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Workers Power

25p/10p strikers

Paper of the Workers Power group

BUILD THE LINKS

FORWARD TO A GENERAL STRIKE!

THE DOCKERS AND miners must unite and co-ordinate their strikes. A fighting alliance is needed. The Triple Alliance has proved to be a crippled alliance. Of course scabby Sirs is to blame for this at one level. But the Alliance was weak in one other crucial respect. As an alliance purely at the level of the union leaders, it relied on Sirs the scab and Buckton and Knapp, the artful strike dodgers.

The result was that this bureaucratic alliance collapsed at the first test of action. Any new alliances built out of this strike must start from a completely new and different premise.

Immediately, the dockers and miners on strike and the rail and seamen blacking coal and freight, must be brought together at a rank and file level. This means building in every locality, rank and file, delegate based action co-ordinating committees.

The tasks of such bodies are to make the strikes bite. Mass picketing of key targets should be organised and mobilised for on a joint basis. Scab ports, freight depots, power stations, steel

plants can all be picketed more effectively if we do it together.

The committees must also organise to spread the action. Delegations of miners and dockers should go to factory gates or canteen meetings to put the case for an united fight now against the Tories. Particular efforts should be made to talk to rank and file steelworkers who have so far only heard Sirs' side of the story. Campaigns to turn blacking into striking action throughout rail, transport and shipping is also vital.

As the action spreads so the committees must draw in delegates from all layers involved. All strikers, unemployed activists who support pickets and demonstrations, wives groups and others involved in generalising the fight should be represented on these bodies. They must be built into real *Councils of Action*. If they are, then they can make sure that their own struggles and - if we force the TUC to act - a general strike, are firmly under the control of the rank and file. ■

THE NATIONAL DOCK strike has brought a whole new section of the working class out alongside the miners. The dockers are a traditionally well organised and militant sector of the labour movement. Like the miners, they were the victors in a mighty battle in 1972.

Their entry onto the battlefield sent the Stock Exchange and the pound tumbling. Ministers, led by the 'wet' Peter Walker are talking tough in order to calm their classes' jangled nerves.

"A Britain succumbing to Scargill's mobs would be a Britain that would lose all international confidence", puffed Walker.

That other well-known friend of the working man, Norman "on yer bike" Tebbit, has huffed that "violence and intimidation are a disgrace to the labour movement." Their Mistress' Voice has of course been loud in its insistence that "The country will not be held to ransom by a tiny minority."

The Fleet Street backers of Thatcher have openly contemplated defeat for the first time - only to urge her on to greater efforts. Thus one of her strongest backers the *Sunday Times* warned their Iron idol, "Well let her be in no doubt; if the miners strike is settled on any terms which allow Mr Scargill to plausibly claim that he has had his way then the past 18 weeks will have been a waste of time... Efforts to encourage realism in other industries will be abandoned. Mrs Thatcher in such an event, might as well ask the pantechonicon to pull up outside the Downing Street backdoor." (15.7.84)

Despite these cries of anguish it would be very foolish to start celebrating a victory. The NUM has scored important successes - in defying Vice Chancellor Sir Robert Megarry's dictat to the union on its own rule book. On the 11th July, the *Financial Times* salivated, "several of the unions' leaders could be summoned for contempt of court. Such proceedings could result in a fine against all the defendants or even imprisonment. Legal action could lead

to sequestration of the NUM's assets and of the personal finances of the union leaders."

Yet so far, they still hesitate, fearing the response of the whole union movement to such action. Thatcher has threatened the proclamation of a State of Emergency which would enable her to put troops into the docks.

Thatcher's war cabinet now faces a dilemma. Should they launch a full-scale onslaught which would involve the virtual out-lawing of the NUM and mobilising the army, thus revealing the full nature of the bosses' state to the working class. Or, should they rely on their friends and agents within the labour movement, Murray, Sirs, Hammond, the whole snivelling gang of "new realists", to delay, isolate and betray.

The trouble with the latter course is that over 18 weeks it has not succeeded and now the dockers (on strike) and the seamen (blacking freight) have British capitalism by the tenderest part of its anatomy. They have to break this grip somehow.

Of course, despite the dockers' magnificent action it is a scandal that it has taken four and a half months for any official section of the labour movement to commit itself to all out action alongside the miners. Arthur Scargill is putting mildly when he says, "The tragedy is that the official movement, in many ways has not responded."

The NUM leaders are to some extent responsible. They have not demanded support from the TUC. They were right to tell Murray to stuff his mediation, but wrong to think this meant "keeping the TUC" as a whole out of it. The TUC is empowered to call a general strike. Individual unions can take action - whether in solidarity or in pursuit of their own claims. They should do both.

Any union that settles for peanuts now in the context of the miners strike (as the NUR and ASLEF did) betrays not only their own interests but also betrays the miners and the whole working class. But with the Tories



Andrew Ward (Report)

limbering up to declare a State of Emergency, with the judges nerving themselves to seize the funds or even the leaders of the NUM (or the TGWU) we need more than solidarity from the hard vanguard of the working class.

The miners and the dockers must not fight the riot police or the army alone. We have argued throughout this dispute that the TUC should call a general strike in support of the miners, of indefinite duration, until both the miners' demands have been met in full and the Prior, Tebbit and King anti-union laws are completely repealed.

There have been several opportunities to launch a general strike. The strike has witnessed key moments when millions of workers' sympathies went out to the miners. Again Arthur Scargill was right when he said in Manchester on July 13th, "When two miners died fighting for the right to work - not one

of you should have gone to work until this dispute was over."

It is 100% right to direct this appeal to the rank and file. No efforts must be spared to do so. But it is also necessary to address it to the leaders. Here Arthur is very weak - he hesitates to offend them at the critical moment.

The threat of a massive increase in state repression means that we must put the whole apparatus of the labour movement on a war footing. The Miners' Support Committees should approach the trades councils, the shop stewards committees, the district committees and all working class political parties and organisations to call emergency conferences in every town and city. The delegates to these conferences should be given full powers to form a *Council of Action*. Every constituent body should hold mass workplace meetings empowering their delegates to vote for

a general strike as soon as the Government declares its State of Emergency or as soon as the Courts attempt to sequester union funds or arrest a single union leader.

The TUC should be bombarded with resolutions to call an immediate general strike in support of the miners and against the union laws. As a minimum they should now announce that if the government takes either of the above courses of action against the dockers or the miners then a general strike will be called forthwith.

Across the whole labour movement the call must be for every battalion to advance. Forward now into action with the miners. If we do this then the Tories - already weakened and divided - will begin to crumble. Then she won't need a removal van at the backdoor of Downing Street, but a private jet at Heathrow!

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RANK AND FILE MUST DECIDE!

AFTER THE PRE-CONFERENCE talks between the NUM and NCB ended there was good reason for every militant to be suspicious. The talks were pushed for by the NCB. They were getting more and more worried about the effects of the strike. Total victory for the miners should have been the simple demand of the NUM negotiators. This was not what happened.

We have always argued that the McGahey/Heathfield axis - the soft left - on the NUM executive have been the keenest to go for a compromise short of total victory. In the previous talks it appeared to be Scargill who was holding the line against them. The pre-conference talks heralded a different approach by him. He explained, "We have bent over backwards to reach agreement which would have resolved this costly and damaging dispute." Scargill had evidently joined the compromisers.

DRAFT AGREEMENT

This was clear from the draft agreement put forward by the NUM and rejected by the NCB. True the statement called for a withdrawal of the March 6th announcement and the package of 20 pit closures. However, the question of "uneconomic" closures was left open. Various categories of exhausted pits or pits that have "no further mineable reserves that are workable or can be developed" were agreed for closure. Yet the failure to explicitly reject the notion of an "uneconomic" pit was a dangerous retreat from the strike's central demands.

The proposed deal also left open the possibility of closing 15 of the pits by naming only 5 to be kept open - Cortonwood, Polmaise, Herrington, Bullcliffe Wood and Snowdown. Certainly these are test-case pits. They are amongst the NCB's

immediate targets for closure. Nevertheless the naming of five gives the NCB the possibility of working out an alternative closure plan within the terms of the deal. For example none of the pits in South Wales under threat are removed.

ROTTEN COMPROMISE

This sort of compromise could of course, like the one forced out of the government in 1981, be presented to striking miners as a victory. It would not be. It would be a rotten compromise, one the NCB would quietly renege on. After the 1981 government climbdown, within the terms of the deal which only involved withdrawing of the "unilateral plan" for closures, 12 out of the 23 pits threatened under the plan were closed with no resistance by the NUM. Given how long the strike has lasted the NCB will undoubtedly try to get away with a similar closure-by-stealth strategy, banking on the miners being too exhausted for another national strike. The proposed compromise would make their job easier.

The strike has thrown up other issues besides closures. The solidity of the strike has raised the real possibility of winning on such issues. They are completely ignored under the proposed deal. For example, Scargill has given voice to the justified calls for early retirement and shorter hours. He has pointed to the fact that a settlement over this year's pay round has not yet been reached.

AREA AGAINST AREA

The strike itself exposed the division and frightful weakness that exist in the NUM as a result of the productivity deal. This previous agreement pits area against area. Crucially, many militants in Kent and Derbyshire have been sacked



In search of a compromise?

by the NCB for helping to try and win this strike. Yet none of these issues receive a mention in the proposed deal.

We must be clear that demands on jobs, hours, no voluntary redundancies, early retirement, pay the bonus scheme and against the victimisations are bound up together and they can be won. In particular a return to work that left strike militants on the dole would be no victory.

The glaring thing about the whole period of talks was that the rank and file had no way of forcing these issues onto the agenda and no way

of exercising control over a deal. It is as certain as eggs are eggs that if a deal had been reached the delegate conference would have become an organising centre for selling it to the members.

The control of the regional NUM barons over the union's machinery, right down to the lodges, would have been a powerful lever in demobilising the militants and using the stay-at-homes to push through an agreement.

DON'T RELY ON ONE MAN

The lesson of these talks is clear. It is not good to rely on one man, Arthur Scargill, to stop a sell-out. In the first weeks of the strike we argued for workers' democracy to be used as a means of winning a national strike. We counterposed to the bosses' ballot, mass meetings, open debate, rank and file control of picketing and democratically elected and accountable strike committees at every level of the NUM - local, regional and national. We put forward these measures to achieve two things - an all-out strike and a rank and file controlled strike. Many militant miners', fearful of breaking with NUM custom and practice, and doubtful about the resolve of their own members, criticised or were, at least, hesitant to endorse our line. The militants' fear of the membership was and is unjustified. Every opinion poll taken throughout the strike shows a solid 60-70% for the strike.

The talks showed us to be 100% correct. Without organised workers' democracy, a shady and totally unnecessary compromise was on the cards and the militant, the rank and file would have no way of organising against it. Those on strike for 18 weeks have a right to decide. Far from it being too late to introduce full and direct workers' democracy for the strikers into the dispute it is more urgent than ever. The moves towards a rank and file strike committee in the West Midlands prove it can be done. The call for mass meetings to decide on any settlement and for democratic strike committees to run the strike must be taken up by militants in every other mining area. ■

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE MUST SPREAD THE ACTION

A DELEGATE CONFERENCE of miners' wives has been organised for the 21st and 22nd of July. Although limited to only four delegates per area it should be used to organise a full conference of the wives' groups. This would raise the possibility of creating a national organisation, raising demands for no compromise settlement, spreading action and fighting for their own interests as working class women.

The present escalation of militant action by miners and other workers makes the organising of working class women even more essential. We must ensure that our jobs, services and demands are included in the goals of the struggle as the struggle spreads throughout the working class. The miners' wives have given a great lead in this task.

A national conference could become an organising body from which calls for increased action are issued. Any moves to turn it into simply being a rally where women go to hear accounts of activities so far, with information on how soup kitchens, demonstrations and fund-raising events have been run would fall short of the tasks confronting the women in the groups.

PICKETING AND DEMONSTRATING

It is obviously essential that the militants involved can exchange information and ideas to learn from other groups. It is especially vital for the more militant groups like Hatfield and Keresley to explain the importance of women picketing, demonstrating and organising solidarity. This would help other women, who have so far been involved primarily with food parcels and welfare, to become more bold and militant in their activities.

The conference should not be limited to that of exchange of information. Wives have a vital interest in the outcome of the strike. It is not for purely moral reasons that they have dedicated themselves to support, have broken down barriers to their involvement, learned to organise, speak to meetings, developed their political consciousness and been arrested in clashes with police on picket lines. For women in the mining areas the victory of the strike is essential for future jobs for their families' living standards, for services and for the very existence of their communities. The women are well aware that any compromise settlement involving voluntary redundancies and selective pit closures would be disastrous for them and their children.

They must therefore have a say in any proposed settlement before the men vote on whether or not to return to work. A national women's conference should discuss the terms of a settlement, issuing a statement on what they consider to be a victory. It should call on the NUM to give full details of any proposed settlement to the wives' group for discussion. The groups could then take a position on the offer and make representation to strike committees and meetings of striking miners explaining their case so as to influence the decision finally taken by miners.

Now that the miners are not alone in their struggle the conference ought to discuss how to further spread the action. Already women are taking action over jobs and closures in hospital



Miners' wives on the march

occupations at Thornton View, Bradford and the South London Hospital for Women. Barking Hospital cleaners are on strike in defence of pay and conditions, as are women workers at Birds Eye factories, nursery workers in Islington, Bolton and Wakefield and in many other disputes around the country.

Miners' wives can help increase support for these women, and help bring more people out by sending delegations to women workers, putting arguments forward as to why now is the time to be acting in defence of jobs and conditions. The NUM leadership has so far taken control of calls for solidarity, with rank and file miners and wives not being able to directly appeal to other workers.

SCAB SIR

The steel workers' scab leader Bill Sirs has prevented any effective action by bleating about steel jobs, which he has consistently negotiated away in recent years. Wives could help get round these road blocks by contacting women steel workers and steel workers' wives, especially those who organised during the 1980 steel strike in Stocksbridge and Scunthorpe for example, and calling meetings where they could put over the miners' case, arguing for steel women to build support in the plants for strike action.

Such solidarity calls should go out to other workers also, with factories employing large numbers of women being visited and leafleted by miners' wives. Factory gate meetings should be held arguing for strike action in defence of their own jobs and wages, and in support of the miners and dockers. Obviously such efforts must be linked to similar ones by miners and dockers. Many miners' wives themselves work in factories,

hospitals and offices. The support groups should be helping them to organise themselves at work and into caucuses in the unions, to discuss the fight for solidarity action and how best they can force the unions to take up their own grievances and demands.

Wives of striking miners are not the only group to take up the struggle for their husbands' jobs. In 1978 dockers' wives organised a demonstration in support of their husbands when the closure of the London Docks was threatened. Links should be built up between miners' and dockers' wives, with the miners wives going out to the port areas to assist in setting up groups.

A national conference would therefore have plenty to discuss - the lessons so far and the tasks ahead. It is important that it can discuss resolutions and action proposals, and it is on this basis that the delegate conference next weekend should build for it. So that the momentum gained from such an initiative is not lost, the conference should set up regular delegate meetings to monitor and lead the work of the groups. There have already been plans made for a rally and demonstration on August 11th, this must be followed by a conference to set up a national miners' wives organisation with a commitment to continued activity after the strike.

Using the delegate conference to issue calls to action, a statement on the settlement and lay plans for a national organisation will be a big step forward for all working class women. It will be a beacon to which other women will look. It can inspire other women workers into activity and hence be a spur to the building of a mass militant working class women's movement, leading all women in struggle against the Tories and their vicious attacks on women and the whole working class. ■

by Helen Ward

Notts controversy

The interview with Steve Abbot in the last issue of Workers Power has provoked a good deal of discussion amongst striking miners in South Nottinghamshire. Much of that discussion has centred on Steve's criticism of the South Notts and North Notts strike committees.

We would like to make it clear that the views expressed in the interview are those of Steve and not those of Workers Power. Those involved in the strike committees are putting a tremendous amount of effort into keeping the ranks of the strikers in Notts solid and ensuring that they are not starved back to work.

Nevertheless we feel that it is important that there is an open discussion on the main issue raised in the interview with Steve. Namely, how important is it that a rank and file movement is built during the strike and what role should it have? In our view the development of the strike and under what conditions it ends will depend in large measure on the answers to these questions. In order to facilitate such a discussion the pages of Workers Power are open to anyone who wishes to contribute on this issue or any other related to the strike. We therefore welcome letters from striking miners which we will publish irrespective of whether or not we agree with their contents. Please try to keep letters to no more than 500 words. ■

TORIES GET THE JITTERS

"BRITAIN'S ECONOMY IS basically in good shape". It is now official! Thatcher said so. The trouble is, the people who are dearest to her heart - Britain's bosses and City financiers - were not entirely convinced. *The Economist* which speaks for many of them, sarcastically said, "When prime ministers start telling parliament that the economy is in good shape, it really is time to worry."

The cracks in the fragile base of the bosses' economic recovery are increasingly visible. High US interest rates for 18 months have made financiers sell sterling and buy dollars. As a result the pound has plummeted ever lower - briefly falling below an all-time low exchange rate of \$1.30. A similar process has more recently occurred against the main European currencies. The bosses are glum because this makes imports much dearer.

Also the money-supply has grown by twice the government's annual target in recent months. Government borrowing was £3.6 billion in April and May compared to a £7.2 billion target for the whole financial year. In order to stop the panic and put some confidence back in sterling the government put interest rates up by 2%.

No one in the City doubts the main cause of the Tories' plight, "The City, already growing edgy about the miners strike, had taken fright on Monday when the dockers said they would join them." (*The Economist* 14.7.84) With coal production down 70%, steel production down up to 10% the added effect of the docks strike will be to reduce any GDP growth by 1.1% this year. Commentators are openly talking of a 1985 recession. The bosses are less than happy that the fruits of their rail "boom" are being denied to them.

The bosses confidence in Thatcher has far from vanished. Nevertheless they are worried about her ability to deal with the new crisis. For the first time Thatcher is in conflict with two powerful sections of workers on a national scale. It is this show of our strength that has got the bosses worried. The working class has regained some of its lost confidence and is putting a spoke in their plans for reaping profits from the economic recovery.

More specifically, when Lawson made his first budget in March he set a series of financial targets which assumed an average of 2% growth for the next four years. This scenario was crucial; for on it depended the Tories' ability to deliver massive tax cuts to industry and Tory supporters and to retain their loyalty. Now it is all in grave doubt. And we have the miners and now the dockers to thank for it.

Eighteen weeks of a miners' strike has done more to rock Thatcher's government than all the so-called banana skins she has slipped on. The parliamentary Labour Party has been scorned and ridiculed by Thatcher as it has lamely tried to make political capital from each minor embarrassment. Mark Thatcher's Oman scandal, the fall from grace of her favourite minister Parkinson, the lack of consultation over the invasion of Grenada - each of these have been the focus of attention and hypocritical point-scoring by Labour. Their ritual parliamentary debates, and votes on issues like unemployment, attacks on trade union rights and so on, have been used as publicity exercises for the vain Kinnoek, not as calls to action. On the vital issue of the miners' strike, the Labour leadership, and especially Kinnoek, have tried to save the Tories' neck by pressing the NUM to accept a shoddy compromise and have repeatedly attacked the pickets who have braved the police thuggery.

The miners' strike is not simply one more banana skin for Thatcher. That would imply it is simply a momentary embarrassment due to carelessness. This time the miners are pulling at the carpet under Thatcher's feet. Her supporters are genuinely worried whether she has got the strength and nerve to resist.

The divisions within the Tory Party however are exaggerated. But its existence and its exaggeration by its supporters in the City and Fleet Street is



deliberately designed to make Thatcher take note of wider opinions. Since her election victory in 1983 she has completed the process - begun in 1981 - of removing all Tory dissidents from her ruling inner-circle. She has replaced them with self-congratulatory clones. Her supporters on the Tory back benches and elsewhere fear that this makes Tory tactics and strategy too inflexible, and therefore prone to embarrassments like the GLC reversal and the spectacle of them dissuading nationalised industry bosses from using the anti-union laws.

Nevertheless the weakness of our enemy should not be exaggerated. Their jittery nerves are a result of our show of strength. Any signs of weakness, any moves towards compromise and the Tories and bosses will regroup and go for our throat. The battle is hotting up. Thatcher has made preparations for Emergency Powers to break the dock strike with troops and even use them to move coal in the autumn. Her will needs to be broken.

The bulk of the Parliamentary Labour Party fear our strength, the strength of strike action, and vainly hope Thatcher will break her leg on one too many banana skins. It is useless and a confession of impotence to expect her to be defeated in this manner. The miners need to extend the strike to embrace all workers. The dockers opened up a second front. We need to open up many more. Let's go for Thatcher's throat. ■

'Militant' betray Liverpool workers



Photo: Tommy Carroll
Hatton and Jenkin - all smiles before the rotten compromise

HAVING JUST STRUCK a deal with the Tories involving putting up the rates by 17% in Liverpool, at least three times the official inflation rate, it was predictable that Labour's "marxist" paper *Militant* should declare, "Liverpool council have won an overwhelming victory over the Tory government". (*Militant* 13.7.84)

In fact in the middle of a momentous struggle between the miners and the Tories, in the midst of a national Docks strike which has brought Liverpool docks to a standstill, this deal, that increases the burden on working class budgets, can only be described as a betrayal.

Two and a half short months ago Derek Hatton, Liverpool council's leading Militant supporter, was declaring in the council, "Our rate increase that we are putting forward is there in black and white as 9% unlike other political parties...to talk about 25% rate increases (the Liberal's proposal - WP) on the back of the people of this city would in many ways put them below the poverty line". Exactly. So how is a 17% increase a "momentous victory", comrade Hatton?

The deal involved small amounts of extra money from Urban Aid programmes, debt rescheduling and a number of other adjustments, including the waiving of penalties which would have dramatically cut Liverpool's Government support grant. It was certainly a compromise by the Tories. But for Thatcher it was cheap at the price. Given what could have been won if Liverpool workers, public sector and private, had linked their struggle to that of the dockers and miners, Jenkin has performed an important service for the ruling class in buying off Liverpool council for a few million.

COVERING THEIR TRACKS

And the Militant led council has allowed him to do it, covering their tracks with cries of "victory". The *Militant* did exactly the same when Knapp was bought off by the Tories and kept the rail-workers out of a struggle alongside the miners. This paper seems to specialise in calling stabs in the back "victories".

The *Militant* was full of huff and puff about how, "...the Tories could not face the prospect of putting in the commissioners to run the city. There would have been massive civil disobedience among the council workers and a general strike." (13.7.84) We are forced to ask, why then did Militant not use this massive hostility to the Tories Tories to push for a total victory?

Others on the left in Liverpool had a more sober assessment of the state of the campaign. *Socialist Organiser* now means that more concessions, "could have been won only by strike action on a massive scale" and that given this was not a possibility, "to vote against the package was an

arid and meaningless act." (SO 12.7.84) They went to declare Militant's retreat "half a victory".

Socialist Organiser, as always, runs away from the revolutionary duty to say what is - to fight and argue against a sell out, to politically arm and win over the best militants in the face of the Militant compromises. It is certainly true, as SO has sometimes half-heartedly argued, that the council-led campaign was fundamentally flawed. We have repeatedly warned of the dangers arising from the fact that the leadership was held by the councillors. Against this we called for the building of a delegate-based city-wide council of action representing every important workplace. In fact, the councillors related primarily to the trade union officials and together treated the rank and file as stage armies when they needed to threaten the Tories into negotiations.

The campaign never oriented seriously to mobilising amongst the important private sector industries - such as Fords Halewoods. Their struggle was crucial in any fight with the government because only strike action supported by the private sector workers hits the bosses where it hurts - in their profits.

DANGER SIGNALS

The danger signals became even more obvious after Labour's victory in the May elections. When the councillors got down to serious negotiations with Jenkin they had little use for mass mobilisations of the rank and file against the Tories' attempts to cut their living standards through attacks on local services. The campaign withered and the "delegate conferences" became even more stage managed Militant anti-Tory rallies. The misnamed "Fightback" conference on June 23rd was a typical example of this.

The final result has been predictable. Militant's "marxist" leadership has shown itself to be indistinguishable from the left reformists. Far from using the city council as a means of mobilising the working class against the Tory attacks, the Militant has achieved rotten compromise which the workers' will pay for. Thanks to Militant, Liverpool's already hard-pressed workers will be hit further by increased rates. They have been lulled and demobilised by Militant and the other lefts on the council. This holds enormous dangers for when the Tories, as they will, renew their attacks on local government.

Councillor Hatton once said that when the NUM are successful, "it will be like the 7th cavalry of the trade union movement coming to the support of this particular struggle". The "cavalry" is still in bitter struggle with the Tories, Militant supporters need to ask - why in the midst of battle has comrade Hatton raised the white flag in Liverpool?

by Stuart King

35 SELL-OUT IN GERMANY

THE BIGGEST AND most costly strike in the history of West Germany has ended in compromise. The metalworkers' union, IG Metall, has accepted the plan proposed by the arbitrator, the right wing Social Democrat Georg Leber, for a 38½ hour week from next April. The six week strike by 60,000 engineers cost the employers some DM3 billion. Their attempt to break the strike was a lock out of 450,000 workers, primarily in car factories and related industries, where production of 380,000 vehicles was lost.

The original demand for the 35 hour week was dropped early on in the dispute as the IGM leaders manoeuvred to gain a compromise settlement. Winning the 35 hour week would have been a tremendous gain for the German workers, however it would not automatically have led to a reduction in West Germany's 2 million plus unemployment total, which is how it was being posed by the union leaders. The key question is not simply the number of hours worked but the intensity of the work and the productivity over the whole working week. At the heart of the problem therefore, lies the question of control over work speed and manning levels.

This fact is highlighted by the small print of the eventual settlement. Between now and next April, bosses will have plenty of time to re-organise and reschedule their production methods. The agreement itself recognises this by accepting that the actual implementation of the new working hours is to be negotiated locally and that employers will be allowed to ensure that plant is used no less intensively than at present. Indeed many employers have used the close down caused by the strike to begin the task of re-tooling and re-organising to ensure that at least as much will be produced after next April as now.

INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT

No employer worth their salt will miss the opportunity to impose speed up and rationalisation so that the actual result of the new agreement could easily be an increase in unemployment accompanied by an increase in productivity per worker. Both the *Financial Times* and its German equivalent *Handelsblatt*, have pointed out that the attraction for the employers lay in the flexibility it would allow them. For example the new agreement does not insist on a standard 38½ hours per week for all workers but only for that figure to be the average, for a whole plant, over a two month period.

Could anything more have been won from the traditionally inflexible employers' organisation Gesamtmetall? Undoubtedly yes. The strikes themselves were highly selective, involving only 60,000

of the union's 2 million members. In the two regions centered on Stuttgart and Frankfurt, the union only called out workers in the car component plants. This was aimed at reducing the costs of the strike and gradually increasing the pressure on the big car makers such as BMW and Opel as supplies dwindled. The employers responded with massive lockouts. These still cost the union enormous sums of money but could never have the impact of positive strike action.

Those on strike were forced by the union to accept the court imposed restrictions on picketing. Attempts at occupations were smothered by the union leaders. Yet, the fact that the relatively limited action taken could force the employers to give way on their insistence that they would under no circumstances drop the forty hour week, is proof enough that a determined strike could have won much more.

CLASS RELATIONS

Nonetheless, if the settlement is a sell-out it is by no means a defeat. The working class of West Germany, for so long presented as a model of moderation, passivity and co-operation with management, has altered the face of class relations in the Federal Republic. By mass, collective action it has forced the employers to concede significant gains that can and must be built upon. The militants have experienced for themselves both the power of their unions and the way in which that power is presently diluted and squandered by their bureaucratic leaders. Other sections of workers too will draw lessons from the IGM strike; that even the strongest employers are not invincible, that the courts are not neutral and that the union leaders are not to be trusted with total control of negotiation or the conduct of the strike.

Within the engineering industry itself such lessons must be learnt quickly. The trade union strike committees should demand that they, not the so-called works councils, have control over negotiating the implementation of the new agreement. In the period up to next April militants must publicise every attempt by management to exploit the weaknesses of the new agreement, winning new members to the union and reorganising the union itself on a workplace, rather than geographical, basis. Strengthening the position of trade union militants at plant level, however, cannot be an end in itself. At a national level the rank and file must fight for control of their own unions, control over negotiations and control over the bureaucrats who handed the bosses a dangerous compromise when they could have imposed on them a thoroughgoing defeat. ■

by Steve McSweeney

MACGREGOR'S PLAN FOR DOLE



THROUGHOUT THIS STRIKE the NUM and NCB have slugged it out over one word: "un-economic". Scargill and MacGregor have built their respective programmes around this word. It was all that stood in the way of a settlement at the last set of talks.

For the NCB, Mac the Knife has insisted that the strike is futile and damaging. In their view, the Coal Industry must make profits to justify itself. To do that when demand is falling, the NCB must reduce costs. In short, this means holding down wages and cutting out the highest cost pits. The NCB argue there is an irresistible logic behind the closure plan announced on March 6th: "We have to produce coal at a price the customer is willing to pay."

These simple laws of supply and demand are held up as natural and unalterable. Just like the weather, you can enjoy it or suffer it, but it is hopeless to believe that you can do anything about it.

If miners or those from whom they seek support believe these arguments then the strike will be weakened. These arguments, turn, if they are not countered, can a picket into a stay-at-home, and a stay-at-home into a scab.

The truth is very different from MacGregor's fairy tales about "market forces". In the first place the fact is that conscious political decisions lie behind the Tories' and the NCB's economics. For example, MacGregor pretends that "the customer" is some unknown individual wandering around the market. Rather the NCB's main customer is another government controlled body - the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB). Some 75% of the NCB's coal goes to the CEGB's power stations. If the CEGB chose its fuel on the basis of price, then it would choose coal every time. In early 1983 coal was sold to the CEGB at £49.40 per tonne whereas the equivalent price of oil was £74.00 per tonne and for gas £60.

The major effect of this pricing policy by the government is to force the NCB to look unprofitable so as to make it an easier target for attack. Compare the CEGB financial accounts with those of the NCB in 1982/3. We can see how arbitrary this balance-sheet system is. That year the CEGB turned an £85 million loss into a £332 million profit. Productivity was not any higher and sales actually fell. It happened because the Tories put up CEGB prices to customers by 8% and pegged the price of coal to half that figure. If the NCB had put up its price by 8% then its £97 million operating loss would have virtually disappeared.

What this points to is the irrational and divisive role of energy policy under capitalism. Instead of a planned and integrated energy policy with costs

spread across each sector the bosses split and divide each sector in order to divide and attack the workers in oil, coal, electricity. At the stroke of a pen one can be made to appear unprofitable as a prelude to an assault on workers wages and conditions.

Directly political and anti-trade union considerations are also easy to detect in the government's decision to make the CEGB reduce its coal-fired capacity and turn to nuclear power. In 1983 the CEGB bought 80 million of the NCB's 113 million tonnes of coal. In its evidence to the Sizewell enquiry the CEGB expected that by the year 2000 it may only want 15 million tonnes per year and so provide 50% of electricity by nuclear power instead of the present 12%. This would mean up to 100,000 miners' jobs going.

POLITICAL REASON

It is certainly not the cheaper cost of nuclear power that lies behind this plan. The CEGB always deliberately underestimates the cost of nuclear power by leaving out interest charges during construction, cost of research, and the effect of inflation on capital costs during the many years of delay between when a power station is meant to open and when it actually does. In the case of Dungeness B this was 12 years!

One of the main reasons for the shift away from coal is the purely political reason that the Tories want to reduce the power of the NUM and so weaken the strength of the organised labour movement. As the famous leaked Cabinet Minutes of October 1979 stated: "A nuclear programme would have the advantage of removing a substantial portion of electricity from disruption by industrial action of coal miners and transport workers."

The economic motives for boosting the number of nuclear power reactors are strong but they are not fundamentally to do with this form of electricity generation being cheaper and therefore beneficial to the mass of the population. Rather it is the huge profits that the big corporations - GEC, Babcock and Northern Engineering Industries - can and do make out of nuclear reactor construction. These huge conglomerates comprising electrical, construction and engineering interests provide every aspect of the reactor and are guaranteed a profit mark up on whatever costs are incurred. Even the Select Committee (House of Commons) on Energy 1981 said that "in effect, contractors... have enjoyed a blank cheque which the CEGB have been obliged to honour."

BUSINESS FRIENDS

The enormous weight of this lobby - together with their US equivalents who have seen their home market slump in the 1980s - has proven irresistible to their business friends in Government, many of whom directly benefit. If this nuclear programme were halted and the coal industry sustained, the chance of huge private sector profits would be denied to them.

Finally, making the coal industry itself profitable is, of course, a desirable goal of the Tories and their City friends. In the end this does not necessarily mean a Coal Industry with a much reduced output as is presently planned. What it does mean is reducing costs as much as possible and increasing productivity vastly beyond present levels.

SACKING MINERS

Both can be done by sacking tens of thousands in the process breaking the power of the NUM, depressing wage levels and making working conditions even more miserable. But it also means applying the new technology (MINOS) fully. The productivity gains of the last 20 years have been due to the fullest application of power-loading technology such as self-advancing pit props. To go qualitatively beyond this would require the extensive application of technology which already exists. This includes retreat mining and computerisation of mining operations.

The showcase for this is the Selby coalfield where, it is planned, 4,000 miners will produce 70% of the output of the entire output of the South Wales and Scottish fields with only 10% of their workforce. Of course, once this has occurred, the Tories' plan would be to sell it off to the private sector for the privateers to reap the profits. Candidates include the firms which already own open-cast mines or coking plants, those in the mining supplies sector and the oil multi-nationals who are eagerly looking to future profitable investments as a compensation for the exhaustion of their profitable oil reserves.

PROFITS!

At the end of the day, behind MacGregor's talk of the forces of supply and demand, lies his real guiding principle - the law of profitable exploitation. The bosses' energy policy is designed to serve the interests of capitalist industry. To this end they are quite happy to talk about a lack of demand for coal and to sack thousands of miners. Yet, this takes place in a world in which energy is desperately needed to raise the standard of living of millions living in misery in the Third World. It takes place in a country in which numerous old people die every year of hypothermia because they have not got enough coal or cannot afford fuel bills. The bosses' energy policy is a barbarous one. The NUM are right to reject it. But it is not enough to put forward, as the NUM and the Labour Party do, an alternative energy policy for, and within the framework of, capitalism. ■

by Keith Hassell

MIDLANDS RANK AND FILE ORGANISE

IMPORTANT MOVES TOWARDS rank and file organisation have been made in the West Midlands coalfield. With a majority of miners on strike in the North Staffs pits, at Lea Hall (South Staffs.) and at Keresley (Warwickshire) but with only a minority out at the other pits in the region, the strike has faced a number of difficulties.

In the Warwickshire district, for example, all the NUM's funds have been tied up by scab officials like Sammy Glass. Organising against the scabs and to overcome the slowness of the Area Executive to co-ordinate any action are amongst the tasks that rank and file miners came together to discuss on Wednesday July 18th.

The Midlands strikers, like those to one extent or another in every region, have not exercised control over the deployment of pickets, other than from their own individual pits. As a result co-ordinated efforts, systematic mass picketing at pressure points, and helping picketing in outside areas has not emerged. Any co-ordination that takes place in South Staffs and Warwickshire is under the tight control of nominees from the South Wales area executive of the NUM and the West Midlands TUC. No discussion has taken place about how or whether the Midlands strikers are to be mobilised to help out at mass pickets such as those at Orgreave or Llanwern.

SCABBING BRANCH OFFICIALS

Better links between the collieries are important in dealing with other problems besides picketing. For example, a scabbing branch official at Lea Hall has been suspended from holding office for

five years. This was achieved after pressure from striking miners forced the Midlands area executive to act. Immediately this official, Tony Morris, with the assistance of the NCB and the right-wing Freedom Association, has taken the union to court. Because this scab has had several years service with the NUM, the bosses and the local newspaper have been successful in efforts to lionise him. Following the successful amendment of the NUM rules at the Recall National Delegate Conference, there can be no excuse for not mobilising all the Midlands' striking miners behind the Lea Hall strikers to drive out the scab, defeat the courts and the struggle in order to challenge other scab officials.

This is an urgent task for the militants from Keresley and other pits who have launched the recent attempts to forge a rank and file strike committee. If the fight against the scab officials and scab miners is postponed, the strike will continue to be undermined and the strikers' futures jeopardised. This much is clear from the action of scab officials at the super-productive Daw Mill pit. They have been jeopardising the chances of the strikers from Birch Coppice and Keresley ever getting transfers in the event of closures. NCB managers at Birch Coppice and Keresley have called meetings with Daw Mill Lodge officials. These meetings must be stopped by mass pickets and occupations of the premises. Nottingham strikers have shown the way here. The Midlands Area Executive must be forced to issue a statement saying that no agreements signed by scab officials during the strike will be recognised by the NUM. These scab officials, along with scabbing miners,

must be faced with the immediate choice of striking or being expelled from the NUM altogether.

Another task facing the emerging rank and file strike committee is, as a matter of urgency, a campaign to break out of isolation. The sympathy of many workers in the region, shown on the July 7th march, must be turned into active solidarity. If the representatives of the various strike committees start driving home the message: SOLIDARITY NEEDED: then it will soon be the scabs who are wilting as a result of isolation - isolation from the entire Midlands trade union movement. Incidents, like the vicious police raid on the home of a Keresley striker who was having a party, must be met by action by other workers.

As a start the rank and file grouping should campaign for a massive day of action and demonstration in Coventry on a working day. Such an action must be built for by sending rank and file delegations into every factory in the area putting the call for supportive strike action. The demo itself should be used as a spur to generalised, indefinite solidarity strike action in the area.

Unless the rank and file of the motor engineering and other industries are appealed to directly, then their officials are likely to seal them off from pressure to take action. A real rank and file militant strike committee could organise such an appeal and win the action.

In building such a committee there is every indication that the existing Area Executive will drag its feet. Worse, it is likely that there will be active opponents to the creation of a real rank and file body being put in control of picketing, building solidarity and fighting the scabs. This

opposition will spring from a fear from time-servers and fence-sitters like Joe McKay, that they themselves will be swept out of office by the newly emerging militant layers in the NUM.

REPLACE THE FENCE-SITTERS

Once built a rank and file organisation must be kept going after the strike. The striking minority in pits like Birch Coppice, Baddesley and Daw Mill, will continue to have a fight on their hands against the scabs. There will have to be campaigns to ensure that union-only labour is allowed onto NCB property. The fence-sitters in the strike - those who hesitated in striking and are now on strike reluctantly - will also have to be replaced. A permanent rank and file organisation can play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of this battle, and of future ones.

It must be spread to other areas. Strikers in Notts., South Derbyshire and Leicestershire suffer similar problems - sometimes on a larger scale - as those in the West Midlands. A rank and file link-up across these coalfields would have a massive impact on the morale and fighting capacity of these other minorities. A common fight for common goals and against common enemies is imperative. The existing structures of the NUM - the Area Executives - do not allow for such a link-up. The West Midlands initiative must be extended throughout the whole Midlands area. A rank and file organisation on this scale will immeasurably help the strike and give us the chance to turn the tide on the scabs. ■

by Dick Pratt

N.U.M. ENERGY POLICY AND CAPITALISM

WHEN THE CLOSURE of Cortonwood was announced in early March, the miners' anger was mixed with incomprehension at the NCB's economic reasoning. Massive investment was near completion which would have allowed new reserves to be tapped. Only six months earlier £40,000 had been laid out on refurbishing the pit-baths.

There can't have been a sharper lesson in the irrationality of the economics of capitalism - its prodigal waste of resources; its indifference to the lives and needs of human beings; the obvious anarchy of decision-making over the future of coal. Above all else, in the midst of mass unemployment, the wanton vandalism of closing pits and destroying whole communities has fuelled the moral and political energy for the strike.

The NUM leadership has tried to shape this anger into a coherent political alternative. In its seven "Campaign for Coal" briefings, in its "Coal not Dole" pamphlet, the NUM has taken on the NCB. It has tried to reject their premises and rebut their arguments.

As in all matters, Scargill has been the chief advocate of this alternative energy plan. At his most intransigent he has taken up a position which at first sight appears totally opposed to MacGregor's. Rejecting the presumption of viability for each pit, Scargill has said "the soundness of any economic strategy must be judged by its social consequences" (*Sunday Times* 11.3.84).

If closing an "uneconomic" pit means the destruction of a community then, says Scargill, the NUM rejects it.

But the problem for miners is that Scargill's alternative plan for coal is in parts inconsistent and contradictory and in others directly contrary to the interests of the working class in general and the miners in particular.

One of the major problems in the NUM's case is that the union doesn't grasp the cause of the slump in the demand for energy in general. In contradicting the idea of an "uneconomic" pit, the NUM argues that this in part is because "the Tories have artificially depressed the market and the price that can be obtained for coal" (*Campaign for Coal*). This is wrong. The Tories have adopted a set of policies within an economic slump that occurred despite them. They have certainly sought to let this slump do its destructive worst in order to make capital leaner and fitter and make the working class pay the cost of this increase in terms of higher unemployment. But the slump itself is due to a crisis world-wide in its scope. In the first place, this is a crisis of profitability, not of markets. This is important because it means the NUM mistakes the real issue facing the bosses, namely, how the conditions for profitability in industry can be restored.

USE OF COAL

Scargill and the NUM usefully outline a number of ways in which the use of coal could be expanded (i.e. combined heat and power; conversion; liquefaction; gasification). However, the real point at issue under capitalism is not demand in itself but whether this can be profitably met - i.e. whether exploitation can occur. A truly working class answer to this problem counterposes social need, not the existence of a market, to the NCB's profit logic.

That there is room for a massive expansion of energy to enable industry to build homes, hospitals, schools or to prevent the old from dying for lack of heat is obvious. But in a capitalist in crisis this cannot be done profitably.

To all this Scargill would reply: a viable or profitable market could be sustained if there was adequate investment in the industry. After all it's clearly the case that the NCB has deliberately run down areas like South Wales. For example, in 1982 the area, with 24,000 miners received only £14.5m in major capital outlay, compared to the North Yorkshire miners - 14,600 of them - who received £452m that year.

As evidence, Scargill has often pointed to pits in the Barnsley Panel which were written off as hopelessly uneconomic but which, after a struggle, received investment and became "economic". Yet this case shows the real weakness in the NUM's case. The return the NCB demanded for that outlay was a reduction in jobs. Capital investment is used to replace living labour with new machinery and technology. This is how productivity and gross profitability are increased under capitalism. It is this process that lies at the heart of the Selby development.

Of course, it is true that the NUM's programme advocates a cut in the working week to 4 days (28 hours) and early retirement so that miners are the beneficiaries, not the victims, of this investment. Nonetheless, if no miners lost their jobs or suffered wage reductions but had their hours cut, productivity and profitability would not improve. It's this that the trade union bureaucracy - not just in the NUM - refuses to accept. In the social arithmetic of capitalism, no job or wage cuts, a cut in hours and massive investment would simply take a huge slice out of the profits of the capitalist class.

This would mean that the NCB and the state would make astronomical "losses". This in turn would fuel the general capitalist crisis. The government would step up their propaganda against the "greedy" miners, claiming that they were asking "the nation" to pay them more for doing less - with the money coming from "our taxes".

COAL, THE NATION'S ENERGY FUTURE

SAVE IT WITH THE NUM



Even if the NUM and its leadership did not compromise and even forced the NCB to concede the demand (which would need a much fiercer struggle than the present one), the government would return to the attack, armed with the figure of "losses" and posing as the champion of the taxpayer. A Labour government, charged with managing capitalism, would do this just the same as the Tories.

It might be argued it is a good sort of demand, precisely because it is "impossible" under capitalism or could only be won by the miners winning control over the industry and helping force an election which Labour would win. There is however a very serious problem: this perspective does not make clear from the outset the goal of meeting working class need at the expense of the capitalist class. It poses as "normal" a demand for investment within the market economy. Worse, it appears only as a sectional demand of the miners which other workers have no direct interest in (except as longterm consumers), and would even suffer from (as taxpayers).

Scargill either has not thought out or is not bothered about such a perspective. Why? Most union officials when they raise such plans are frankly not serious about winning them. They secretly know they will compromise - sell some early retirements, increase in productivity, to "pay for" jobs saved or investment made now. The NUM has done it before - under Labour and under Thatcher. Now they claim they will not sell the jobs of future miners. Good.

Perhaps Arthur is totally sincere. Perhaps he believes that a vigorous fight can win all these demands. We would argue that he underestimates the centrality of the issues at stake for the bosses, and overestimates the ability of normal militant trade unionism to meet the task that would face it.

HUMAN NEED

We would argue that to secure miners' jobs and the jobs of their children, to run the industry to meet human need, to win the active support of the whole labour movement for this struggle, requires more class-wide and more radical demands. It needs demands that openly challenge the profit system. Demands that start from social needs not from markets; from planned allocation of resources, not from subsidies or state capitalist investment. A real "plan for coal", therefore, would be anti-capitalist. As such it couldn't limit itself to coal only, but would have to be linked to one for steel, for transport, for machine tools, for cars, for building etc. Moreover it could be won only in a fight which crippled or destroyed the state forces of the bosses. It could be securely established only by working class political power.

Arthur Scargill and the NUM would reject such a perspective as "unrealistic" or utopian, but their present arguments just tie themselves and the miners up in knots. These are in fact the truly unrealistic perspectives.

In rejecting a consistently revolutionary view of the coal crisis, the NUM leadership inevitably fall back onto a series of one-sided and inadequate arguments against the NCB, arguments which can be easily undermined or turned against the miners.

Let's take two of them - perhaps Scargill's most oft-repeated ones. The first is that Britain "produces the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world", as an argument against the idea that pits are "uneconomic". Only occasionally does he correct himself by expressly excluding South Africa. He prefers not to draw attention to the fact because the implication is clear. The reason South Africa produces the cheapest deep-mined coal is because it has very low wage costs, because it keeps its black miners in a state of semi-slavery. If the NUM want to take responsibility for producing cheap coal on a world market, then that's where the logic of the position leads them.

If the NUM really wants to help the NCB produce the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world, then driving wages below the £10 a week South African black miners receive is one option. Not even the latest technology at Selby can produce coal as cheaply when wages are very low.

The second point about this statement is that it is somewhat deceitful. Most of the coal output of the US and Australia is from open-cast mining and is much cheaper as a result.

WORLD SUBSIDIES

Scargill's second most repeated propaganda ploy is to insist that "the subsidies per tonne to the British coal industry are the lowest in Western Europe". This is true. In 1982 the coal industries of Belgium, France and West Germany received £17.80, £18.37 and £8.46 per tonne respectively, compared to the UK's £3.30. The implication is that with similar subsidies British coal would be cheaper on the world market and sell more, thus allowing output to remain at higher than planned levels.

Apart from the fact that this implies cuts in the output and jobs of miners abroad, it also fails to grasp that subsidies are tolerated with bad grace by capitalists at the best of times. The bosses see them as a drain, through taxation, on their profits. In order to subsidise employment or excess capacity. In recent years, the UK economy has been sicker than most in Western Europe, and its ruling class see such state subsidies whether they be in the form of coal subsidies or the NHS, as an intolerable burden.

In addition, although the subsidy per tonne is lower than elsewhere, the overall amount laid out is proportionately bigger, because nowhere else in Europe does the coal industry occupy such a central place in the provision of a country's energy. France, for example, already has most of its electricity generated by nuclear power.

There is a similar lack of clarity and decisiveness in the NUM's defence of the Plan for Coal of 1974, which they insist has been unilaterally ditched by the NCB and the Tories. By choosing this ground to fight on - which the NCB have accepted - the danger exists that Scargill has boxed himself into a corner. It is too easy for MacGregor to point out that in terms of investment levels, creation of new capacity, productivity performance and closure of dead capacity, the NCB has observed its commitment and the NUM failed theirs. Similarly, Scargill's dogmatic rhetoric to the effect that the Plan for Coal "did not envisage

closures on economic grounds" is partly rebutted - to say the least - by Para 27 of the Plan which states that "inevitably some pits will have to close as their useful economic reserves of coal are depleted".

We do not make these points in order to say MacGregor is correct, but to point out to rank and file miners that Scargill's alternative is not a clean break with the NCB's profit-book philosophy. It's a confused attempt to distance himself from some of the consequences of the notion of a viable coal industry.

Leaving aside these questions, there are elements of the NUM's programme which are downright anti-working class. Chief here is the call for import controls. We are not talking of the completely justifiable measure of preventing scab coal (e.g. from Poland) from coming into ports during a strike and thereby acting to break a strike. We mean import controls implemented by a bosses' government to restrict domestic market competition in an attempt to preserve jobs. In the short or long run the gains are illusory for workers.

If carried out by a capitalist government, it would guarantee high prices and bigger profit margins. Inevitably this would result in an increased cost of living for workers in general, forced to pay these high prices. Not only does it redistribute the problem among British workers, but it would also lead to a reduction in the employment of miners in other countries (such as Australia) who would find the markets for their coal choked off. In reality the imposition of import controls by one country would start a chain reaction of similar measures that would soon end the positive effects for whoever started it. It would in the process completely undermine the prospects for international class solidarity which is so often crucial if strike action is to succeed.

The NUM's attitude to nuclear power is equally problematic. The NUM point out the safety hazards of nuclear power, the fact that it is more expensive and how its growth is being sponsored deliberately to reduce the industrial weight of the miners. All these points are true at one level. Capitalism's reckless lust for profits creates huge hazards in the way it constructs and runs nuclear reactors and disposes of the waste. Recent events at Sellafield make this all too clear. This recklessness directly affects the workers in the industry and their families who live nearby, as well as the public at large.

HALT UNSAFE PROCESSES

The strictest safety standards and safe working conditions are in the interest of these workers. Many of them are unionised and have taken action over safety issues. If the NUM really wants to stop nuclear power being used to undercut their industrial strength they should form links with these workers - an energy workers' alliance pledged to mutual support could more than offset any lost bargaining power of the NUM. To call simply for the closure of their industry, rather than for a struggle to halt all unsafe processes, for workers' control over the nuclear industry, is no way to forge such an alliance.

Whilst nuclear power is expensive in its initial development stage, it also has the potential for almost limitless, immensely cheap energy, if it can be made safe. Humanity needs such cheap energy to run the industries of the future that can raise 66% of the world from poverty. The attitude of the working class to all technological change and innovation must be to prevent the capitalists using it against the working class, either through its negative effects on health and safety, or through mass unemployment. We must fight for real workers' control over its introduction, for the massive reduction of working hours and thus open the way to its safe utilisation for human need, if possible. A real pro-working class energy policy would involve a search to utilise all safe sources of power. To be in a position to fight for such a policy, we need the unity of miners and nuclear power workers, indeed all workers in the energy supply industries. Miners can start this fight by the links of solidarity they are building now in this strike.

But of course, no such working-class plan is possible whilst industry and the bosses remain in capitalist control. No plan is possible whilst the police, the army, the judges and the top civil servants constitute a mighty weapon to crush isolated workers' struggles. A "workers' plan" will arise, not from the offices of trade union leaders or from a superwise party. It will and must arise out of the present struggles against a chaotic capitalism. But it will take form and be implemented only by a state based on the organised, armed and victorious working class.

The "next step" of the NUM is in fact already present in the clause of its constitution which pledges the union "to join with other organisations for the purpose of and with a view to the complete abolition of capitalism".

The NUM has since nationalisation suffered the repeated attacks of capitalist "Plans for Coal". Only a strategy which starts from the above premise of the NUM's constitution can see the realisation of a genuine working class plan which will banish unemployment and insecurity forever. ■

Democratic jail for US workers

JULY 1984 BRINGS two multi-million dollar spectacles to California- the Olympic Games in Los Angeles and the Democratic Convention in San Francisco. Following Russia's withdrawal from the Games, American workers are well aware that no representatives of the workers' states will be found in LA's Rose Bowl. But they remain less than clear on the hard fact that no representatives of American workers' interests will be found on the platform of the Moscone Convention Center.

The media folk currently swelling the population of California bear some responsibility for this lack of clarity. Walter (Fritz) Mondale is portrayed as the "friend of labor" because of his support from the bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO trade unions. Jesse Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition" is shown as representing black and hispanic workers and unemployed in the urban centres. And though Gary Hart is identified as the representative of the young urban professionals and attacks Mondale's running with union funds, his campaign managers have been happy to parade him in blue collars, wearing hard hats and shaking hands with workers.

But while the three men "champion" different sections of the "Democratic Coalition" they are all capitalist politicians who will do the bidding of the powerful sections of the ruling class that run the Democratic Party. Workers have no interest in deciding which of these capitalist politicians will face Reagan in the elections. In that election itself, they have no interest in choosing between the Democratic Party or Reagan's Republican Party in these elections. Mondale, the man who has won the Democratic nomination, sees himself as the traditional "New Deal" politician. This is a mix of Keynesian reflationary policies and social programmes. Sadly for Mondale, America's temporary economic recovery has been bought with budget deficits. Given that a socialist alternative is not on the agenda, it is difficult to see how even the existing welfare programmes can continue to be financed to the same degree as America's proportion of the old and infirm increases. Without Reagan's promised welfare cuts, "something's got to give". Either Mondale would have to increase deficits, entailing a disaster for third world debtor countries and US banks, or huge cuts would be necessary in military spending, or taxes would have to go up.

Mondale is coy on welfare cuts and tax hikes (he talks of "reform") and promises only slower real growth in Pentagon budgets (5% as opposed to Reagan's 13%)

Workers would do well to remember that it was the architect of the New Deal Franklin D. Roosevelt, who superintended the brutal suppression of workers in the 1930s after their massive endorsement of his candidacy. He fought the great industrial unionisation drive of the 1930s and the attendant strikes every step of the way.

Roosevelt's "solution" to that earlier crisis in capitalism was eventually militarism and entry into the second world war. Fritz Mondale, trying to escape the "incompetent dove" tag picked up as Carter's stooge, has been noticeably more hawkish than the runners up. While supporting a "nuclear freeze" (ie, guaranteed American superiority) he is a staunch anti-communist and "an old fashioned cold warrior" (Stephen Fay, Washington correspondent of the *Sunday Times*.)

Senator Gary Hart, by contrast, is regarded as a "neo-liberal", the born-again John Kennedy. The watchword is pragmatism. The image is of "new ideas". This translates into a more "flexible" attitude to social programmes. Hart wants to eradicate "waste" (as of course did Thatcher). He supports a form of industrial democracy which would "guarantee" jobs in return for wage "concessions" (wage cuts in plain words). Given his hostility to organised labor, it takes little imagination to decode a strategy of cuts, redundancies, givebacks and continued encouragement for union busting bosses.

Abroad Hart claims to stand for more diplomacy and less aggression in America's dealings. He briefly went so far as to call for the withdrawal of US troops from Honduras. But while this struck a chord with many Americans, especially the youth, he backed down quickly when Mondale accused him of "pulling the plug on Central America." Hart's retreat on this issue was a clear signal to the Democratic Establishment that he will deliver in the future where US imperialism's vital interests are at stake.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson's campaign for the nomination, however, has given that Establishment less to be happy about. Not simply because of his good wishes to Castro amid the spectacular release of 48 prisoners. Not even for the anti-Semitic noises he and more particularly his backer Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader, and lately Democratic supporter, have been making. The main reason the Democratic Establishment was worried was because Jackson might have encouraged blacks to think that this time they might have got some concessions in return for their votes.

In fact Jackson is playing a classic game. As a wily black careerist he wants to strengthen the position of middle class and bourgeois blacks within the Democratic Party. This lay behind his successful campaign to encourage black registration and voting for his candidacy. This campaign did not offer anything tangible to the mass of America's exploited and oppressed blacks. It did improve the chances for self-aggrandisement in the party of Jackson and other bourgeois black politicians like him. He has strengthened his bargaining position

over various discriminatory restrictions that the racist elements in the Democratic Party had insisted on.

His political standpoint is not nearly so worrying to the bosses and their representatives in the Democratic Party's upper echelons. He seemed, for example, equally at home with El Salvador's Duarte as with Castro! Indeed he is not opposed to military aid to El Salvador if "human rights are improved" - a familiar line. His relationship with the Arab bourgeoisie, which secured the release of the pilot captured by Syria, brought embarrassment to Reagan not the Democrats.

At home his organisation, PUSH, attempted to break the teachers' strike in Chicago last year. He consistently refuses to support workers struggling to defend jobs and livelihoods, black or white. He is, on the other hand, prepared to pose for the press with George Wallace, the one-time racist fire-raiser and darling of the Klu Klux Klan.

For Jackson racism is not a problem of capitalism; affirmative action will, he claims, achieve equality within capitalism. In the meantime the more black businessmen, the better. Jackson is a broker between the black masses and the white, racist Democrat bosses, who need the black vote to dent Reagan's electoral strength. Far from being a step forward, Jackson's emergence represents a step back from the militancy of blacks in the 60s and 70s. Instead of organising with white workers against racism and the capitalist society of wanton greed that breeds it, the black masses are being encouraged to look to the Reverend as their saviour. It is absolutely clear that all three runners for the Democratic nomination shared one basic premise. They all stand for the profits of US imperialism and

against the working class at home and abroad. It is a profound mistake to look to any of them as a progressive, worthy of working class support.

The Democratic Party has a long tradition of hostility to the working class. Given this, it is perhaps not obvious why many workers in America still vote Democrat. Their failure to build their own party and break with the capitalists, is what brands the US working class as "backward" in the eyes of the European left and the small minority of American socialists. But like their US counterparts, many European workers see the Democratic Party as some sort of equivalent of the European social democratic and Labour parties. After all, don't most American trade unionists vote for it, and don't the trade union leaders influence it?

The fact is that the Democratic Party, unlike Britain's Labour Party for example, has no organic links with the working class. It is not based on the mass organisations, the trade unions. It has no mass membership. Workers do not vote on policies, not even via undemocratic block votes. The election of party leader in the primaries is an undemocratic affair, which in some states discriminates against minorities and is heavily weighted, via caucuses and "Special Establishment Delegates", in favour of the latter's choice. In other states the system dilutes the power of the Democrat supporter by making the choice open to all voters.

This lack of democracy in the Party, and its open control by big business interests should help to undermine illusions in the Party. Yet they persist. The illusions stem from the long association between the trade union bureaucracies of the AFL-CIO and so-called "friends of labor" within the

Democratic coalition. Through the good offices of the bureaucrats, workers are persuaded to see the Party as one that will represent their interests, or as a lesser evil than the Republicans. This view is actively peddled by most trade union leaders. But their success to date owes more to American imperialist supremacy than the truth of their propositions.

It is the superprofits derived from this supremacy which have brought social peace to post-war America, undermined class consciousness and increasingly, union organisation as well, and created a climate in which class-collaboration, the staple diet of the trade union leaderships, could bear fruit. In British imperialism's heyday in the late nineteenth century, the trade union leaders and the better off workers saw little need for their own political party. Their political aspirations were satisfied by the Lib-Labs, a wing of the thoroughly capitalist Liberal Party. England's fall from pre-eminence and the erosion of super profits produced class antagonisms. New industrial unions and the Labour Party were formed. Such developments, begun in the turbulent years of the 1930s, will come during US Imperialism's decline. The task for communists is to hasten these developments and give them a revolutionary direction and solution.

No support can be given to the Democratic Party. It is a bosses' party through and through. Nevertheless, when we call for workers to form their own party, we do not want to bring into existence a British style Labour Party. The fact that the Labour Party is organically based on the working class and is in this respect *different* to the Democratic Party does not make its politics working class politics. Both parties pursue capitalist policies.

Therefore when we call for the workers' to form their own party we fight to build that party on a revolutionary basis. No law of history lays it down that the workers' party in America has to go through the stage of reformism. This is not an inevitable outcome. Revolutionaries must fight to get the trade unions - and that means their leaders as well - to break with the bosses' parties and form a political organisation. The nature of that organisation will be decided by struggle - by the development of the class struggle and by the struggle of revolutionaries against the reformist (or sub-reformist) union bureaucrats.

The very act of the creation of such a party would be the signal for the parasitic union bureaucrats as a whole, or in part, to decamp from the Democratic Party. Their objective would become a tame party on the lines of today's British, German and French "socialist" parties.

This is where the question of programme is vital. The call for the unions in America to form a Labour Party must be coupled with a fight for a revolutionary programme which satisfies workers' needs and links the struggle for those needs to the struggle to overthrow capitalism altogether and build in its place a workers' state based on workers' councils and an economy planned to meet human need. ■

by Dave Jenkins



Three men in a vote

LETTERS

Are the Sikhs a nation?

Dear Comrades,

The article in *Workers Power* No.58 on the crisis in the Punjab comes, in the final two paragraphs, to the correct conclusions. However, some of the argumentation in the earlier part of the article on the question of the "Sikh nation" is unfortunately open to misinterpretation.

The Sikhs, we are told, are not a nation because 1) they are not racially or linguistically distinct from their fellow Punjabis; 2) Sikhs comprise the agrarian bourgeoisie in the Punjab; 3) Sikhs were never a majority in a pre-partition Punjab.

This approach is dangerously akin to the "check-list" approach of Stalin. Nationality is a question of the *consciousness* of a particular community. If the Sikhs were a distinct race with their own language, if they were all workers or small peasants and if they comprised a large majority in the Punjab, this would not, of itself, be enough for us to recognise them as a separate nation.

It is by no means excluded that a policy of repression directed against the Sikhs by the Indian government could create in the Sikh communities a national consciousness. As Trotsky wrote with regard to the "black nation" in the USA: "(the question of economic equality) alone does not decide the question of the Negroes' fate as such, the question of the nation etc. According to the arguments of the American comrades, one could say for example that Belgium too has no rights as a nation. The Belgians are Catholics and a large section of them speak French. What if France wanted to annex them with such an argument? Also the Swiss people, through their historical connections, felt themselves to be one nation

despite different languages and religions. An abstract criterion is not decisive in this question; far more decisive is the historical consciousness of a group, their feelings, their impulses." (Emphasis added.)

Even if the Sikhs *did* constitute a nation, we would only support their right to self-determination if this did not involve the oppression of another community. Further, even were we to recognise the Sikh right to self-determination, we would not necessarily advise that this right be exercised to the extent of separation.

The need for correct tactics to enable revolutionaries to divide all the national, linguistic, religious groupings in the Indian sub-continent along class lines is too important to permit even the least looseness of formulation.

Yours in comradeship,
J. Tandy,
Birmingham.

Comrade Tandy mistakes the purpose of my argumentation on the Sikhs. Whilst I do argue that at present they constitute a religious community rather than a nationality, my point is certainly *not* that they cannot be granted the right to self-determination because they are not a nation. Rather I argue that whatever they are, they are not an *oppressed nationality*.

What would oppression mean? Political disadvantage and exclusion within the existing state? But (up to Ghandi's latest attacks) the Sikhs dominated the Punjab. They ask for "historical" Sikh areas with largely non-Sikh populations to be included within an expanded Punjab. This is not a democratic demand.

It represents the aspirations of landlords and the clerical caste to expand their exploitation of Hindu and Sikh peasants and workers. They demand the extension and expansion of the privileges of their religion in such a state. This is again a reactionary clericalism not a democratic demand.

The territorial overlap of Sikhs and Hindus makes the creation of a purely Sikh state a reactionary utopia. To bring it about would either require

huge forced population transfers, and, given the leadership of both communities, probably a massive inter-communal pogrom whereby isolated minorities on both sides would suffer cruelly.

Comrade Tandy also misunderstands Trotsky's position. He rightly criticises Stalin's schematism on the objective basis for nationhood. Stalin's famous definition "a nation is an historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" and his contention that if one of these features is absent then a given social grouping cannot be considered a nation, is obviously pedantic and open to the objections that Trotsky raises (viz. Belgium and Switzerland). But we cannot counterpose to Stalin's undialectical formula a totally subjective definition: "Nationality is a question of the consciousness of a community". This is to throw the baby of historical materialism out with the bathwater of Stalin's empiricism. Consciousness must be rooted in social, economic, class reality.

The quotation comrade Tandy uses from Trotsky continues "But that too (i.e. consciousness-D.S.) is not determined accidentally but rather by the situation and all the attendant circumstances." Trotsky here refers to the political oppression and super-exploitation of American Blacks. This is what would give the vast amount of these blacks under the banner of national self-determination a progressive character. This is what obliges revolutionaries to promise in advance to such oppressed peoples "If you wish separate statehood, we will support you 100%".

If however - as was the case with the Protestants of Northern Ireland, the Israeli settlers in Palestine, the white settlers in Algeria, "Rhodesia", and South Africa - such "self-determination" involves the right to exploit and disposes another people then (whether or not these "peoples" feel themselves to be a nation) we will not support that right.

Of course we do support the democratic rights of the whole of the people of the Punjab against Gandhi's state of emergency. Of course prolonged military occupation and all its horrors could create

seventies. Unlike the miners' leaders made no urgent preparations.

NUM has failed to lead to unite the re-

Instead of miners against the NCB and

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The RCP hits the pits

...and how!

Since the miners' strike began RCP supporters have been shouting our 'militant' ideas.

ordination at pit and area level. Most activists appreciate the importance of

wingers in the coalfields and by the media. The

ation of ballots or by elevating 'picketing' or systematic

the next step, April 1984

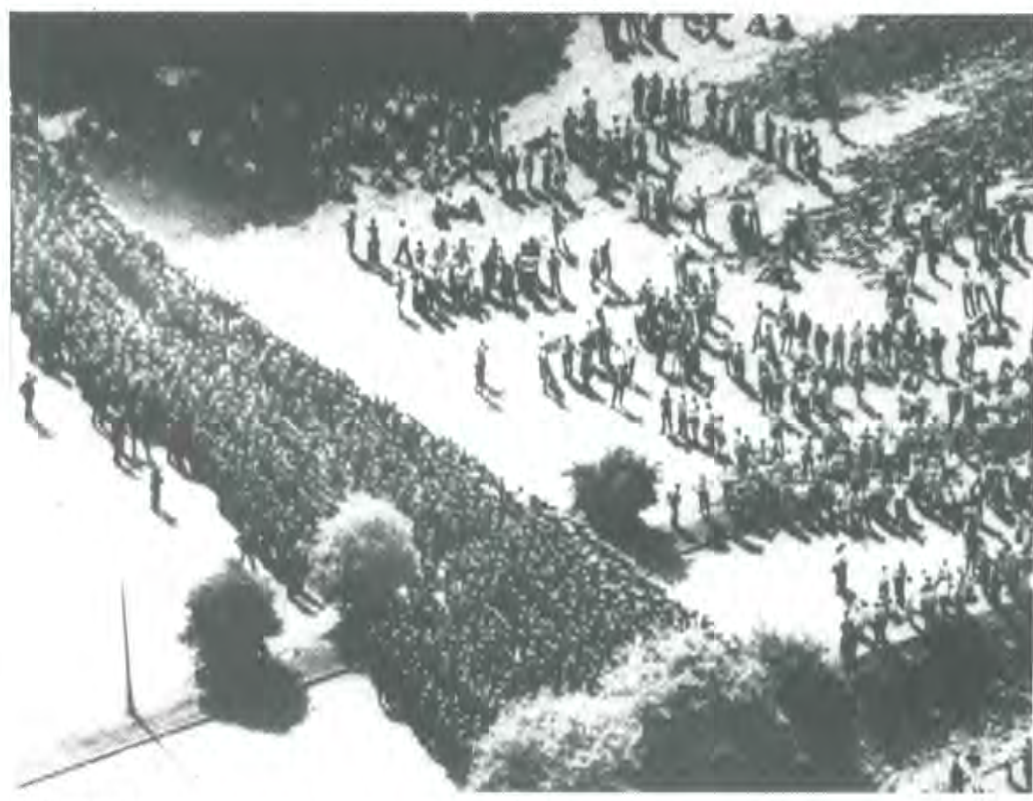
THE MINERS' STRIKE has well and truly exposed the bankruptcy of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). They entered the fray in the belief that their panoply of methods for recruiting inexperienced students and youth - grandly named front organisations, ballyhoo about their size and influence and a smattering of abstract propaganda passed off as politics - would win them the ears of the miners. Yet, 19 weeks later without a new RCP front to show for it, they are sitting on the sidelines declaring the strike to be a waste of time because the miners had failed to take up their ideas.

The RCP's basic method of dealing with the class struggle is to deliver lectures about socialism. They explicitly reject the Trotskyist method of using demands and forms of organisation that relate to specific struggles and immediate needs, but are at the same time a "bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme for revolution". (Trotsky).

Today the RCP crudely isolate a single factor - the class collaborationist politics summed up in the 1974 *Plan For Coal* - as the be-all and end-all of the strike and the sole reason for its (projected) defeat. This boils down to the NUM's commitment to an expanding coal industry. The RCP spare no efforts in denouncing Scargill for suggesting that the British miners produce the cheapest deep mined coal. They regard the NUM leadership's attempt to hold the NCB to the "Plan for Coal" as an ultimate act of betrayal. Thus the RCP's *Next Step* declares: "The NUM leadership put forward a policy which equates the fight against pit closures with saving the coal industry...rather than simply fighting for the interests of the miners regardless of its consequences." (*Next Step* June 84)

The RCP is incapable of tackling the legitimate concern of the miners with the maintenance of the industry they work in. Concern which, when used by the reformist leaders is indeed turned into arguments about "viability" and "economic pits" and the "need to make sacrifices". Of course revolutionaries denounce these arguments as fraudulent. We point to the massive interest payments the NCB shells out - over £400 million a year extracted by the banks and finance houses from the coal industry. We point to the massive profits being made by the private suppliers of mining machinery, based on research and development by the NCB. We fight for miners to take up these issues against the "viability" arguments and mobilise them around a fight for the cancellation of the debts and interest payment for the nationalisation of the banks and private suppliers without compensation and under workers' control.

In this way we start from the immediate demands of the miners in struggle and raise, as real answers, demands which take forward the struggle



RCP called Orgreave an empty gesture - the police thought otherwise

for working class power. In contrast the RCP can only lecture the miners on the mistake of worrying about the industry when they need to overthrow capitalism: "Instead of asking - how can we make the British Coal Industry viable? - its time British miners started asking - is capitalism a viable system for the miners?" (*Next Step* May)

Indeed it is time; but these fine words jump over another question - how do you convince miners of that? The RCP's method is incapable of relating to the immediate struggle of the miners. It is reduced to making abstract propaganda against capitalism.

But the RCP's ever more shrill verbal radicalism is married to a mixture of sneering contempt and downright opportunism with regard to the strategy and tactics of the strike itself. Having correctly identified the problems of the region by region strike strategy and the need for a national strike the RCP adopted the strategy of - the national ballot! According to *The Next Step* a mass campaign around a national ballot was "the only way to ensure rank and file control over the strike." (*Miners Next Step* - no date) Certainly there would have been a mass campaign over the three week period given for a secret ballot - it would have

been conducted in every bourgeois paper, on every TV channel and on every radio station against the strike.

In contrast Workers Power also recognised the need for the strike to be made a national strike, but we fought for a national vote through the methods of genuine workers democracy; we fought for votes at pit head meetings, demanded the left NUM leaders broke their pact with the Nottingham leaders and stomped the Nottinghamshire coalfield arguing for support, for mass pickets and delegations from striking areas to address working miners in welfare, at mass meetings, door to door in the villages. This was the communist method to win the Nottinghamshire miners' support in the first few weeks of the strike - not the secret ballot.

The Next Step did not stop here however in this worship of bourgeois democracy. Having sided with the *Financial Times*, *The Sun*, et al. over the ballot, in its May issue an article by Fran Eden and the Editorial proceeded to denounce the absolutely correct rule change allowing a simple majority for a strike as "back door methods" and "manipulation"! By July Frank Richards was writing a two-page rambling apologia for Notts scab miners ar-

guing there was "no real difference between Notts miners and other areas". Only one, Comrade Richards, the majority of Notts miners have been scabbing for 18 weeks!

One of the hallmarks of the RCP's sectarian politics is its inability to distinguish between Scargill's politics and strategy for the strike and, say, Bill Sirs' attempts to stab it in the back. "Spot the difference" exclaimed the April issue of *the next step*. But when McGahey, Taylor and Williams were opposed to the extension of militant picketing while Scargill favoured it, this difference was important for how to intervene tactically in the strike. But then the RCP have no operative tactics. A "party" that can't spot differences and utilise them will never be of any use to the working class, let alone be able to "take control" of the unions!

As to the tactics adopted by the miners the RCP has been unsparing in its criticism. Days of Action, selective mass pickets, the Orgreave mass pickets were denounced as "token" and "gestures" (RCP leaflet "SWP and the Miners' Strike"). Miners were told they were pursuing the wrong targets - "clapped out steel works". When Shirebrook rail-workers blacked movement of coal *The Next Step* could only carp "such isolated action is inevitably ineffective" (*Next Step* July 84). The RCP showed itself to be completely ignorant and indeed unconcerned about how to develop and build on solidarity actions. It preferred to stick to revolutionary phraseology:

"It is clear that narrow trade union tactics cannot match the bitter class warfare the state is waging against us. The issue of class power cannot be resolved simply through pickets and demonstrations."

In reality the RCP has become rapidly disillusioned with the miners and their strike. Having rejected their demands for a ballot and not been won over by abstract arguments for socialism, the miners are now being told by the RCP that their strike can only fail. The young miners who were "instinctively against capitalism" at the start of the strike have now according to the RCP been "channeled into conscious identification with the reformist and bureaucratic outlook of the NUM leadership". (From the leaflet already quoted). Their June paper could run a leading article on the strike under the heading "Three Wasted Months"

The RCP think that the miners' strike has become a waste of time. What these middle class pedants mean is that it has become a waste of their time. Unable to offer the miners' anything in terms of helping them to win the strike, they have failed miserably to win any influence amongst miners. To rationalise their failure they blame the miners and are increasingly turning their back on the strike. That is typical of people whose interests are not really fused with the victory of the class struggle, but only with aggrandisement of their own paltry sect. ■

the basis for a democratic movement for self-determination among the Sikhs. But for "Sikh nationalism" to become a progressive factor it would have to overcome those obstacles I cite in the article. In doing so it would almost certainly have to transcend its Sikh (i.e. religious) identity and its clerical and bourgeois-landowner leadership.

However Marxists do not await let alone take responsibility for the development of progressive nationalist movements whose room for manoeuvre and progressive content is extremely limited in the imperialist epoch. They seek to rally the workers and poor peasants to a strategy which combines consistent defence of all democratic rights, with the major demands of the exploited classes which aim necessarily to expropriate the bourgeoisie and the landowners - whatever their nationality.

Dave Stocking

Bolivia

Dear Comrades,
The article by Stuart King on Bolivia in *Workers Power* No.58 while dealing with the errors of the USFI section in Bolivia in the present crisis, has little to say about the policies and tactics of the POR (Masas) led by Guillermo Lora. It is important to do so because in the past your paper has thoroughly examined the opportunist practices of this organisation. In the context of the class struggle in Bolivia at the present time the POR (Masas) is reaffirming Trotsky's old adage that opportunism and sectarianism are only two sides of the same coin. In the current practice of the POR (Masas) we see both co-existing side by side.

In the issue of Masas dated 26th March 1984 the POR explains why it now rejects its former slogan "For a Government of the COB". The author declares that "this would not be a bad slogan if at this moment the COB played the role of an organ of power, if it were in conflict with the bourgeois state, pressing forward the duality of

power." It is certainly true that such a slogan or "All power to the COB" could only be used in the same way the Bolsheviks used "All power to the Soviets" if the COB had taken on the characteristics of a national soviet, if it was raised in the context of fighting to turn the COB into a real soviet body, representing workers' organisations nationally as well as peasant committees and organisations, and if it was linked to the demand for the leaders of the workers' organisations - in and out of government - to break with the bourgeoisie and enter onto the road of struggle for a workers' and peasants' government.

But the alternative slogans and activity that the POR (Masas) poses are themselves hopelessly abstract and sectarian. While the Masas carries a sustained criticism of the bureaucratic leadership of the COB, primarily the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) and Lechin and his supporters, the united front tactic plays no role in their activity. They place no demands on the leaders of these organisations who maintain sway over the majority of workers in Bolivia and therefore abandon the possibility of winning over the rank and file of these organisations in a struggle against their treachery.

The POR (Masas) justifies this policy when it defines the PCB in the following manner "The Bolivian CP is a bourgeois party because it applies the policy of the bourgeoisie." (Masas 19th March 1984). But the fact is that the PCB is a bourgeois workers party. By "forgetting" this fact, Masas "forgets" to struggle for the working class base and supporters of this party. The POR's inability to use the united front to break the workers in the COB from their class collaborationist leaders, leads to attempts to go around this problem. Thus instead of mobilising to transform the COB by placing the leadership under the control of the rank and file, they counterpose to it the demand for "strike committees" to organise for a General Strike. And this precisely at the time the COB leadership is being forced by the masses to call numerous short general strikes against austerity.

The same approach is to be found in relation to the government. In a situation where the majority of active workers and peasants adhere to the three parties of the UDP Government (MNR-I, PCB, MIR) and are threatened by their leaders with a right wing coup if they reject austerity measures, the slogan "Break with the Bourgeoisie" and the proposal of an alternative fighting united front is vital. Nowhere does the POR do this. At no point does it link this question to a joint struggle with the supporters of these parties to fight for an action programme which can tackle the chronic crisis in the country, the problem of the crushing external debt, against starvation wages and hyper-inflation, for the control and nationalisation of the banks and industry, for the disarming of the coup plotters in the army and the arming of the workers and peasants. The struggle around such a programme, the implementation of it by the workers themselves alongside demands on the workers' parties to support and implement such measures, would allow the winning of UDP supporters to a revolutionary perspective and a revolutionary party. Instead of this method, the method of Trotsky's Transitional Programme, the POR (Masas) turns the call for the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" into the most abstract of propaganda which remains at the level of sloganising, in as far as it tries to jump over the illusions and support given to the governmental parties by the masses.

If in relation to the workers' movement the POR (Masas) only offers a Third Period sectarianism, then in the case of the peasantry it shows crass opportunism. In Bolivia today there are chronic food shortages and there is even starvation in the mining villages. The Comibol state shops are empty, the produce of the peasantry is sold on the black market at many times the state controlled prices. The POR (Masas) answers this problem by calling for "better prices for the products of the countryside". (Masas 19th March 1984) Far from uniting the workers and peasants, such a demand can only divide them.

In contrast revolutionaries fight for the workers' organisations to press for demands which

would liberate the peasants from the crushing interest burdens imposed on them by the banks and speculators. We would demand free credit from the banks, assistance - technical and financial - for peasant co-operatives, the nationalisation of road transport and distribution. The workers themselves should be organised to suppress the black market and expropriate the hoarders and speculators. As in Chile during the later period of the Allende government, neighbourhood committees should be set up to carry this out and control food prices and supply. Only such a programme and struggle could unite the toiling masses of Bolivia and enable them to be rid of a system which offers only repression and poverty.

Diego Mocar.

Martyrs' revenge

Dear Comrades,
It was nice to see the Tolpuddle Martyrs strike another blow for the Labour movement. After all, having the likes of Scabby Len standing on your grave is enough to make anybody turn. Len's fall was richly deserved. It's a pity it wasn't from his office where he still keeps the TUC on the sidelines of the miners strike. At this years TUC he should be censured and dismissed for his deeds over the NGA, GCHQ and the miners. Then he can go and talk to trees in Epping Forest or push up the daisies for that matter.
In comradeship,
J. Lovelace.

AN APOLOGY

In the last issue of our paper (59) three photographs of the Orgreave picket-line appeared without being credited. These pictures were all by John Harris (IFL). Apologies to the photographer for this omission.



DOCK STRIKE

THE NATIONAL DOCKS strike must be turned into an offensive for the extension of the Dock Labour Scheme to all ports. Anything less than that will allow Britain's bosses, and their government an escape route out of their present crisis.

The fact that the strike began in response to the use of scab labour to load iron ore at Immingham only underlines the fundamental link with the miners' strike. The T&G have, quite rightly, refused to end the strike just because the bosses caved in over Immingham. However, the strategic aim of the T&G leaders to force out of the Port Employers only an agreement that there will be no further use of unregistered labour, is wrong for two reasons.

Firstly, it is well known that the employers are pressing for the entire scheme to be scrapped. They made this clear at their annual luncheon in April. Nicholas Ridley, Transport Secretary, has made it clear that the scheme, "represented the sort of restrictive practice which was hampering the docks industry." (*Financial Times*, July 10th) Any concession forced-out of the Employers' Association now would simply be a temporary one to allow them to fight in circumstances of their own choosing. The middle of the miners' strike clearly does not fit their bill.

It is certainly true that the employers do not want to make the concession. However there can be absolutely no doubt that, if things were getting too hot for the bosses throughout British industry, Thatcher would order them to give way on this point. She did just this when she ordered British Rail to agree a rather higher pay settlement, than they had originally intended. We must be clear a major victory can be won. Already there are shrieks from food importers that the strike is biting deep. It can bite deeper and bring the bosses to their knees.

Secondly, if the dockers were to win the agreement they are demanding and then return to work they would be stabbing in the back the workers whose sacrifice and militancy would really have won the agreement - the miners. They would be increasing the chances of a defeat for the miners. If the miners were to be defeated then the dockers' newly-won agreement would not be worth the paper it was written on.

Just as the miners' strike is the worst time for the bosses so it is the best possible time for the dockers - and all other groups of workers - to really make decisive gains, not just to defend past agreements. We must be as hard-headed as Thatcher and company would be if they were winning.

The Port Employers have been busy weakening the power of the dockers and their union for years. Tens of thousands of jobs have been destroyed through redundancy schemes. There are now only 13,500 dockers in ports covered by the Dock Labour Scheme,



John Sturrock (Report)

Dockers on the picket lines

EXTEND THE SCHEME!

another 6,000 unionised dockers in non-scheme ports and an unknown number in un-unionised ports. The growth in traffic through non-scheme ports like Felixstowe and Dover, the use of containerisation and 'inland ports' and the complete closure of the London docks are all part and parcel of their preparation to tear up the scheme.

The answer to this threat is not just to defend what we have but to extend it. If all dockers, irrespective of the size of their ports, were brought into the scheme then all dockers would benefit. Not only would they secure their jobs, but, by consolidating themselves as a unified group of workers they would make further attacks by the employers vastly more difficult to mount.

Even if the demand for the extension of the scheme is won, to go back to work with the miners still out could let Thatcher off the hook. By the same token, if the power of the dockers were to force a change of tack by the bosses and a climbdown by MacGregor, the miners should not return to work until their allies on the docks, or, rather, those now on the picket lines at the docks had also won. Such a display of solidarity and far-sighted class consciousness would throw the bosses into complete disarray. It would change the balance of class forces in a most spectacular way.

Great as such a victory would be, there is no reason to believe that it is the target of the dockers' union leaders. John Connolly, National Docks Officer of the T&G has been insisting since the

start of the strike that it was purely a docks dispute. The timing of the strike during the miners' strike was coincidental. In this he was echoing the damaging sectional sentiments expressed by the T&G's Humberside Port Committee who said at the beginning that the strike, "had nothing to do with the miners." (*Morning Star* 11th July)

Even though Connolly later extended the question beyond Immingham to a national issue he has not gone anything like far enough. Indeed he has been eager to demonstrate his willingness to do a deal. So far it has been the bosses' intransigence, not his, that has prevented this.

As a union, the T&G is under attack on many fronts. Its rules are being openly flouted by scab lorry drivers in the miners' strike. Transport firms are now openly challenging its position within the whole transport industry. The Government is backing the attack with its plans for deregulation and privatisation of public road transport. Now a real opportunity to unite these different trade groups of the T&G in an all-out offensive against the united bosses and their government, exists.

Dockers and miners should demand that the T&G unequivocally state that its objectives in this strike are to extend the Dock Labour Scheme nationwide and to ally themselves with the NUM until both unions have won all their demands.

- Bring out the whole of the T&G!
- Extend the Dock Labour Scheme!
- Strike alongside the miners until complete victory!

WORKERS IN ACTION

Miners visit Kewals

THE NORMALLY QUIET little street outside Kewal Brothers Birmingham erupted at 7.30 am on Friday July 7th as 60 miners from Lea Hall colliery arrived to show their solidarity with the 20 Asian workers on strike there. To the refrain of "Here we go, here we go", the miners not only took the police in the area completely by surprise but also lifted the morale of the Kewal T and G members, four of whom had been arrested for picketing the previous day.

The strike is for recognition of the TGWU and against the sacking of two packers and a machinist who started the union. The employer expects them to work 40 hours for a basic £60 a week. On the day the miners arrived the three scabs whom police have been escorting in and out failed to turn up at all.

The miners' action contrasts strongly with that of the T and G full-timers who have resisted requests for strike pay, claiming that the rules forbid it to those in the union for less than 39 weeks. This notorious rule effectively

undermines all unionisation struggles. It is a catch-22 for new recruits to unions in anti-union firms. The T and G members at the nearby P S Raindi and Supreme Quilting, a textile factory like Kewals, know all about this after their struggle to gain recognition. When they heard about the Kewal strike they wanted to take solidarity action. But they were sent a letter from the T and G officials saying that they should not do this for fear that their employer would do what Eddie Shah did to the NGA and take them to court!

In fact Kewal workers need all the solidarity they can get - on the picket lines, through collections and through action in other sections of the T and G.

SUPPORT THE PICKET AT MIDDLEMORE ROAD.

Send donations and messages of support to:
SHAHEED UBHAM SINGH CENTRE,
364 SOHO ROAD,
HANDSWORTH,
BIRMINGHAM.

Islington "lefts" hold out against workers

AS REPORTED IN WP 59, 150 children's day-centre workers for Islington's "left" council have been on strike since April 16th. Three weeks ago the social services department went on indefinite strike in their support.

The council, who early in the dispute, put forward a miserable offer on the pay and conditions claim of the workers, have stuck to its guns ever since. They are willing to go to arbitration only because they know in advance a decision against the strikers is likely.

In the circumstances the NALGO branch should be organising all-out action for the full claim. Instead it has

substantially reduced the claim, presumably to impress the moderates on the council.

Unless the strikers win their full claim, and the council is forced to surrender unconditionally this Labour crew will be encouraged to press ahead with its plans, to decentralise services against the wishes of the council unions, who reckon that it will lead fairly quickly to job losses.

Messages of Support, and Donations to Islington NALGO,
Finsbury Library,
St John's St,
London EC1.

Reject the NHS offer

THE 4.5% OFFER to health workers is a con. It is designed to take them out of the developing battle with the Tories. It is not a great breakthrough against the Tories' 3% wage norm. In fact before tax it will mean a meagre £3.14 per week. For the lowest grades this will take pay up from £65.84 a week to £68.98 - hardly a sum to make much difference to the household budget.

It is clear that the Health union leaders, in particular COHSE, look like recommending acceptance of this offer. Even NUPE, led by the supposedly left wing Rodney Bickerstaffe, sent out a circular (11.7.84) describing this insult

to health workers as the "best that can be achieved."

The increased offer - to be paid for out of existing NHS budgets in all probability - should be rejected. A consultation process is to take place between now and August 10th. Militants in NUPE and COHSE must argue for rejection of the offer and for strike action to win a substantial rise and end low pay. With the miners and dockers on strike no time could be better than now to reverse the 1982 defeat.

- Reject the offer!
- All out alongside the miners and dockers!

South London Hospital

WORKERS AT THE South London Hospital for Women moved into occupation on 29th June. They defied Wandsworth Health Authority, who plan to solve the "reverse cash shortfall of £3 million" by closing the hospital. This unique hospital, run for women entirely by women, has 170 beds. Its closure would add to the staggering 35% loss of acute beds in Wandsworth which has already occurred.

The running down of the hospital which went on before the occupation began, has already resulted in one death. An elderly woman, previously moved when St. Benedicts was closed in 1981, died less than 24 hours after being moved from South London to Bolinbroke Hospital. The responsibility for this woman's death lies directly with the callous, cost-cutting Tory axeman, Norman Fowler.

The occupation, supported by the community based Wandsworth Health Emergency and Save the South London Hospital campaigns has been made official by NUPE. It is also supported by local trades councils. In order to put pressure on the health authority to reopen the hospital, workers from South London must organise meetings in all local hospitals and workplaces to win support for strike action. Other hospital workers' own jobs are threatened in the latest round of Tory cuts and they should be won to action now!

Support is needed to maintain the 24-hour picket outside the hospital (Clapham South Tube)
Messages of support and donations to: Occupation Committee,
South London Hospital,
Clapham Common South Side,
London SW4 9DR.

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