happens only in great semi-revolutionary struggles like a general strike."***

Women's pickets were a regular feature of the strike, and on May 12 the streets of Barnsley were swamped by an exuberant women's demonstration.

Repeatedly the pit women would cite the women's peace camp at Greenham Common as an inspiration. Direct links were made between the normally somewhat isolated, conservative, male-dominated pit villages, and feminists who might never before have seen class struggle as anything central to politics.

For a lot of people, the strike shook up their ideas in a way that normally happens only in great semi-revolutionary struggles like a general strike. Opposed to the Tory class-warriors, the police chiefs, the Fleet Street editorialists eulogising the heroic scabs, here at last was something more than the quibbling, middle-of-the-road, trimming whines of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. The miners were a pole of opposition, and inevitably they became a magnetic

pole of attraction for the oppressed.

Spitting boldly in the teeth of all Tory philosophy, the miners rallied round them all the movements, impulses and rebellions against that philosophy and against the system it defends. The miners inspired and gave focus to an across-the-board challenge to Toryism; and that challenge became an increasing part of their own awareness of the world.

Thatcher did have an 'enemy within'! And hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people rallied to it. Many of them were shocked by the Tories' remorseless drive to compel the miners and their families to let her offer them as human sacrifices to her savage god, Mammon, the god of profit and lucre; and shocked at the will of the police to use any means necessary to beat the pickets. They started to think about alternatives to Thatcherism.

Jenny Dennis, from Kiveton Park, Yorkshire, told SO in November:

"Mining communities are traditionally male-dominated. It's the men that work and the women that do: having babies, washing and making snap is our lot. Then it changed.

"It was as though we'd been sleeping for hundreds of years. We awoke, we realised a new political awareness.

"Organising food, raising money, speaking. Men have acknowledged that we, as women, are vital to that victory. We're an active part of that struggle, side by side with our men in the battle's frontline.

"We are witnessing something amongst the women which I can only compare with the suffragettes. We are living and making history. We won't return to the status quo. We can't.

"Personally it has made me realise that not only must we fight our injustice but others too.

"Because we have lived through media lies we ask ourselves: 'What other lies have they made?'

"Look at the injustice in Ireland. What really happened in Toxteth?

## Arthur Scargill's demands

Last week, Arthur Scargill set out his demands for the pit strike:

- A complete withdrawal of the Coal Board's closure programme announced on March 6 aimed at reducing capacity by 4 million tonnes.
- A reaffirmation by the Board and the government of the Plan for Coal, the expansionist plan agreed between the government, Coal Board and unions in 1974.
- Development of 40 million tonnes new capacity.
- New investment to expand all existing pits.

- Rapid development of new coal burning technologies.
- The introduction of a four day week.
- A substantial increase in wages.
- Retirement age brought down to 55.
- A scheme to protect wage rates.
- Consolidation of the incentive bonus scheme

The demands for the four day week and for scrapping the incentive scheme are particularly important as part of a working class programme to defend jobs and unite mineworkers.

Socialist Organiser, June 21, 1984



**Women on the march**

On Wednesday May 12 Barnsley was invaded by some 10,000 miners' wives, marching to oppose pit closures. It was very much a women's march, not just in its constitution but in its atmosphere.

Women from all over the country - Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Northumberland and South Wales - came together to give a wry lively and resounding NO to MacGregor's closure plan. Not your boring run of the mill trudge, this... chants of "the miners united will never be defeated" and "I'd rather be a picket than a scab" continued throughout

the march. Drum majorettes provided more noise and colour. And I don't think anyone in Barnsley centre escaped without getting a 'Coal Not Dole' sticker plonked on some part of their anatomy. Socialist Organiser, May 17, 1984. The picture is of another women's march in London in August. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni

In Brixton? I realise the black community is struggling against injustice.

"After we win we must turn and right other injustices".

'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' set themselves up in June, and found miners coming to their meetings, saying things like: "Since the strike their ideas had really changed, and perhaps now the 'traditional' labour movement should go to black people and lesbians and gay men to relearn what socialism is all about" (SO 199). But the lesbians and gay men had things to learn from the miners, too: the strike drew a class line among lesbians and gays.

Black groups organised to help the miners; and miners came to understand better what black communities feel about police harassment.

Frank Slater of Maltby NUM (Yorkshire) put it like this:

"What did we do when blacks were being harassed? We said - it's not us. But we're ethnic minorities now" (SO 200).

The local miners' support committees were never anywhere near having the weight, in official labour movement terms, to organise strikes in support of the miners.

Usually they were run by the Labour Left. (The Communist Party organised its own activities, often trying to exclude or suppress more active people to its left. The Socialist Workers Party continued its 'splendid isolation', pouring scorn on the 'left-wing Oxfam' and 'baked beans brigades' of the support committees, until October, when it readjusted and joined in. Militant never joined in.)

But, if the support movement was organisationally weak and ramshackle, it was the umbrella for a vast amount of individual activity. Workplace collections, door-to-door collections, street collections, pub collections, football ground

collections; benefits, demonstrations, mass pickets; visits from miners, visits to pit villages.

The 'Coal not Dole' sticker, the bundle of 'The Miner', and the collecting bucket became the standard hardware of political life. Hundreds of thousands of people who did nothing more than give donations or wear a badge were stirred and inspired by the miners' fight. Labour activists miles from any coalfield found themselves talking, thinking, breathing, living the miners' strike week after week.

Between May 9 and July 13 there were regional TUC days of action in every major region except the Midlands. Railworkers, hospital workers, council workers, dockers and shipyard workers struck; demonstrations in London and Manchester were up to 50,000 strong. But there was no centrally organised campaign to develop the potential shown by the days of action. Len Murray denounced the days of action in advance. The central TUC leaders stood on the sidelines, sharpening their talons, eyeing Scargill and Heathfield with hatred. But the miners, keeping their distance, had not yet approached the TUC.

It was the miners' picketing that mainly drove the struggle forward. On May 2 the police (probably exaggerating) estimated 10,000 pickets at Harworth colliery, and on May 3 almost as many at Cotgrave (Notts). On May 7, 100 miners picketed Ravenscraig steelworks, near Glasgow. On May 14, 40,000 marched in Mansfield. Between May 29 and June 18 thousands of pickets and police fought battles outside Orgreave coking plant, near Sheffield: coke runs from Orgreave were suspended on June 18.

On June 7 the transport unions agreed not only to boycott coal and coke, but also to block substitute oil movements. On June 9

union leaders Jimmy Knapp and Ray Buckton persuaded railworkers at Shirebrook depot in Notts to follow this policy; by July 13 Knapp could announce that only 10 coal trains were running daily in Britain, out of a normal 356. On June 25 railworkers stopped iron ore supplies to Llanwern steelworks (South Wales); on June 28, to Ravenscraig.

**"I feel the police wanted all the Yorkshire lads to go over the gate into the road and get into a riot with the police, and then they'd do them all for rioting."**

**"It was definitely an act of deliberate provocation."**

From early June the Tories became visibly alarmed. They had schemed and prepared for years, waited patiently for the right moment to strike; they had split the miners; they had thrown many thousands of specially trained police at them; they had mobilised the entire press to engulf them in a barrage of lies, misrepresentation, libel and hate-filled propaganda - but still the mines remained in the fight and seemed to be advancing steadily, though slowly. They could fight epic battles like the one at Orgreave, near Sheffield, and hold the cops to a draw, forcing - temporarily - a halt to coke movements there.

Thatcher saw that, like some fabled 'British square' of soldiers on the battlefields of the Napoleonic wars, the mines could take a tremendous pounding, stand in a swirl of smoke and shell, and

then move forward on the offensive. The Tories had good reason to be worried. So they stepped up the counter-attack.

There was a new and sinister development of police thuggery, directed not against miners and their families in their home villages. Police began to act like a hostile army of occupation in some pit villages.

On the night of May 11, 160 police in riot gear terrorised Thorney Abbey Road, Blidworth, Notts. Annette Holroyd and Pauline Radford told Socialist Organiser what happened:

"They managed to get Terry (Terry Dunn, a Yorkshire picket) over the driveway onto the road and about four or five got hold of his arms and got him into the van.

"Everyone asked why they were arresting him. They refused to give an answer and said, 'We don't have to tell you'.

"Then they chucked him in the van and all the men ran up to the van but they slammed the doors in their faces. One of the lads said, 'Come on, take me. If you're going to lift him you should lift the lot of us. They just drove straight off.

"I went over to see my baby-sitter. She was terrified. It was my house just next door. I asked her what was the matter. She said, 'There's been five or six policemen knocking on the door, and asking questions: Where's my dad? Where's my husband? Where is everybody?

"I calmed her down and by then there were thirteen or fourteen police vans out in the road. There were policemen lined up across the road. I've never seen so many policemen - hundreds of them.

"I was terrified, as was everyone else. I kept clinging hold of my husband so he wouldn't go through the gate. If they went through the gates they'd get lifted.

"All the men said, 'What are you doing here? We're not causing any trouble'. The police said they'd had a report about a disturbance - they need at least 13 police vans to check out a disturbance, 160 police in riot gear!

"The union official said he saw another 20 vans in the next street waiting to come round.

"I feel the police wanted all the Yorkshire lads to go over the gate into the road and get into a riot with the police, and then they'd do them all for rioting.

"It was definitely an act of deliberate provocation".

The tone of Tory denunciations got more and more shrill and hate-filled, until, on July 19, Thatcher denounced the NUM as 'the enemy within', a domestic equivalent of the Argentines she had fought in the Falklands war. Other Tory speakers followed up the attack, and the Times editorialised: "There is a war on".

On June 13, with the battle of Orgreave still in full swing, Arthur Scargill had set out an expanded set of demands for the strike, including a four-day week. By June 25, Tony Benn was calling over the heads of the union leaders for other workers to strike immediately alongside the miners, and the next day in Parliament Labour MP Martin Flannery spoke of an "inexorable march towards a general strike... now under way".

Tony Benn was right to appeal over the heads of the union leaders for workers to back the miners. But that it was Benn the MP who did it was also the measure of the weakness of the official trade union leadership.

The NUM special conference on July 11-12 was jubilant, endorsing Scargill's expanded demands and approving a rule change which could be used to discipline scabs.

rest of the story next week

# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Miners wives organise:

# Big and beautiful!

By Jill Mountford



**O**ur men were left to fight on their own last time round (1984-85) and there's no way they can face it alone this time" - the words of a miner's wife, addressing a workshop at Saturday's "Conference of the Left" in Chesterfield.

She went on "we hate what the UDM did to us - we hate Roy Lynk - I hope the pit he's occupying floods! But we have to be bigger than that. We have to bring them into the fold".

She asked the meeting to "give the men the confidence to fight" She explained how women in her pit village were "desperately encouraging the men to fight back", emphasising once more: "we can't do it alone".

This woman was one of thousands who, during the 84/85 strike, was the backbone of her community.

In that strike the role of women rapidly developed from one of running soup kitchens, to picketing, and then to touring the length and breadth of Britain addressing mass meetings and rallies, arguing the case for the miners.

The best year of my life so far was spent fighting alongside miners wives in Stoke during the 1984/5 battle. For eleven months not one day went by without us doing some sort of activity around that dispute.

Having helped out with the first food parcel distribution, within a few days the group of women I was working with were on the picket line. Within a month we had a women-only picket. Dozens of women picketed out scabs - surrounded by twice as many scab-herders - while the men stayed at home to look after the kids!

Within a short space of time, you saw working class women who, prior to this struggle, had had little confidence in themselves to do anything outside of the domestic sphere, stand up and argue the case for the miners, and for our class. Whether arguing against Tory lies about "economic viability", or explaining, in a no-nonsense way, the role the state was playing in the miners strike, these women rose to every occasion.

Mums, wives, girlfriends, once outside the front doors of their own little, individual storage tank, also known as "home", became big, bold and determined class fighters.

The priorities of their lives did a 180 degree turn. Collective action for a common aim generated a strength, confidence and power in these working class women which took them way beyond the basic economic issues of pit closures. These women became creative, inventive, and adventurous.

If we were to play a word association game, and you were to say "miners wives", I'd say 'big and beautiful'. Not the big and beautiful of the Ursula Andress type, but the big and beautiful that comes in all shapes, sizes and colours. The big and beautiful working class woman who, grows in struggle. The women who collectively, can help tear every limb from the monster capitalism and then, very carefully, can help put the limbs of a better society together in a new order - socialism.

The 1984-85 miners strike showed some of us just a hint of what is possible when working class women fight together. It gave me a glimpse of the future I now fight to win.

## Ice cream workers show the way

# Save jobs: occupy!

**A**s anger against the Tories' vicious pit closure programme spread like wildfire up and down the country, workers at the Lyons Maid factory in Kirby, just outside Liverpool, joined in the jobs fight and occupied their plant. They are trying to stop the plant's closure and the sacking of virtually the entire workforce.

The Lyons Maid workers have set an example for all workers fighting redundancies. Occupation is the best way to stop closures, and now is the time to fight.

One of the shop stewards at the factory explained the situation:

"On Friday afternoon management told us that everyone was going to be made redundant with the exception of expert hand-picked workers."

The closure comes after Allied Lyons sold the factory to Clarke Foods, a front for American asset stripper Henry Clarke.

"We checked up on Clarke after the sale" added the TGWU steward. "He has had four companies in America,

and all of them went bust. Whenever he took over a factory, he came onto the site, made some big noises and then walked out again in an asset-stripping operation.

"He also said that he had never dealt with trade unions and had no intention of ever dealing with them.

"He's a con man. He's just all talk.

He tried twice to force us to sign new contracts under threat of pulling out,

but we beat him both times. He also awarded himself an 839% pay rise, the biggest single pay rise that any director in this country received this year.

"The workforce here is in the TGWU. At Clarke's Telford and Stourbridge sites there is no union recognition. But we have had meetings with workers from those factories and we hope that they will soon be joining, the TGWU as well.

"The miners struggle has been of assistance to us as it has highlighted the question of unemployment and the issues are the same: protection of jobs, and basic trade union rights. We'll be down on the lobby of Parliament on Wednesday."

Messages of support/financial donations to: Steve Alcock, TGWU 6/556 branch, c/o 2 Melrose Road, Melling Mount, Kirkby, Merseyside.

## Campaign for jobs

**A**t last the TUC has decided to put some energy and resources into campaigning for jobs.

This Sunday's demonstration could be the start of a massive crusade for jobs but for the campaign to really take off it has to capture the imagination of millions of workers.

That means instead of relying on dis-sident Tories and the CBI - with workers left to passively look on and

applaud - the TUC has to base the campaign on the struggles of workers. The TUC should:

- Support all workers fighting redundancies;
- Argue for cutting the hours not the jobs;
- Revive the successful engineering unions' campaign, "Drive for 35", and spread it to all sections of workers;

- Demand a massive programme of public works and training and retraining at trade union rates of pay;
- Demand the restoration of all Tory cuts;
- Link up with the Labour Party for a series of mass demonstrations demanding an immediate general election!

Please display this poster in your workplace

# MINERS' JOBS



**M**ake no mistake, the decision to butcher the coal industry is not going to be the end of the Tory jobs massacre.

Up to 60,000 jobs in industries related to coal are immediately under threat. And if the Tories succeed against the miners, it could be your jobs tomorrow. The case for a united fightback from Labour and the unions is irresistible.

## PIT JOB LOSSES: THE REAL TOTAL

Whatever the Tories may be saying right now, they still want exactly the same cutbacks in the industry that led them to call for 31 pits to be closed. They have not genuinely reprieved a single pit.

So, 30,000 miners still face the dole by next March. What's more, according to Oxford economist Andrew Glyn 31,500 jobs in mining-related industries are set to follow the closures. The total number of job losses involved adds up to 78,600 at least.

## RAIL AND POWER JOBS TO GO TOO

7,000 jobs look certain to go in coal-fired power stations over the next three years. 6,000 have already gone in the last two. 16 coal-fired stations are at risk.

On the railways, 5,000 jobs and 8 depots face the axe.

Rail and power workers have every reason to strike against these plans. They should ballot to do so.

## EVERY JOB IS AT RISK

It's not just the pits that face devastation. Even the Tory press is talking about 200,000 job losses by Christmas.

50,000 builders, 16,000 engineers, 9,000 car retail workers, 5,000 Telecom workers, 5,000 in textiles, 5,000 shopworkers and 3,000 banking and insurance workers face the sack, according to a report from the Chamber of Commerce.

No job is safe. There is no alternative but to fight back.

## TORIES PLAN NEW ATTACKS

Under existing Tory plans, up to 1 million public sector jobs could go in the next few years.

# YOUR

# TOMORROW

The Tories plan to massively extend "contracting-out" — Compulsory Competitive Tendering — in the civil service and local government.

It will lead to lower wages, worse conditions, few jobs.

The workforce in these areas will face casualisation and the uncertainty that goes with it. Union and pension rights will be destroyed.

Prospects are little different in the NHS. Thousands of jobs could go as a result of the Tomlinson Report which could close four central London teaching hospitals.

5,000 London Underground jobs could go under management's crazy "Company

Plan" which also means... for those who remain

## PAY CUTS FOR STAY

If your job isn't immediate... you can bet your pay... Tories are certain to... workers in the public club, the CBI, has already... public sector wage fr

## JOIN THE FIGHT

• Support the miner delegations from you

# Kick the Tories out!

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## TBACK

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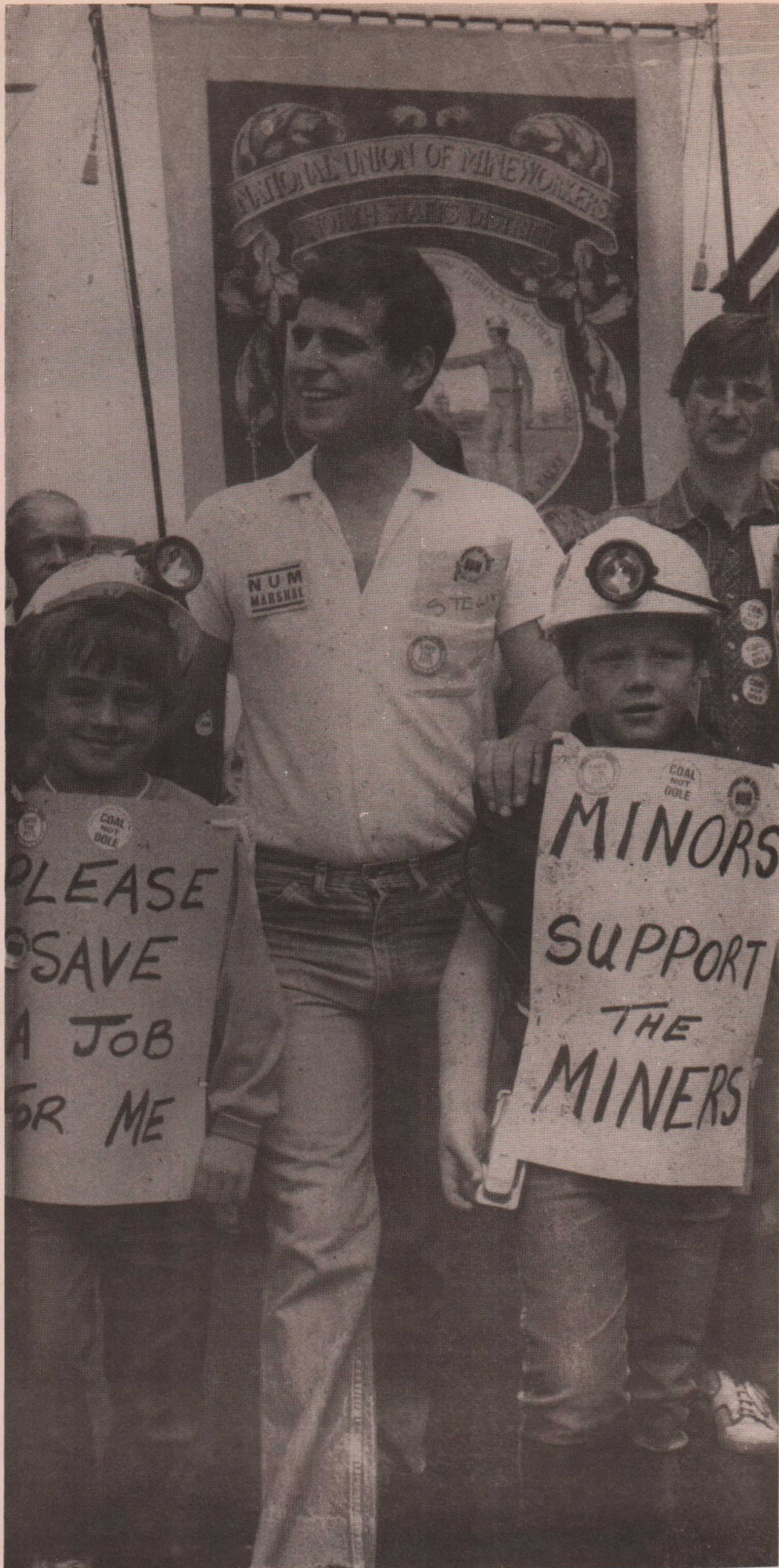
support any protests. Join the TUC demonstration this Sunday.

- Demand the TUC calls a day of action on a workday to back the miners. Try and get a strike in your workplace in support.

- Link the issues that are facing you and your workmates — whether it be job losses, pay cuts, privatisation or worsening conditions — to the miners' battle. With the Tories on the ropes, now is the time to fight.

- Demand that the Labour and TUC leaders put themselves at the head of a mass protest movement with the aim of forcing a new general election.

Kick out the Tories!



# TH THE MINERS