

**so near - so far:**

**a history of the british**

**miners**

**(2005)**



A Selective History of Miners' (and a few other) Struggles Up To And  
Including The 1984-5 Strike

(Completed in June 2005)

**Preamble**

We have re-organised this text in March 2006, cutting out "Miner Conflicts - Major Contradictions" as a separate text, putting it in as one chapter (chapter 13) in the whole text, and thus changing this preamble, which was originally an introduction. Unlike the "Miner Conflicts..."

text, this text takes place in a vacuum: it cannot influence any *specific* movement, and has no intention of doing so. Unlike most of the reflections on the strike 20 years after, and on the history of miners struggles in general, its aim is to contribute to developing an analysis of the strike and the present day situation in Britain in order to extract a few pointers to a possible future practical use, just as analyses of, for example, the Spanish Revolution (1936-37), contributed to a supercession of anarchist ideology and an attack on Stalinism. In the present desert of practical opposition to this increasingly suicidal world, this may seem over-ambitious. But if you don't aim high you always end up low.

Although I sometimes use "we", this text has essentially been put together by just one person, though with considerable help, advice, and encouragement from a good friend.

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### **Introduction**

All useful, radical, analysis of the history of class struggle comes down to recognising how we, the masses of individuals, failed to make that leap in the past so as to "learn the lessons" of this failure in order to help make that leap in some possible future (whether it be next week or in ten years time). However, the miners strike was unique and such an opportunity will not arise in anything like such historical circumstances ever again: history does not repeat itself at this level, but clarifying the past is a necessary moment in helping us see and confront the present afresh. It's certainly not essential *in itself* but such reflection is *one* of the essentials. Sure, we have some misgivings about writing about the history of the miners, and in particular, the Great Strike, when there are very few miners left. It's a bit like fighting ghosts - even though the '84-'85 strike haunts us in the present, it's clearly also dead. For some, recounting these past details of a semi-revolutionary movement might seem like pornography for the celibate - a vicarious pleasure in past passions to console for the lack of real excitement between people in the present. So if it doesn't incite something really good between people, then much of this is not much better than an erotic memory. For this reason, we hope that this is not just treated as a curiosity, informative and interesting to read: we hope it will have some use - sometimes in its general insights, sometimes in its details, for people in the world (if not in the UK for the moment) who might yet find - or put - themselves in a situation of mass struggle, even though obviously no struggle is ever the same. We trust that there will be some things in this text, and not just banalities (e.g. a critique of trade unions), which are still applicable for other places in another epoch.

What is the relation of the past to the present? Marx famously said "*the traditions of the past weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living*". Clearly, analysis of the past and of your relation to it is part of breaking through to a more experimental and subversive life in the present. But, contrary to what radical historians say, you only begin to understand the past, to uncover and use it, when you attack the present. Psychologists claim an individual must first of all understand their past in order to supercede it. But this is a task without end and if one is always looking for the cause one remains stuck in an introspective retreat from action. Moreover, one only discovers which aspects of the past need to be focussed on in finding out how to use this knowledge in the present, in confronting the obstacles to one's desires. What's true of individuals' pasts is also true for the pasts of the masses of individuals, the pasts of social movements. So, even on the level of preparing for an attack to come, the extent to which a thorough critical knowledge of struggles from 20 years ago

plays a part is fairly tenuous. Though some general and even very specific lessons can certainly be applied to possible present and future struggles, such knowledge doesn't play the essential part - the essential theories relate to events which can be influenced by the theories - anyone can be right' 20 years too late. Theory in the present is always made on the hoof: sadly, so many of those that claim to be revolutionary think they can wait till a struggle is over before they can provide some analysis, because they are fearful of making mistakes. Maybe better late than never, but like those involved directly in the practical risks of the moment, far better to make new mistakes with all the risks of imperfection they entail, than to wait till it all becomes a largely abstract question. For this reason, amongst others, this text should have been written in the few years after the strike, when such a reflection could have influenced miners when there still were some (although it was very difficult to see clearly the enormous extent of the coming devastation until it was too late). In fact, one of the main reasons for writing this is to feed a *subjective* need: to help exorcise the obsession of the miners strike that has churned through my head - and other people's - for the last 20 years, to off-load the traditions of the past weighing like a nightmare on *my* brain. Of course, as I have just said, the limitations of psychoanalysis show that obsessions can only seriously be exorcised by some *practical* supercession. And most of the essential aspects of practice depend on not so much *just* individual will (say, by writing this bit of critical history, for example) but on the will of the *masses* of individuals, on a social will, which advances and - at this moment in history - enormously retreats. For this reason this writing will have achieved some real exorcism only by influencing the mass action of individuals a little. Ambitious maybe, but this would be the only satisfactory overcoming of the constant niggles that the miners failure still causes people, because the results of this failure are still in the world about us and still desperately need to be corrected. There is no moving on', to use the psychological buzz word beloved by our beloved Prime Minister, until the practical situation is changed.

The effects of the miners' defeat were global. Just as it severely weakened and demoralised the working class, particularly in Britain, so it boosted the confidence of the ruling class immeasurably, and was one of the major factors ushering in privatization, the roll-back of the welfare state and all the horrors of a world apparently without exit. To show the truth of this it's sufficient to point out that in the budget immediately following the strike, Nigel Lawson, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, reduced the threshold of top income tax to 40%, an unprecedented rise in income for the rich paid for by cutbacks to those at the other end of the hierarchy.

The present evaporation of community and intensified isolation and reification would have been very unlikely if the miners had won. You only have to look at the brutality of everyday life in the former mining communities themselves to see that. Nowadays these areas suffer from a big increase in:

- burglary and muggings by the young of the old in areas which, up till 1985, had no experience of mugging, areas where people regularly left their front doors unlocked even as late as the 80s,
- alcoholism and drug addiction rife
- general suicidal tendencies and nervous breakdowns amongst the old and young
- intensified domestication - everyone indoors.
- intensified madness of all varieties.

And all this taking place in a booming economy:

- property prices soaring
- a building boom for middle income housing
- gentrification
- the transformation of pit villages into functional dormitory towns for the larger close-by cities
- pretty good wages amongst the skilled working class compared with the past
- scary poverty for the rest, though with relatively low unemployment levels, compared with the 80s.

As virtually everybody reading this will know, these tendencies are by no means confined to the former mining areas, though they seem to be more intensified there. Whilst the defeat of 1926 was brutal, the difference between now and then is that in the aftermath of 1926, an aftermath which lasted generations, there was at least a community of class hatred towards the ruling class and its middle class minions. Nowadays, particularly amongst most of the young, there's just an individual consciousness perplexed by the meaninglessness of life and at a loss to comprehend the reason and history of this meaninglessness. This society tries to wipe out all memory of what was radical in these former communities - either by aestheticisation (former pithead winding wheels turned into sculptures; pits made invisible by being covered over and turned into parks; pits turned into museums for tourists; the Battle of Orgreave re-enacted by historic societies; movies showing the tragedy of it all; etc.) or by more direct lies, lies by omission and ideologies.



the aestheticisation of history (Kiveton Park today)

If lessons' are to be learnt from past and present movements we must look not just at the ruling classes ' strategy - but, more importantly, at the weaknesses and contradictions in the opposition, as well as its strengths. In relation to the miners strike this involves looking not just at the Thatcher government, the National Coal Board, the cops, the media and the Trade Unions but also the failures of the more independent miners, of revolutionaries and of the rest of the working class, as well as their strengths - their audacity, initiative and solidarity.

Amongst the failures on our side we could list:

- the inordinate respect for leaders big and small

- Trade Unionism as an ideological and practical Trojan Horse amongst the working class
- the failure to involve the more passive striking miners
- the failure to make connections between miners and other workers in their workplace
- the increasing indifference towards the strike amongst many who initially identified with it
- the failure of many of those who identified with it to push for their own demands and desires, treating the miners as heroes who could save them
- the demoralising weight of the confusions of the pseudo-revolutionaries in the political groups and parties
- the failure of theoretically sussed revolutionaries to initiate *practical* activity that would advance their project in a historical situation that made everything so more vital.

**All these aspects interacted and it's only those who don't want to look to themselves as well as external factors, and the relationship between themselves and the objective forces encouraging defeat, who become experts in reducing the defeat to one or two things.**

The good side of the strike was that it got the ruling class very rattled because we almost won, and almost won a very violent confrontation which developed significant radical changes to the daily lives of those who were involved in it. It could only have won if it had developed its most radical autonomous aspects.

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The following is a chronological critical look, almost a half of which is a history of some aspects of the miners, and other, struggles and lives prior to the strike. A lot of it is common knowledge to those who lived through this period of time, but we have decided to include a lot of banalities for those who are not so familiar with this history. It has no pretensions to being a definitive history: inevitably, loads of facts and lots of areas of analysis are missed out, and undoubtedly many people could add to both our analysis and the facts. We have not given references because references are a way of seeming correctly researched and objective in a University sense, and passes the buck of responsibility for the facts onto the references: if the facts are wrong you can blame the references. In any case, very few people check references - for academics it's enough to give the appearance of a factual basis for what one writes and most people, out of blind deference, respect the objective ' nature of what is written. Suffice to say, we have done our best to ensure that the facts we put in here are accurate, but sometimes the information we have kept is sketchy and at times contradictory: so, occasionally dates, numbers and places might not be entirely correct. We have been here neither "economical" with the truth nor the other way - excessively lavish ' with the truth'. Invention would distract from our aim.

Up until 1984, and even up till the savage destruction of the pits in the early 90s, coalmining "communities" were very closely-knit places. The social clubs were always very well-attended. Almost everyone knew everyone else. Tens of thousands of families had men working in the pits for three or four generations. The fact that it was one of the more filthy, dangerous and undesirable jobs as compared with the jobs done by most of their fellow wage-labourers, and that it was essential for the running of the economy, meant that the struggles of pit communities' were more central than most other struggles. The miners were not a vanguard ' of the proletariat, but often their struggles were the fiercest and most inspiring. They remembered the history of their "section" of the proletariat more than did any other "section", even if this was

often (though certainly not always) from an uncritical contemplative perspective. For the moment we won't go into what was undoubtedly partly repressive in some aspects of the history of these communities'. Their most publicly significant moments are what concerns us here. It is a rich but (inevitably) contradictory history.

In the struggle to make sense of the past for some future use, there is a fundamental difference between the perspective which defends a particular organisation and a perspective which looks at the strengths and weaknesses in the organisation of the struggle itself. A reflection on the the contradictions in the struggles of each individual proletarian is fundamentally different from a partisan reflection' used to evasively defend an organisation of which one is a member. Leftist specialists in trade union history tend to only look at the miners from a distorted NUM angle that wants to crudely represent this history by mythologising everything, simplifying everything - a way of looking at history that's usually been nurtured by a union-subsidised stint at Ruskin College. Its aim is to present and justify a trade unionist role as compatible with a subversion of this society, as genuinely socialist'. For ourselves, we shall try to look at some of the things they don't even mention.

*"I was offered a place at Ruskin by the NUM and a future Union position but I refused it - it would have taken me away from reality"*

- John Dennis, Yorkshire miner who died in May 2002.

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## Chapter 1:

### 1926 to the early 60s

The General Strike...Spencerism...  
...A.J.Cook and the project of nationalisation...World War II...  
...Nationalisation...wildcats against the NUM...  
...Industrial capital v. Finance capital...

In May 1926 the miners struggle against wage-cuts and increased hours sparked off the General Strike. The bosses, the Tory Government and the TUC combined to break the strike, aided to a certain extent by the miners allowing the Union (the Miners Federation) to isolate them and calm them down. Though it was a powerful strike - in some areas workers militias were formed, and improvised locally initiated Councils of Action were created - it was defeated primarily by a faith in Trade Unionism, and above all by a faith in leadership, which prevented the working class from seeing and extending what they'd already done. Namely, the fact that there were more workers on strike *after* the TUC had called off the General Strike than before, was not understood by the strikers as significant (perhaps most didn't even know about it) and the habit of looking to leaders meant that workers quickly returned to work. The essential reason for its defeat is also one of the essential reasons for the defeat of most subsequent struggles: the failure to go beyond the Trade Union hierarchical form, to consciously attack this form. J.R.Clynes, one of the Trade Union leaders at the time, said in his memoirs, "*No General Strike was ever planned or seriously planned as an act of Trade Union policy. I told my union in April, that such a strike would be a national disaster...We were against the stoppage, not in favour of it*". Despite this failure, the General Strike still had a significant effect on the working of capital: for example, nine days of just 1% of normal train services running "*caused chaos on the railways for months afterwards. The breakdown was greater than that caused by the air-raids on London in 1940-41 and took much longer to repair.*" (Tom Brown, **The Social General Strike**).



The miners themselves continued to strike for over 7 months after the General Strike but in almost total isolation. Due to lack of support, combined with poverty and starvation (though, as in the Great Strike almost 60 years later, soup and meals were provided, and there were collections through benefit concerts), the strikers were humiliated back to work.



Ready - Steady - Cook (during the General Strike)...  
*...those who make arfur revolution dig naught but their own graves...*

The miners were led by the famous A.J. Cook, the “revolutionary” leader of the Miners Federation [1a] (the forerunner of the NUM), the first miners' Arthur, whose image is as much a legend as the King some people have treated him as. A.J. Cook was undoubtedly a good passionate speaker. Though he was paid as a Union official, he was never a full-time bureaucrat; he worked alongside the miners he represented - all of which is why he was uncritically supported by the vast majority of the miners of his time. But he was very much an expression of the weakness of the old workers movement, and believed, amongst other things, in professional paid leadership and whose idea of justice for miners was simply nationalisation. Moreover, he insisted that miners weren't lazy and that they were not saboteurs (see *The Case For The Miners*, written by Cook, pubd. 1924). It's very much part of the schizoid leadership role within this society, especially within trade unionism, to present a reasonable' (reformist) image to the general public, whilst rabble rousing to your followers. He was briefly a member of the CP, having left in 1921, probably because being a CP member would have prevented him from being elected as miners leader (according to Paul Foot, anyway). Certainly there was nothing particularly principled about his departure and, unlike for example Sylvia Pankhurst or Anton Pannekoek, he never incurred the wrath of the international or national CP, and indeed was praised after his death by Arthur Horner (the leading Stalinist miner's bureaucrat who insured that the miiners buckled down to the State as boss of the new nationalised mining industry after World War II). He remained a member of the ILP (one of the best of the old workers' movement parties), but was never one of the more independent-minded members.

As for nationalisation, in Britain at least, nationalisation was never considered a particularly socialist, let alone radical, idea. The Sankey Commission into the mining industry which published its findings in 1919, recommended “*nationalisation or a method of unification by national purchase and/or join control*”. This Commission included a Tory member of the government - Andrew Bonar Law, who later became Prime Minister for a short time. Undoubtedly this recommendation came as a verbal sop to the workers movement which, in the wake of the October Revolution in Russia, was growing more confident. The Miners Federation accepted the Sankey Commission's findings without question, which shows how easily recuperated the British workers movement was at this moment. Of course, its findings weren't put into effect until almost 30 years later. Regardless of its words, in practice the British ruling class rarely makes concessions of any significance until well after the social pressures to make concessions have receded. It doesn't like to be *seen* to be giving in. Shortly before the General Strike, a different Royal Commission - the Samuel Commission - reported recommendations which were a retreat from the suggestion of full nationalisation, suggesting only that coal royalties be nationalised, recommending the continuation of private ownership with a few minor concessions thrown in - pit head baths, and improved government aid for

research and distribution. Despite the fact that it suggested immediate consideration be given to the lowering of wages (some months into the miners strike, but after the defeat of the General Strike) the great radical A.J.Cook said the miners would accept its findings. But even then, the mine owners, the balance of class forces having been firmly tipped in their favour, refused to accept even its very minor concessions. Which just goes to show that, even on the level of ideas, to concede *anything* to the dominant powers will, rightly, be taken as a sign of weakness, and, as is the case when confronted with mad dogs, only encourages further attacks.

During this strike, George Spencer, a Labour M.P. 1b, was instrumental in forming an openly scab union in Nottinghamshire which signed a local agreement which was rather like Franco's model of unions, which later on got some support in most other mining areas. Areas were picked off individually for lower wages because the owners knew that if there was a strike in one area, coal could still be mined in another. In the aftermath of the wildcat strikes after the TUC called off the official General Strike, the Tory government made wildcats illegal. In 1936, some Notts miners, despite being in the Spencerite scab union, were sent to prison for going on wildcat strike.

During the early 30s, parts of the left-wing of capital wanted the coal industry to be run by a "mining council" with 10 State-appointed members and 10 union-appointed ones, which had already been proposed by union bureaucrats from 1912 to the late 20s. Whilst in the Labour Party, Mosley, a Keynesian at this time, had put forward a Manifesto proposing temporary deficit financing for public works and protectionist imperialism, which was signed by 17 people - 16 Labour MPs and A.J.Cook. This was later demagogically taken up by Mosley's fascists.

The temporary State management (not ownership) of the pits during World War II didn't stop trouble at the pits despite strikes being made illegal ("without State permission"). State management during wartime meant a worsening of conditions: safety regulations were suspended, overtime was made compulsory and, with increasing amounts of miners being made unemployed, miners who were still employed were made to work harder. In 1942 there were wildcat strikes in Yorkshire and elsewhere. In Betteshanger, Kent, over a thousand miners appeared in court for striking contrary to wartime law. All were found guilty and fined, three being imprisoned (unlike Lady Mosley during the war, however, they were not allowed to have their butler in prison to cater to their every whim).



On January 1st 1947, the pits were nationalised with the post-war Labour government in power, who were conscious of the need to grant concessions for the securing of social peace in the

wake of general increased expectations in the post-war era - and the National Coal Board (NCB) came into existence. Emmanuel Shinwell, a former radical jailed during "Red Clyde", the semi-revolutionary atmosphere in parts of Scotland after World War I, who later became Lord Shinwell, presided, as Minister of Fuel and Power, over the nauseating nationalistic ceremonies under the banner of the virtually Stalinist slogan, "*The National Coal Board now owns and manages the industry on behalf of the people.*"<sup>2</sup> On the NCB of 9 men, 3 were ex-mine owners (amongst them, Lord Hyndley, former president of the Company of Mines) and 2 were high level Union bureaucrats - Ebby Edwards (in charge of labour relations) and Lord Citrine, an old enemy of the miners who, as acting General Secretary of the TUC in 1926, had sold them out. The National Union of Miners (NUM), born 2 years previously, pledged itself to "*do everything possible to promote and maintain a spirit of self-discipline...and a readiness to carry out all reasonable orders given by management.*" It had no formal representation on the Board but the NCB labour department, the day-to-day cops of wage labour, was staffed largely by their own ex-officials. Many regional officers of the union took up jobs with the NCB but the NUM's rules forbade them to keep up their formal union membership. Miners themselves didn't seem to have many illusions in the new Board. As early as summer '47, a delegate at the annual NUM conference warned against "*the terrible tendency to paint the face of the coal-owners over the face of the Coal Board.*"

After 1947, both the NCB and the NUM were finding it difficult to generate "*the new responsibility*" which Arthur Horner, the NUM General Secretary who was also a leading light in the Communist Party [2b], wished for. The National Reference Tribunal (mandatorily binding arbitration) was excitedly praised by the NCB who hoped "*to infuse a new spirit into management and men, new partners*" and by Horner, who thought it "*would achieve the maximum results for our own forces with the least possible damage to them*". The NUM used all the influence it could muster to ensure restraint in wage negotiations. As Horner said, "*If we asked for the moon, we could get it. Instead we have shown the highest sense of social responsibility of any organisation in this country*". Translated this means: "*The miners have enormous potential power - but the NUM, as a capitalist organisation responsible to this society and the country/nation, has shown its ability to defuse that power.*"

After 7 months of nationalisation some of "*the people*" came into conflict with the organisation which acted on their behalf - a wildcat strike broke out at Grimethorpe which was described by one union leader as the most bitter he had ever seen. The NCB wanted a 5-day week, but wanted to reorganise shifts so that the extra production which used to be done on Saturdays was compensated for by an increased workload during the week. The NUM opposed the strike. Within 3 weeks it spread to 38 pits and the Yorkshire Area General Secretary told the men to choose "*between industrial democracy and anarchy*". Will Lawther, ex-President of the General Council of the TUC and an NUM bureaucrat, said that the NCB should prosecute the strikers "*even if there are 50,000 or 100,000 of them*" and he attacked strikers for not recognising "*their responsibilities*" and for committing a "*crime against our own people*". Strikers at Grimethorpe responded by painting a gallows outside the colliery gates with the slogan "*Burn Will Lawther*". Shinwell pleaded that many Yorkshire firms could go bankrupt if the strike continued and Horner warned that the shortage of coal could bring down the Labour Government. The union signed an agreement with the bosses promising "*to prevent unconstitutional stoppages*" and to prohibit any financial or verbal support to strikers in such stoppages, whilst the NCB took 40 miners to court who were penalised for damages under a law passed in 1875. In the year after nationalisation miners strikes accounted for 33% of days lost (lost to capital that is - but gained by the workers) through strikes that year. Miners were just 4% of the workforce.

It's significant that Lawther was knighted by the Queen a year or so after the above mentioned strike. Later, in July 1953, he said in a speech to the Durham Colliery Mechanics' Association:

"We cannot afford to be Luddites...We must rebuild this nation to be as formidable in this century as in the past. This cannot be achieved by following people who are always cursing the land of their birth and speaking as if we are among those countries who never know, when they go to bed at night, who will be in charge in the morning."

The decade after nationalisation - the period of the most capitalist reconstruction up till that time nevertheless insured a growth in wages in part due to the combativity of the miners, but also due to Keynesian government policy of full employment which needed to develop proletarians as consumers, and required better health for wage slaves, partly because of the possibility of war constantly in the background. Mechanisation was brought in, and so were free baths, newer canteens, better housing, better compensation for injury, a pension scheme, and better safety conditions (though mechanisation involved the creation of vast amounts of coal dust particles which produced an epidemic of pneumonicosis - a kind of lung cancer). Although production had remained steady up till 1960, manpower had fallen from 704,000 to 602,000, the increase in productivity being mainly down to mechanisation. Moreover, the increase in oil imports from the end of the 50s meant coal production was being increasingly cut and by '65 there were only 456,000 miners, and by the end of the 60s this had fallen to 287,000, 47% of what it was in 1960, though productivity had risen by 57% .

From '59 onwards, the NUM, while recognising that “all pits must eventually die”, were warning governments about “the effect on the community” of “premature” shutdowns. The NUM defended capitalist policies in the interests of the NUM - i.e. investment in coal, the more the better. Unions defend their own particular interests within capital - hence the NUM represented a section of *industrial* capital, unlike banks or financial institutions, which are not concerned with investment in any particular sector<sup>3</sup>. Apart from the Unions' role as police, as negotiators of wage labour, as recuperators, they also have to defend their specific role in the reproduction of capital - because they depend solely on the union dues paid by their members and on the investment of these dues and pension funds. The NUM cannot suddenly relocate to another industry. Hence, in the 60s, both the NUM and the NCB campaigned for a greater consumption of coal on the internal market - both extolling the homely virtues of coal fires. The NCB too had to defend its own position - the defence of the profit-rate of a sector of capital. In 1966, Lord Robens, Chairman of the Coal Board, said “*A lot of people in the union attack the Coal Board...I attack the government.*”



Lord Robens

*Formerly on the Left of the Labour Party (he was shadow foreign secretary during the Suez crisis, and considered “too left-wing” by its leader, Hugh Gaitskell) Robens ended up supporting Thatcher in 1979.*

*The highpoint of his life was the Aberfan disaster in 1966 when a massive spoil heap from the nearby Merthyr Vale Colliery collapsed onto the village of Aberfan, burying 20 houses and the Pantglas Junior School in a 10-metre deep landslide of water-saturated slurry, killing 116 school children and 28 adults. The report of the Davies Tribunal which inquired into the disaster was highly critical of the NCB and Robens (the possibility of such a disaster had been foreseen, but of course, nothing had been done). He eventually appeared in the final days of the inquiry and*

*conceded that the NCB was at fault. In the wake of the disaster Robens refused to allow the NCB to fund the removal of the remaining tips from Aberfan, despite the fact that the Davies Tribunal concluded that the NCB's liability was "incontestible and uncontested". Despite this conclusion, Robens refused to pay the full cost. Robens then raided the Disaster Fund (which had been raised by public appeal) for £150,000 (£1.8 million at 2003 prices) to cover the cost of removing the tips - an action that was "unquestionably unlawful" under charity law - yet the Charity Commission took no action to protect the Fund from Robens's thieving. Those were the days!*

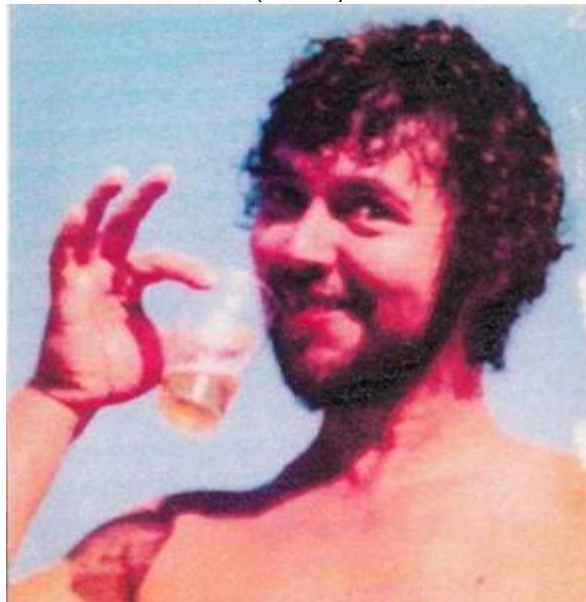
## **Chapter 2:**

**We interrupt this chronology to reproduce a personal account by a miner of a series of incidents in his pit village, which gives some idea of the atmosphere of the mining areas during the mid- 60s. It is not the kind of history one is likely to see from those trained to write "History" with a capital "H". It is lived personal history.**

### **A TRUE LIFE STORY: The Story of a Boat (no title in the original)**

by John Dennis

(below)



This story begins in the early sixties. I would be just sixteen years old, just entering the world of work. Life appeared good and for me - everything seemed possible (people of my age are obliged to say that sort of thing about the sixties). Anyway, Europe at that time had a massive mining industry in which millions of people were employed and on which millions depended. We happily polluted the skies with our smoke and denuded the land and forests with our acid rain. The Beatles were beatling and The Stones were beginning to roll. Good whisky was about two pounds a bottle, beer was around seven pence a pint. We teenagers were being trained to provide the hands and minds that would begin to embrace the white heat of technology. Most of us in the mining communities seemed to have a place in the present and great expectations of the future. Ignorance was bliss and we were blissfully ignorant.

For such kids as myself who did not enjoy an above average intelligence or parents with

middle-class aspirations we generally gleaned some sort of education from the secondary modern schools. Thus after spending five years learning the rudiments of social interaction, petty crime and sexual experimentation it would be time to leave and be taken into one of the three great soaks of the young white male in Yorkshire. For the majority it would be the mines, the steel industry or the armed forces. If you consider my family history and the proximity of the coal mines - six within a three mile radius and one on the doorstep - it's not too surprising that I should take what seemed to be the easy option and sign up with the NCB (National Coal Board).

After the primary euphoria of acceptance and a vigorous sixteen week training period a great disappointment befell me and the likes of me. Because we were above six foot in height and weighed less than eleven stones it was deemed that we were physically unsuited to become face workers. It would seem that the ideal face worker should be five feet nine high and five foot six across, social engineering maybe? The shame, all our clan had been underground workers, my father, his father, his father, cousins, brothers, maybe the odd sister, all of them members of that industrial elite, the money, the hours, the social kudos. I was willing to be killed, crippled or rendered lungless, if only I could have carried on the family tradition. Alas, no, so a compromise was made. I would be apprenticed into one or more of the mining trades. In time I would be a blacksmith, welder, farrier, learn the mysteries of rope making and in my spare time make tea for the craftsmen, clean the workshop and not complain if I should be beaten up or sexually abused.

So it went busily on until one dull as dishwater morning in 1964 the foreman came to us and gave us our tasks for the day. He began with the opening, "John, Mick, Alan, you've shown such promise in your metalworking skills that the engineer has seen fit to give you lads the chance of a lifetime." We heard the man's blatherings with some suspicion but not with optimism, he was Alan's father after all. What sort of a chance of a lifetime? Some task to test our newly founded skills? Some project in the mine to stretch our physical and mental capacities? Imagine our disbelief when the lickspittle gaffer's running dog said, "Lads, you're going to help build the Chief Engineer a sailing boat".

I think it may be wise at this juncture to explain some of the social relationships between the miners, the village and the employers that existed during the 1960s and 70s. We seemed to be in a period of some consolidation between the barbarities of the coal owners and the savagery about to be unleashed during the Thatcher years. After nationalisation, conditions in the mines improved, poachers turned to game keepers, the NUM incorporated its powers. Investment in mining was massive, there seemed to be a tacit agreement that, "if it was good for the miners it was good for Britain", and no doubt the miners thought vice versa. In villages such as Kiveton Park with a population of around three thousand, one thousand worked at the mine and seven hundred in mining support industries. The old patrimony seemed to carry on seamlessly. The Dennis family like many more had fled the famine in Ireland during the middle of the 19th century. They had washed up on the shores of this uncompromising land and straightaway signed up to work in one of the most barbaric industries in Europe. Great grandfather John had been a shaft sinker at Kiveton Park, his son John a driver of tunnels. I would be the third and the last John Dennis to work at Kiveton Park Colliery. We lived in low rent houses owned by the NCB. The schools, medical facilities owed their beginnings to the miners, even the churches and chapels were built or renovated by the good will and labour of the workers. We would nowadays be described as a close community.

The hierarchy at the mine itself was only slightly revised from the days of the coal owners. The Colliery Manager could be likened to the captain of a nineteenth century sailing ship, his powers awesome, his responsibilities equally so, described by act of parliament he answered for every life, human or animal, every nut, bolt and cobble of coal, the mine and its environs and to a great degree, the social and economic life of the village in his grasping paws. Directly below him on the ladder to fame and fortune, stood peering up his trouser leg, my boss. The

enginewright, to give his job description, would be engineer in charge of the mine. In those days enginewrights had so much room in which to line their pockets and abuse their many powers, but one source of unending conflict between the manager (in charge of overall production) and engineer (in charge of the mode of production) was that machines would be smashed, worn out or sabotaged by the elements in a growing bolshy workforce. From the workers point of view the problem was really simple. It took x number of pounds to buy and maintain a mining machine. It took x number of pounds and two years of valuable time to train a pit pony. The workers earn and maintain their own keep. He or she is not a capital investment. For us the answer was simple. We not only stole the bosses' materials, we stole their time. To the bosses the machine and the pony were of more value than the workers. Also the government had decreed that machines and animals were tax deductible. In those days we knew exactly where we stood.

We all knew the pedigree of our enginewright and we all knew of his predicament in the year of the boat. In 1964 he would have been around sixty four years old, tired and embittered and certainly fraying at the edges. He had married young to the daughter of a second generation colliery manager. He was at that time a lowly machinist, she a lass of great appetite and social conscience. Naturally his ambitions to be an enginewright were fulfilled. Marrying the boss's daughter assured that. In fact in his younger days he was considered a rising star and it would only be a short time before he attained a place on the board of directors, owning several mines in that area. Then for him tragedy. His wheel of fortune and fame developed a flat tyre. It was 1947 and those red-in-tooth and claw socialists went and nationalised the mines. No more would marrying the boss's daughter assure him of a safe passage on his slimy journey from rags to riches. In truth, marrying the boss's daughter scuppered any chance of furthering his career at all. The reason being the reputation of the father-in-law in question. This creature made Josef Stalin look positively avuncular. During his time as Squire of Waleswood and manager of Brookhouse Pit he took his pleasure by sacking any worker who displeased him then evicting them from their homes. Thuggery, buggery and intimidation were all watchwords. But to cap it all he and the mining company owned all the shops and public houses in the village, so by selling them cheap strong beer and relatively expensive food he entrapped the miners and their families into drunkenness, poverty and debt. Even by his contemporaries he was considered an ineffable bastard which must put him in the same league as (fill this space if you know of anyone that wicked who has not been exposed in the full glare of left-wing historians or the mass media).

Thankfully, "the mills of justice may grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small" and the lousy old sod got his punishment in the true and tried English tradition. Firstly, he was given the options of resign or carry on working, sharpening pencils in some obscure office in deepest Doncaster. If he resigned he would be forced to take approximately ten years wages in lieu of lost earnings. His shares in Waleswood Mining Company would be bought from him at premium prices and his pensions would be paid in cash on the day of his resignation. He died a mere 87 years old in his swimming pool on the island of Antigua, some say from a surfeit of rum and rent boys. His days of shame and exile must have given great satisfaction to those many poor and damaged souls he inflicted such gross inhumanities upon. But worse still our poor enginewright was shuffled to the sidelines, there to waste his remaining years, a frustrated Brunel. His wife, now of independent means, would desert him at least twice in the year to do good works in the East End of London or to sojourn with struggling young artists in the steamier regions of Italy. His children despised him, his colleagues pitied him and we made his life as unhappy as he tried to make ours'.

At times of great despondency he would unburden his woes around the pubs and clubs of the villages. It is said that during one of these two-bottle unburdenings he came upon the idea of building a boat that upon his retirement would take him through the canals and rivers of England and thus escape the miseries of mining and the contempt of his family. The spirits guide us in mysterious ways.

Between the Pit Manager and the enginewright there was an old festering conflict. As an ex-lover of the engineman's wife the manager knew well his propensity for drink and theft, but the enginewright knew of the manager's weakness for cooking the figures (which enhanced his bonus) and the fact that bedding another man's wife would not enhance the happiness of that pillar of the local Methodist community, the manager's wife.

The dimensions of that boat would be thus: in length 18 feet, in width 6 feet, the mast 16 feet tall, the hull to be made of supermarine plywood, the fitments and fittings to be hand crafted, the engine to be a two litre Coventry Climax converted from the pit potable fire pump, hydraulics and pipe work gratis from Doughty, the labour and time gratis the NCB. It was to be built in the carpenter's workshop but hidden from prying eyes by a canvas partition.

My tasks from the beginning would be to hand finish all the many copper and brass fitments which would be delivered from the foundry in a rough condition. It's strange how fortune seems to favour the favoured. In this case it manifested itself in the guise of the foreman carpenter, his war service had been spent in the construction of torpedo boats for the British and US Navy. After five years of bending plywood in some Norfolk backwater he could nearly do it blindfold. The sealords work in mysterious ways.

At the start of the project we didn't mind the painstaking and repetitive nature of the work, after all there was a certain thrill in taking part in such a scandal. Then there was the fact that much of the work was done outside production time. This meant working Saturday and Sunday, time and a half and double time respectively. Add to this the fact that if we felt like a lazy hour in the workshop we would take a small work piece, place it in the vice and pretend to file or polish it. The foreman would peer over our shoulders, put his finger at the side of his nose, nod sagely, then slope off to pester some other unfortunate.

But alas the novelty began to subside and maybe the work began to suffer as a consequence, or maybe we were beginning to react to the attitude of the enginewright. He was becoming obsessed with the time the work was taking. He would stride down the workshop, arms waving, spittle splashing, eyes popping. "Two hours to polish a bollard, that's bollocks Dennis!" This hurt. All craftsmen know the adage, "More haste less speed". It's imprinted in the back of our minds like a mantra, so we naturally resent such talk.

After work we'd sit in the pub and talk of the really important things such as money, sex, money, Alan's latest wet dream (they were becoming really bizarre). The things that lad got up to in his sleep would keep a Jungian trick cyclist in work for a lifetime. On the afternoon of the gaffer's outburst about my bollocking bollards, he related his dream of the night before. It seems he was page boy to the mother of the queen. It involved him guiding the penis of the queen mother's horse into her vagina (which was tastefully kept from view by a tartan blanket) while he was being masturbated by the young Princess Anne, naked but for a golden miner's helmet. Bloody hell! Then we'd talk about money again, the advantages of the condom as a device for halting premature ejaculation, the quality of the beer and then finally the boat and how everybody but the bloody enginewright was becoming so disenchanted with the whole bloody project.

Things took an extra turn for the worse a few days later when the enginewright brought his new assistant to the workshops on what could be described as a guided tour, during which he mapped out the pitfalls, snares and traps his prodigy would encounter in his daily dealings with the proletariat. In fact on passing our workbench at which I was putting the final shine onto another (or was it the same?) bollard the old snake said to his new gofer, "Watch that bastard Dennis. He's idle, shifty and he'd steal the coat off the back of a leper." I was most offended, shifty indeed! I'd never been called shifty before. This new guy was of old mining stock but had just graduated from Sheffield University. He had the wit to understand the boat situation but



from the onset he had made it clear that he would collect feathers in his cap if by hassling, hustling and bustling he could expedite the completion of the "Marie Celeste" (as the boat had now become known to we three apprentices). To these ends this man would be found prowling the workshops at 6.30 in the morning. Management in its senior forms would never be seen before 9a.m. if the good running of any enterprise is to be assured, workers in all walks of life understand this basic tenant. This guy would appear before we'd finished wiping the sleep from our eyes and say in a loud voice, "Right men, let's show the boss what we can do. Come on, let's get cracking!" Indeed one morning he said to the foreman, "Get the bollard boys off the boat work and onto some fucking pit work. It's a bleeding disgrace this workshop." Imagine the foreman's shame at being usurped by an overweening toe rag the likes of an assistant engineer. Also the added shame of having his son described as a "bollard boy", this epithet was to remain with Alan for many years. In fact to this day when father and son are seen together the cry will go up: "Here comes Blacksmith Bill and his bollard boy," a remaining stain on a proud working family.

The situation finally came to a head one morning when the assistant discovered the foreman blacksmith trying to fold a piece of canvas into the boot of his car. The assistant with his usual calm and considered approach said, "Right! What do you think you're doing stealing the Gaffer's sailcloth?" The blacksmith replied, "This is not a sail, this is a hammock for my back garden, so fuck off". The assistant stamped his feet, turned pink, turned purple, whipped off his helmet and kicked it across the car park shouting, "Right, that's it. You're sacked, fired, I'm going to have you prosecuted." You may have guessed that by this time everybody called him Mr. Right. But let's not digress. The assistant went to the manager, the foreman of the Union and the rest of us looked like going on strike.

In 1964, my father and the pit manager would be 53-54 years old. They'd both left school at 14 years of age and had started in the pits as pony drivers, their job to lead the pit ponies pulling the tubs on their journey from the coal face to the collecting points. To the pit bottom it was an arduous and dangerous journey. In those days it was a rigorous training for even harder things to come. Their careers had parallels in time and in some ways circumstances. When I look at photographs of my father as a teenager at 14-15 years old I can see a child but eyes are already ageing beyond his time. His body is that of the small Dennis's - around 5' 6" (full grown 5' 9"), big shoulders, thin waist, long arms and those silly tendril-like fingers that we'd all inherit - except for his hands the perfect mining shape. Early in life George, through the influence of his beloved mother learned to and became a talented violin player. The manager at that same age found that most cherished of Yorkshire sports, cricket.

During the 1926 strike father learned hard lessons about the lack of solidarity of the English workers when threatened by the middle classes. In the late twenties he joined the Communist Party. Our manager in the meantime through his ambitions to rise in mining and his contacts in the higher echelons of cricket became a deputy (underground foreman). Father led a local dance band, the manager led Worksop cricket team and was very active in the North Notts Tory party. They both married in the late 1930's. The manager left the Tory Party in 1939 because of the appeasement of the Chamberlain government. Father left the Communist Party in 1941 when Stalin signed the non-aggression treaty with Hitler. In 1964, father at that time was union secretary, enjoying all the benefits that the position accrued to him, one of which was having intelligence on all the dubious doings of his membership at the mine at that time. Mr. Right had hardly finished his tirade in the car park before father was on his way to the manager's office with certain cards to lay on the table and a few kept in reserve up his sleeve. His main argument was really direct and to the point. If any action were taken against the foreman blacksmith he'd be on the phone to the area offices describing the scandal of an engineer who seemed to think he was Noah and his upstart assistant who didn't understand the basic rules of one illegal item for the management meant one for the workers. The manager didn't even alter his countenance, he just waved his pen in the air and said, "George, what do you expect from a young lad straight from college. Let's talk about getting a little bit more effort out of these chaps

down in the headings.” To father that meant the subject had been settled satisfactorily. Mr. Right was less than satisfied when he was called to the presence later that morning. The information came back to father via the manager's personal secretary, who was allowed by the manager to hand down information to the workers when the occasion suited. The meat of the interview was as follows. “What do you mean stealing canvas? There's enough canvas in the stores to fit out the fucking Spanish Armada. Mind your ways laddie or it's the Scottish coalfields for you”.

Young Mr. Right, a well chastened assistant, was very subdued for long into the future, but still given to uncontrollable helmet kicking when primed and fired by the expert wind-up artists.

Let me explain my piece in the jigsaw. For example, as many as fifteen bollards would arrive at the mine from the foundry. The attachments look like the letter “I”. They are fixed firmly; thereby ropes can be safely tied off and sales and masts can be made secure. Each small brass object would arrive from the foundry in a rough condition. To make it smooth the sharp edges had to be taken off with a very coarse file. Then marks and gouges had to be taken out by a less coarse file until a smooth file could be used to take out those marks, then metal abrasive cloths and then a polish hard and a polish soft. But every time I looked at the boat I was charmed, it's lines, the work, it was becoming pleasing to the eye and to my mind a pest. For my two friends it may have been worse. The fitting of the engine and the keel would be educational but just as exasperating.

Later that day, showered, needlessly shaved and very thirsty we assembled ourselves at the bar of the Saxon Hotel. There we ordered our beers from one of the few Calvinist barmaids in the county of Yorkshire. She held we youngsters in the deepest contempt saying we were doomed to the fires of hell and damnation due to our drinking, gambling, fornications and foul-mouthed unruly behaviour, then promptly gave us the wrong change (always short) and scream for the landlord if we complained. This woman exercised my curiosity no end. She would wear low cut sweaters hardly hiding her upthrusting breasts, the shortest of mini-skirts, make-up by the kilo and then declaim religion in a manner which would have made Martin Luther King reach for his tape recorder.

In those days we would drink our first two pints standing at the bar (why waste time and energy walking?), order the next round, then find a table away from the jukebox and set about the foul-mouthed repartee which would so inflame the senses of our beloved barmaid. We were thus engaged when in walked father, who with no more ado came up to our table and sat down. “Well lads, I've just come from a chat with the manager and Alan's dad. I think the best solution is for you lads and everybody concerned to get your fingers out and get the bloody thing finished and off the premises as quickly as possible.”

I couldn't believe my ears. What was he saying? Rush a job which by my crude estimations would, if dragged out for another three months, earn the people involved at least four hundred pounds in overtime let alone hours fruitful pleasure baiting the bosses? No way daddio! I saw his eyes glint and his shoulder muscles hunch when Mick said, “Bollocks! Whose fucking side are you on? Are you up the manager's arse or something? This is money for old rope and it's going to last as long as we can spin it out.” Father turned to me smiling, then as quick as a cobra back to Mick and grabbed him by the throat pulling him over the table and whacking him on the side of the head with his open hand. Mick spun to the floor, mouth open, eyes ablaze and hand reaching for a bottle. Things looked on the verge of serious violence when a voice high on righteousness and indignation rang out, “George Dennis, have you no shame? Striking a boy just out of school, not old enough to vote, let alone see the ways of the Lord. Well, I think it's time you and your Communist kind were hounded out of office and sent back to Russia. And as for you, young Michael, he could no more creep up a gaffer's arse than an elephant's, his bloody head is too big. Now get out the lot of you afore I call the police.”

Father stormed out first and we trailed after. This boat business was getting out of hand. As

we stood on the terrace of the pub watching father stride away, the words came hissing out of Mike, "if he ever tries anything like that again, I'll fucking have the bastard." Try as I may I couldn't think of any reply that would support him without betraying father. Then Alan said, "Did you see her when she lent over the bar? Did you? Her titties just about fell out, they did. You could see the brown bits. You know the ear holes? Fucking hell, I hope I dream about her tonight. Talk about hard-on." I looked at Mick, we both looked at Alan, shook our heads and headed towards the working men's club. I didn't want to see father just yet.

I arrived home after a couple of subdued pints to find father and mother just getting over one of those rows, the subjects of which tend to rumble on for years between couples who have been married for nearly quarter of a century, in this case, booze, money and the union - mother hated the first, never had enough of the second and resented the third, father loved all three. For the next half hour mother berated the both of us with our shortcomings. These included my moral laxity in not defending father, his propensity for violence, Mike's hypocrisy, him coming from a family that had scabbed during the 1926 general strike and the mortal folly of drinking in the afternoon. When a person like mother took the high moral ground it was wise to sit down, switch off and think of barmaids with big boobs, just hoping she'll finish the tirade before the potato pie became too cold to eat (see Vol. 1 - "The Matriarchs in Mining Villages" for a different perspective of life when the bounds of their reason were overstepped).

About mother. My mother's father had been killed in a mining accident in 1928. Kiveton pit after the defeat of the miners in 1926 was not a good place to work. The miners at Kiveton had been some of the most militant in Yorkshire. Now the bosses had the whip hand and they cracked that whip with increasing brutality. Conditions and pay had degenerated to almost pre-1914 standards. Mother's family hand the story down that the undertaker had to put stones in the coffin to give the illusion of at least a little weight, there being so little of granddad to bury. The manner of his death was a scandal even for those dreadful times. The man in charge of igniting the explosives (the shotfirer) had set six separate sticks of gelignite, these he would fire in succession. This would bring the wall of rock down in a controlled manner instead of firing the charges simultaneously which would lead to unforeseen and chaotic results. The bloody man miscounted, he fired only five, then ordered grandfather forward to remove the fallen rubble. The poor man was standing over No. 6 shot when it exploded, he took the full force of the blast and was never seen again. All that was remaining could easily have been put into a small shopping basket without filling it. Not even his boots were recovered. The shotfirer was demoted and fined a week's wages, grandmother was given £100 and a pension of 4 shillings a week for life, but only if she would accept that her husband's death was due to his own fault. She had five daughters and two sons. The boys, just out of school, went into the mines. The girls, all except one, went into "service". (this was a euphemism used to describe young girls working for low wages in the houses of the middle classes). All her life mother venerated the memory of her father and would become misty-eyed and tearful at the mention of his name. She was twelve years old when he was killed; she has many stories of the hard life.

Due to a surfeit of Sam Smith's bitter, potato pie and a troubled mind I overslept next morning. When I arrived in the carpenter's shop it was to find Alan staring into the fireplace. The blaze was huge and the heat intense. "What the fuck are you burning, Napalm? That's ridiculous!" I was standing about twenty feet away and my overalls were beginning to steam. I could just hear Alan's reply over the roaring of the flames. "It's that cotton waste you used yesterday to soak up that spilled varnish and paraffin. I threw it on the embers, it warmed up, smoked a bit, then WHOOSH! Fucking great, hey?" "Fucking great? Fucking fantastic, that's what!"

It was one of those occasions on which two people have the same idea at the same time and no words need to be spoken, all that's wanted is time and certain trigger words to channel the thought process along similar avenues. In our case the words were Revenge and Blame - how to achieve our revenge and not take the blame. The conflagration subsided as quickly as it had

begun, but it was gratifying to note that the wrought irons in front of the fire place still glowed a dull red after the fire had settled to its usual level. Our plans had to be set aside for the time being when the foreman arrived to give us our jobs for the day. I was to apply the umpteenth coat of varnish, Alan was to assist in assembling the steering gear. The mechanic working on the boat that day was to be George Marsh. His nickname (but not to his face) was Bog Breath.

That morning we ate our sandwiches and drank our tea and tried not to get too close to George's halitosis, we would look at each other and smirk and use phrases which only the two of us would know the secret relevance. Finally old Bog Breath had suffered enough innuendo, turned towards us and shouted, "Are you two shagging each other?"

This would not have mattered too much had he not sprayed us with half chewed lumps of cheese and onion sandwich, mixed and softened with his usual strong black coffee. We quickly straightened our faces, washed our cups and went back to varnishing and tinkering. After work we sat in The Saxon together playing cards and planning how we could utilise this gift of wonderful destruction without being sent to prison for the rest of our teenage years and beyond. We thought of making electric devices which could ignite the varnish, we thought of clockwork devices, we thought of elaborate fuses. Fantasies evolved and disappeared but with each plan the risk outweighed the gain or proved impractical for our limited skills. As we sat, subdued and thoughtful, becoming more frustrated by the minute, in strode father. "Hello lads, I'm looking for volunteers to carry our "Beloved Union" banner in the carnival on Saturday. You three are perfect. You're young and fit and you'll be given free drinks in the beer tent at the end of the march."

After the nastiness of the previous days Alan and Mick were none too keen to comply with father's proposition, but like Paul's vision on the road to Damascus it came to me - "THE CARNIVAL". Every year the management, the church and the chapels put aside their rivalries and sponsored a carnival on the second Saturday in August. This coincided with the religious harvest festival and the return to work of the miners from their annual holidays. Also every year after this carnival day would follow carnival night, naturally. During the daylight hours of carnival most of the enjoyment was focused on the children, the fairground, the fancy dress parade, the games, fathers being pelted by soaking sponges, mothers hiding pieces of rock and broken glass in the sponges and all the things that make a carnival a carnival. But after twilight things would change. In the local church hall many of the famous rock bands of the sixties would raise the emotional temperature to boiling point. Freddy and The Dreamers would create the adolescent nightmare of unrequited love. The Seekers would be lost forever. In pubescent orgasms, as young girls threw their soaking underwear onto the stage, young men would seethe. Gene Vincent would slink onto the stage, clad in shiny black leather, and promise covertly with his index finger to stimulate places in the female anatomy that young Yorkshire miners had yet to discover. We seethed, being the rough-arsed rednecks that we were. Instead of burning down the church and church hall, stuffing Gene Vincent's digit up his own arse and giving The Dreamers and The Searchers a nightmare to remember, we would turn inward and fight each other. The cops loved it. After we had finished kicking the shit out of each other, they would arrive and carry on kicking the shit out of us. What a wonderful decay.

We made the molotov cocktail using a wide-neck milk bottle so that the petrol would splash even if the bottle didn't break. Before the end of the shift on Friday I collected all the varnish-soaked wasted cloth and spread it at the side of the boat. All we needed was Saturday night and luck. The decision as to who should do the job was easy. I was the hardest drinker and the fastest runner and, shit, it was my idea anyway.

During the carnival and on the march through the streets we met the bastards who had given us the hard times with the boat. The Enginewright and his assistant shouted to us as we carried the banner, "Nearest you three have been to work in months. Nice work lads. At least you can

follow the band." We smiled. We took part in the games that children of all ages enjoy - drinking, eating, hitting, throwing balls, laughing at others and being laughed at. After a while we forgot our secret agenda and became part of the carnival.

The British are renowned throughout Europe for their inability to deal with alcohol and rightly so. Adults are regarded as children. When buying booze and drinking in public, the times would be strictly enforced. Between 11 o'clock in the morning and 3 o'clock in the afternoon you could buy a drink in a pub (then you must rest). Between 6 o'clock in the evening and 10.30 you could buy a drink in a pub (then you must rest). Thank you Mother State but no thanks. Treat people like children and they behave like children. So it was with us. By 2.30 in the afternoon the consumption of beer had become ferocious. The young girls of our milieu had become emboldened by Babycham and barley wine (a most potent brew devised by a witch and warlock in Norfolk), we young men rowdy and bilious on black puddings, pork pies and warm ale.

The entertainment for the rest of the day was set. As we lounged in the sun, searching for dregs to drink or underwear in which to wander, we became restless at the futility of it all and made our ways home to wash and dress for the evening enchantment.

The off-licence is a peculiar place. It can sell all manner of goods but could only sell booze at the times mentioned above. Thankfully, the owners of these places were, and still are, greedy, unscrupulous and totally understanding of the teenage predicament. Therefore, before going into a gig or concert we would fortify ourselves before entering the totally teetotal church hall or equally benign establishment. In those days, under such circumstances, I would drink two or three bottles of Guinness and buy half a bottle of rum to mix with the coke to be bought inside. Alan would buy brandy to give to the girls who had smuggled in Babycham (brandy and Babycham - another potent mixture from Norfolk), Mick would smuggle Bacardi in, drink two-thirds of the bottle, then re-fill it with water and pass it round with largesse (nobody ever suspected him) and so the night progressed.

If I remember correctly the group that headed the bill that night was Wayne Fontana and The My Members, a bunch of fortunate 23 year olds posing as teenagers. Wayne Fontana looked old beyond his years even then, lucky bastard. As I watched I became him, as I picked up the pheromones my mind began to wander again - this was not the plan - WHAT PLAN?

Glad to relate that as the night wore on I became drunker by the minute. The rest of the story was given to me the next day. It would seem that the three of us had agreed to separate and then meet up at the bridge on Hard Lane. We then met at least five people walking back to the next village (Harthill) and had drunken conversations. We then strolled through the pit yard, picked up our molotovs, lit them, threw them through the carpenter's window and wandered as pissed as rats to the end of Pit Lane. By the time the fire alarm was raised we were sat across from the tobacconist's wondering what the fuck all these people could be dashing about at. The next day after the admonishments of mother about drinking till early on a Sunday we met at The Saxon. The first pint is the most important after a night when you can't remember how you arrived home or found your bed. After the first sips I asked Alan, "How did it go?" He answered, "Great! Don't you just love the smell of Sunday dinners cooking?" I said, "Who's got the blame?" He said, "Some bunch of drunken revellers from Harthill. Seems they threw half a bottle of whisky through the joiner's shop window and it caused a flashback from that great fireplace that's always smouldering in there. My comment according to Alan and Mick was, "Fucking waste of good whisky."

### **Chapter 3:**

## A continuation of the chronology: late 60s to early 70s

...1969 wildcats...In Place Of Strife...1970 wildcats...

In 1969, whilst productivity had risen greatly, basic wage-rates (i.e. not counting overtime and bonuses) for some mineworkers were below the official DHSS subsistence level. Relocation was proving a reliable method of keeping down wages - in some areas, only a small proportion of relocated miners were paid as much as in their previous location. The rates of surface workers were such that overtime was effectively forced. In October 1969, a wave of wildcat strikes over pay and the long hours of surface workers hit Yorkshire, Scotland, South Wales and the Midlands - encouraged by the movement forcing the withdrawal of the Labour government's *In Place of Strife* 15, as well as by the global atmosphere of class struggle at the end of the 60s. This strike involved the first widespread use of flying pickets - squads of cars, mini-buses and buses directed onto pre-determined targets with five, six, seven hundred miners at a time. For the first time since 1926 a strike had spread across the boundaries of a coalfield. At its height it involved 130,000 miners from 140 pits across Britain. The NUM general secretary at the time, Lawrence Daly, called for the strikers to return to work. Amazingly the NCB agreed to the wage demands in full (though not the issue of long hours) - which was unprecedented. However, not wanting to admit that it had been forced by an unofficial strike, stressed that the wage-rise had already been agreed upon before the strike had begun. The NUM president, Sidney Ford, called for an immediate return to work, but the strikers understood their own power and stayed out on strike. In several areas, non-union strike committees were organised. The NUM had lost a lot of its authority. A special delegate conference was held by the union (with a recommendation to return to work) to try to take the heat out of the movement. The NUM leadership then arranged for the non-union strike committees to meet the TUC, who promised an inquiry into the hours of safety-workers if the strike was called off. Obviously non-union strike committees can be as imbued with their own leadership role as much as union ones, and at the end of the 60s such unofficial committees were generally the organisation of branch union officials only, who were pushed forward as representatives by the strike movement to consolidate and extend the concessions won (such leadership roles are made possible by the lack of confidence of those who follow.) Arthur Scargill, then a Labour Party member and ex-member of the Young Communist League, was one of them. The left of the NUM had shown its capacity for organisation. In October 1970, a national NUM ballot achieved a majority (55% ) in favour of a strike, which was less than the necessary  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority. Wildcats broke out. At one point some 103,000 miners from 116 pits were on strike. The NCB upped its offer. The C.P. was losing control of the strike it had hitherto been able to organise - other State capitalist organisations were attacking the CP in order to further their own bureaucratic aims. The chairman of the NCB denounced hooliganism' and a section of the bureaucracy tried to vigorously recuperate the strikes through half-feigned opposition to the NUM old guard, with the aim of reforming the union. The Stalinist McGahey urged miners to try to change the bit in the union rule about a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority being necessary before the union could officialise a strike. Leftists opposed a further ballot and called for a special delegate conference, a very well-tried method for British unions to try to recuperate base action by means of emphasising the democratic nature of trade unionism - low-level bureaucrats being allowed a voice, unions being able to be influenced in their recommendations by base action. The left of the bureaucracy was gaining ground - through a rank and file trade unionism which had a critique of sell-outs and with the aim of democratising the union, along with having a "more representative" stratum of middle-level bureaucrats. It was a reform that balanced the conservative function of trade unions with the desire and confidence developing amongst miners - it was more a genuine representation of the contradictions of the mining community than the way the old style-Stalinists and the right wing of the Union had controlled things in the union since World War II. So the main result of the strike was a compromised change of the rule-book to making a strike official if it got 55% of the vote.

### Chapter 4:

**A text by Dave Douglass and the Webbs criticising some aspects of the miners' unions' history**

**The following passage is taken from a pamphlet entitled "Pit life in Co' Durham: Rank and File Movements and Workers Control." (A History Workshop Pamphlet).**

**Written in 1972 by Dave Douglass (who at the age of 17 described himself a Wobbly, IWW supporter - a Tyneside industrial unionist who described himself as a syndicalist), as one of his contributions to the miners struggle of that year. It expresses both the intelligent as well as some almost unnoticeable, ideological tendencies of rank n file Trade Unionism, albeit tempered by loads of ifs and buts. The leadership and the rank and file.**

The miners unions were the first trade unions in the country to develop a section of full time officials. When the Durham Miners Association was founded in 1869, the county was divided into three districts and an agent appointed to each of them. Their weekly wage was to be £1-5s-6d. Their number increased as the union prospered. It was the same in other coalfields. But at the same time as relying on full time representatives, more than other working men at the time, miners also distrusted them deeply. Their very distance at area office was a sufficient cause for mistrust, and their actions plagued the miner with annoyance. In all the disputes within the DMA there is a recurring pattern, a basic fear of being misrepresented which can be seen in the type of motion put forward at the DMA calling for mandates, card votes, records of who voted, which way etc., and also in the general suspicion of the conciliation machinery which the DMA worked so hard to set up. The full-time officials soon developed a particular character. Almost invariably they were drawn from the ranks of the moderate, self-educated, temperate miners. Once elected, they thought their role was to inflict upon the members their own moderation and lead rather than serve. As early as 1870 they ruled that any colliery which struck in an unconstitutional manner should be denied union aid'. The members found that they were being policed by the men to whom they were paying wages. The officials became more and more preoccupied with arbitration and conciliation as the cure for all ills, and more and more impatient of local action which ran up against it. The leadership rejoiced in the formality of the conciliation machinery; they exalted the authority of the Joint Committee even when it was used against its own members, preferring any course of action, even simple submission', in preference to a strike. From this point on the struggle in the coalfield became three sided. There were the men, the owners and firmly between them the full time agents, who negotiated on their behalf but came to totally unsatisfactory agreements and then spent the bulk of their time trying to ram them down the throats of the men. To make matters more complicated and more infuriating to the lodge with a strong grievance - there was a joint Committee of the DMA and the coal owners, a high court which sat in judgment on them, and whose rules were supposed to be binding. The lodges hated the idea of leaving negotiations in the hands of full time officials. The constant appeals to abandon the joint boards with the coalowners, the suspicion of the Sliding Scale, the mistrust of the proceedings in the DMA executive itself, as well as disputes between the individual lodges and the miners agents, were all based on a deep-felt resentment of delegated responsibility, whatever form it took. The miners traditional mistrust of delegated representation' is a carry on from his traditional *self-reliance* and independence at work. He dislikes the idea of anybody deciding what he should do, apart from his marras' and himself. It is at best something which has to be put up with. His wages and toil to get them are a big thing to trust in another man's hands. He prefers the open direct representation of we are all leaders'. Even in the case of a working miner who is a branch official, yes - they can see he is a worker, but that would be no call to get excited, they still would only trust him if he was seen to be acting on their behalf and the results were coming in. When the lodge secretary goes to see the gaffer a deputation of marras will often go with him to see that he really does represent them. At branch level the union committee is of course elected by the rank and file, subject to dismissal, and up for re-election every two years, but even these men have to be watched. The branch committee man, if he is a good one, even the agitator, can be got at many ways by a gaffer: he

may be offered a pleasanter place, away from the centres of trouble, if he will only show himself to be reasonable'. The attitude of the rank and file towards the lodge committee has always been - if the branch officers are not negotiating the right terms kick them out, or build an unofficial committee to take their place. It is the rank and file themselves who take the initiative in all events. On many occasions strikes start in a wildcat way long before a branch meeting can even be held. Men walk out of the pit on strike as soon as there is something they won't put up with. A group of marras, or a shift, will go to see the manager on their own, and often have refused to take an official of the branch with them. If the branch official is brought in it is sometimes only as a formality. They prefer to speak for themselves. Rarely, if ever (and never in my own experience) do the workers carry out the rule of working under protest while the union official carries out negotiations on their behalf; they would have to be there themselves (there is also, of course, the simple fact that he has no bullet up the spout, or power in his elbow, until the men come out on strike). If all this is true of the branch officer, a working miner, how much more true is it of the area official, a man who has removed himself into another sphere. If the branch officer can be regarded as distant, even after a year in office, the area official inhabits another world. The worker can trust the man who works next to him, even if he is wary of giving him too much power. But the man who removes himself from the pit to an office becomes an alien. You can see this time and again when the area official comes down and tries to give a lead'. The men. may listen to what he has to say but what they are thinking is "we\_ are the union, not you". The gulf becomes much greater when the men take action on their own. In the words of George Harvey, "the religion of the area official is compromise." These people detest the branch strike. In the first place this is because they cannot themselves control the activity, and secondly because it undermines the machinery of conciliation which they are paid to keep well oiled.

By and large, miners leaders have been renowned for their respectability and almost all of them have ended up as moderates, even those who were firebrands in their youth. In the Webbs *History of Trade Unionism* there is a passage in which a worker, talking about trade union officials, beautifully describes the genuine mistrust which the workers harbour towards such people:

*As branch secretary, working at his trade, our friend, though superior in energy and ability to the rank and file of his members, remained in close touch with their feelings and desires. His promotion to a salaried office brings him wider knowledge and larger ideas. To the ordinary trade unionist the claim of the workman is that of justice. He believes, almost as a matter of principle, that in any dispute the capitalist is in the wrong and the workman in the right. But when, as District Delegate, it becomes his business to be perpetually investigating the exact circumstances of the men 's quarrels, negotiating with the employers, and arranging compromises he begins more and more to recognise that there is something to be urged on the other side. There is also unconscious bias at work. Whilst the points at issue no longer effect his own earnings or conditions of employment, any disputes between his and their employers increase his work and add to his worry. The former vivid sense of the privations and subjection of the artisans life gradually fades from his mind; and he begins more and more to regard all complaints as perverse and unreasonable..With this intellectual change may come a more invidious transformation. Nowadays the salaried officer of a great union is courted and flattered by the middle class. He is asked to dine with them, and will admire their well-appointed houses, their fine carpets, the ease and luxury of their lives. Possibly, his wife too begins to be dissatisfied. She will point out how so and so, who served his apprenticeship in the same shop, is now well off, and steadily making a fortune; and she reminds her husband that, had he worked half as hard for himself as he has for others, he might also now be rich, and living in comfort without fear of the morrow. He himself sees the truth of this. He knows many men who, with less ability and energy than himself, have, by steady pursuit of their own ends, become foremen, managers, or even small employers, whilst he is receiving only £2 or £4 per week without any chance of increase. And so the remarks of his wife and her relations, the workings of his own mind, the increase of years, a growing desire to be settled in life and to see the future clear before him and his children, and perhaps also a little envy of his middle class friends, all begin insidiously, silently, unknown even to himself, to work a change in his views of life. He*



goes to live in a little villa in a lower middle class suburb. The move leads to him dropping his workmen friends; and his wife changes her acquaintances. With the habits of his new neighbours he insensibly adopts more and more of their ideas. Gradually he finds himself at issue with his members, who no longer agree with his proposals with the old alacrity. All this comes about by degrees, neither party understanding the cause. He attributes the breach to a clique of malcontents, or perhaps to the views held by the younger generation. They think him proud and stuck up', over-cautious, and even apathetic in trade affairs. His manner to members, and particularly to the unemployed who call for donation, undergoes a change. He begins to look down upon them all as common workmen'; at the unemployed he scorns as men who have made a failure of their lives; and his scorn is probably undisguised. This arouses hatred. As he walks to the office in his tall hat and good overcoat, with a smart umbrella, curses not loud but deep are muttered against him by members loitering in search of work, and as these get jobs in other towns they spread stories of his arrogance and haughtiness. So gradually he loses the sympathy and support of those upon whom his position depends. At last the climax comes. A great strike threatens to involve the Society in desperate war. Unconsciously biased by distaste for the hard and unthankful work which a strike entails, he finds himself in small sympathy with the men's demands, and eventually arranges a compromise on terms distasteful to a large section of his members. The gathering storm cloud now breaks. At his next appearance before a general meeting cries of treachery' and bribery' are raised. Alas! it is not bribery. Not his morality but his intellect is corrupted. Secure in the consciousness of freedom from outward taint, he faces the meeting boldly, throws the accusation back in their faces, and for the moment carries his point. But his position now becomes rapidly unbearable. On all sides he finds suspicion deepening into hatred. The members, it is true, re-elect him to his post; but they elect at the same time an executive committee pledged to oppose him in every way. All this time he still fails to understand what has gone wrong, and probably attributes it to the intrigues of jealous opponents eager for his place. Harassed on all sides, distrusted and thwarted by his executive committee, at length he loses heart. He looks out for some opening of escape, and finally accepting a small appointment, lays down his Secretaryship with heartfelt relief and disappears forever from the trade union world."

\* \* \*

**When "Miner Conflicts - Major Contradictions"** was produced during the 1984 strike, the author sent a copy to Dave Douglass with a photocopy of the above text saying that *"this was produced by someone you once knew"*. However, on reflection, it represents the best, most radical, but still in many ways ideological, expression of the reform of trade unionism, of the NUM in particular, that was doing the rounds during the 1972 strike. It was part of the atmosphere amongst the most radical workers in this epoch which is why we put it here, even though it refers mainly to previous history. The fact that it contains some excellent insights doesn't deflect from the fact that it partly remains within the ideological constraints of Trade Unionism. The Webbs, despite publishing such insights as the above, were disgustingly elitist Fabians (part of the Labour Party) who much admired Stalin. Insights can often spawn a monstrous repression - it always depends on how they're used and what process follows the expression of such insights - whether they become part of a hierarchical role, boosting ones' image and career or whether they go on to subvert the world and the person's position within it. For the moment we shall mention just what is ideological in Dave Douglass's text. We choose him partly because he is a fairly well-known representative of this trade unionist tendency - often on the telly [6]. Whilst this tendency had considerable success in contributing to weakening British capital in the early 70s, it had a considerably debilitating effect on workers' struggles in Britain after the Winter of Discontent ('78-79). Ideas and methods of struggle are never eternally applicable and what is relatively true and subversive in one epoch can become evasive lies in another. We shall see later, during the '84 to '85 strike and after, how the advances and retreats of the struggle expressed itself in the swings from radical initiatives to, as the struggle retreated, into the more dogmatic, and overtly deceitful, aspects of trade unionism which became dominant. For the moment, we shall point out the lightly expressed ideological aspects of this text criticising them at a fairly abstract level without going into precise detail about how these aspects manifested themselves concretely.

DD criticises the old-style bureaucrats who *“thought their role was to...lead rather than serve”*. As we know, there are and have been plenty of leaders, not to say tyrants, who justify themselves in terms of *“serving the people”*. Neither a master nor servant be. It is not a question of proletarians *“acting on...behalf”* of those they represent but of cutting the need for representation. For low level branch officials like DD that can mean, and did mean later on, representing, during a struggle, the more radical miners, but also, when such a struggle was being defeated, representing the majority who remained passive before this defeat. If you really want to advance the class struggle, you speak and act for yourself and your enlightened proletarian self-interest, which is usually not saying what the majority are saying. A struggle against this world implies going beyond roles, whether that of leader' or servant'. Whilst workers have the illusion that *“we are the union - not you”*, they deliberately ignore the fact that unions assume a social function which escapes the control of each unionised worker and the ensemble of unionised workers, a social function necessitated by the unions role in commodity production and consumption. But this illusion is strongest amongst those who have a role in the union, who *need* it - other workers often succumb to it but also often see through it. As we've said, though, the assertion of the desire to represent other workers in DD's text is muted, expressed in a fairly tentative way because he adds things like, *“He prefers the open direct representation of we are all leaders’*. *Even in the case of a working miner who is a branch official, yes - they can see he is a worker, but that would be no call to get excited”* and *“the branch officer can be regarded as distant, even after a year in office... the worker can trust the man who works next to him, even if he is wary of giving him too much power”*. But we shall look later at why it is necessary to be vigilant about how even the slightest germ of ideology can infect and contribute to killing off a whole movement. This is not to be purist or perfectionist: all movements begin with the ideological baggage of this world, but if they are not to be weighed down by this baggage, such movements have to throw it off.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **The 1972 Miners Strike**

During 1971, the NUM conference put forward a large wage-demand under pressure from the rank and file, but Gormley, the NUM president, warned that *“pressure from below”* must not *“lead to anarchy”*. The NUM organised a ban on overtime; the NCB employed privately contracted labour whilst rearranging shifts. The NUM was afraid that the tension would allow wildcats to break out immediately, so in December they declared an official strike to start from January 1972. The NCB promised a new productivity deal and five extra days' holiday. But the pay offer was a third of the absolute minimum the miners were demanding. All the press, from the *Daily Mirror* to the *Daily Telegraph* via the *Guardian*, patronisingly urged the miners to give up their fight, that their struggle was hopeless, doomed to defeat.

From day one all 289 pits were closed. Against the wishes of the NUM, on the very first day of the strike, the miners refused to provide safety cover: more than half the pits were deprived of such cover from day one, and by day 2 only 46 had full cover. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> night, Gormley appeared on TV to appeal to miners to provide safety cover. Safety cover had always constituted a serious threat to the physical structure of the pits due to the risk of fire, flooding or roof falls. On day 3 Gormley complained that *“the men are being a damn sight more militant than we would want them to be”*. On day 4 he said *“some men have been over-ambitious in applying the strike”*. On day 7 only 38 of the 289 pits had full safety cover, whilst 133 had no cover whatsoever. Pit deputies, NACODS members, were increasingly stopped from trying to provide safety cover, some being threatened with violence. On Jan 31<sup>st</sup> 250 pickets clashed with 300 cops escorting 68 deputies to work at Clipstone colliery in Notts. Against the South Wales area executive, a mass picket at Penrhiwceiber pit on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb stopped all NACODS members there from continuing to provide safety cover for the rest of the strike. The same kind of thing happened in Durham, Northumberland and Derbyshire, all against the wishes of the various

area executives. In Yorkshire, the area executive waited until 7<sup>th</sup> February, a month into the strike, before it asked the national executive to ban all safety work. When some miners at a particular pit were asked on TV if they realised that by refusing to do maintenance work, they were putting the future of the pit in danger, one replied, "*So what - who wants to go down the bloody pit again anyway?*"

Another issue which divided the miners against the NUM leadership was the question of NCB office workers. The NUM had instructed the union's white-collar section (COSA) to stay at work to handle wages for the week in hand and to process tax rebates. Picketing in Notts led to 500 workers at the coal industry's research centre to come out and this was followed by 1200 members in South Wales coming out, and a week later, on 17<sup>th</sup> Jan, 12,500 came out on strike, all against NUM wishes. And picketing of offices still working continued in various parts of the country throughout the strike, often with some success.

The NUM executive also issued instructions that only NUM literature be distributed at picket lines and that "physical contact" (i.e. violence) was illegal. Neither instruction was adhered to.

There was also massive picketing of Ferrybridge power station; and almost all coal movements were stopped there by the end of day 3 of the strike. A smokeless fuel plant in Grimethorpe near Barnsley was picketed to prevent road tankers delivering oil. Coke was used to pelt the tankers and the cops were forced to close the plant. Thus picketing was then extended to other power stations and fuel depots, initially in Scotland. At Thorpe Marsh power station near Doncaster, after an oil lorry got through the picket line, a striking blacksmith miner returned to his pit and his forge there in order to make "*things which you throw on floor and chance which way you throw them there's a spike stuck up to throw under wheels. He'd made about a dozen.*" They proved very useful.

Labour Research estimated that 500 different places were picketed on a 24-hour basis by an average 40,000 miners every day during the strike.

On the same day (Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>) that 10,000 people attended the funeral of Fred Matthews, a 37 year old striking miner who'd been run down by a lorry outside Keadby power station near Scunthorpe, a picket began at West Midlands Gas Board coke depot in Nechells Place, Saltley, about a mile from the centre of Birmingham. There were just 7 pickets. The next day they were reinforced by 200 miners from Stoke. The TGWU warned lorry drivers to the depot that their firms would be blacklisted' if they crossed picket lines. With round-the-clock picketing, the distribution of coke was much reduced but the bosses responded by using non-union firms who were paid as much as £50 to £60 a day plus a £50 bonus per load, a helluva lot when you consider that miners themselves, before the strike, had been getting just over £20 basic per week. The CP, together with the Midlands right-wing area NUM secretary, then contacted the national office to appeal for extra pickets. By 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. there were several hundred pickets and on the 7<sup>th</sup> there were over 1000 miners there, the numbers increasing throughout the day, supplemented by workers from Bryant's and McAlpine building sites, and from SU Carburettors, who had already struck in support of the miners. The entire Birmingham police force were put on special alert. On 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. there were even more miners, joined by 2000 car delivery workers and by 200 workers from HFWard and delegations from British Leyland Tractors and Transmissions, Thorn Electrical and Radiation plants. But this still did not stop the flow of lorries. 2 pickets and a police chief inspector were injured by a scab lorry. Pickets let down the tail-board of one lorry and about 3 tons of coke - black stuff not white stuff - poured onto the road. The cops had to shovel it all back onto the lorry to clear the way.

Scargill, who was the main guy in charge of this picketing, then addressed Tuesday evening's meeting of the AUEW East Birmingham district committee, calling not for financial support but demanding they come out on strike and come down to the Saltley coke depot. Various meetings were called the next day to organise people to come down on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Rank and file workers from the NUGMW and EETPU agreed to try to get workers out unofficially, since the

union refused to call official action. Miners went round on the 9<sup>th</sup> to different factories in Birmingham and the Birmingham Trades Council even put an ad in the Birmingham Evening Mail calling for support. At about 10 a.m. 10<sup>th</sup> February, the picket of 3000 miners, many of them singing, were joined from all sides by up to 12,000 striking workers. The enormous force of the picket was reinforced by the cry of "Close the gates!" and each time the slogan was shouted the mass of pickets pushed against the cops until the Chief Constable of Birmingham also shouted "Close the gates!" and they closed them. Everyone cheered with incredible joy and hats were flung in the air. A Gas Board official locked a padlock on the gates and by 11 a.m. it was announced that the gates would be closed for the rest of the day. Scargill, asked by the chief constable to disperse the crowd, did so using a **police loudspeaker** to make a nice rhetorical speech about the workers of the world uniting - but clearly they'd done enough uniting for the last hour and were asked to disunite and go home. The strikers, sadly, complied. Who knows what the working class could've achieved that day if it'd done a bit more than just *flex* its muscles? Sometimes it's in moments like that where a small group of people can initiate something that just snowballs, particularly after a victory like that. History is always a question of connecting with a mood (the mood' also has to be part of a general culture of solidarity continuing to exist independently of any particular struggle, as a basis for the possibility of collective struggle; a passing whim/mood is something under-developed, which has been shown in, for example, the struggles against fuel prices in 2000 and in the schoolkids movement against the Iraq war in 2003 - both of which disappeared as quickly as they arose in part because such a community of solidarity and of some comprehension of history has been severely repressed). But despite not going further, it was certainly a memorable day. The chief constable had assured Maudling, the Home Secretary, that the pickets would only succeed over his dead body. *"I felt constrained to ring him...to enquire after his health"*, wrote Maudling in his memoirs. Under the threat of a more extensive strike in the Birmingham area for the 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, including that of 8000 TGWU lorry drivers, the Gas Board capitulated in the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup>, an agreement on essential loads (for things like hospitals) was reached with the NUM and a token picket of 12 was established.

The day the gates closed in Saltley was the day of the first power cuts. The Industry Secretary announced a ban from the 12<sup>th</sup> on the use of electricity for the heating of *"offices, shops, public halls, catering establishments and premises used for recreation, entertainment and sport."* and that from 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. onwards, *"most industrial consumers with an estimated maximum demand of 100 kilowatts or more will be required not to use any electricity on Sunday and three other days in the week."* This was not the famous 3-day week, which came in 1974, but a one-off 3-day week for the week 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. to the 19<sup>th</sup>. About 800,000 workers were laid off on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> this had reached 1.6 million. The Industry Secretary told Parliament that even with the restrictions imposed the *"anticipated endurance of the CEBG is approximately 2 weeks and after this capacity will be down to approximately 20% to 25% of normal load...sufficient to meet only the essential services - with very little left available for other users"*.

Prime Minister Edward Heath with Joe Gormley, NUM president

The NUM executive showed its anti-working class nature by asking its members to reduce picket numbers. The request was ignored. For 3 days there were fairly violent confrontations between cops and pickets at Longannet power station in Scotland, with sometimes 2000 pickets facing 400 cops. 13 were arrested and charged with "mobbing and rioting", a charge which drew a 200-strong crowd outside the courtroom. Fear of the situation getting out of hand led the Lord Advocate, the senior government law officer for Scotland, to fly to Scotland and get the legal process speeded up, and they were quickly released on bail. At the subsequent trial all 13 were acquitted.

A hastily cobbled together government enquiry recommended wage increases of between 15% and 31.6% , about 4 times what the NCB had originally offered, and a bit more than the miners had originally asked for. Even then, the NUM, under pressure from the miners who had clearly realised the enormity of their power, even rejected this deal, holding out for an extra £1 a week for the non-faceworkers. After appropriately romantic candle-lit beer-and-sandwich-type

negotiations at 10 Downing Street, this demand was precisely what the miners got - a pretty good result which boosted working class confidence everywhere. However, the NUM executive unilaterally called off the pickets., leaving unofficial pickets open to management victimisation. Nevertheless, it had been a great victory. The NUM ballot resulted in a 96.5% majority to end the strike. The victory came through a certain autonomous content of struggle, though it has to be said much of it came down to low-level NUM organisation on the part of the leftist, often CP, bureaucrats. One might say that, having been led into radical activity, the miners were led out of it: a bit of an overstatement, because in part it was the miners who pushed the low-level bureaucrats into action, but they certainly could have done more if enough of them had wanted to (they had the country in the palm of their hands, after all).

The events at Saltley showed to the State that its forces were not adequately organised. Ultimately the government was able to pay more and was frightened by the unexpected scenes of workers' violence. They wanted a quick settlement not only because of the enormous power cuts which would ensue if the strike had continued but also because they were aware that trouble was brewing everywhere - e.g. the looming confrontation with the dockers over containerisation, and the power workers, and the fact that there were dozens of occupations of engineering factories....

## Chapter 6:

### 1973 - 1980

...1974 strike...a conversation with miners...Labour government...  
...Benn helps divide miners...Tory plan for defeating working class...

In October 1973 the Yom Kippur war erupted in the Middle East and soon Arab nations massively increased oil prices, which were approximately quadrupled (many revolutionaries put this oil price hike down to a direct and conscious attack on the autonomous working class movements in Europe, a way of deliberately using and intensifying a crisis as a way of reinforcing the market and its authority). Inflation rose, real wages fell and trouble was again brewing in the coalfields.

Mick McGahey spoke of "defeating the government", though he stressed he meant by parliamentary means. "Phase 3" - the statutory regulation of wage increases to 7% - was brought in by the Heath government, though this government left itself the loophole of allowing extra in the case of workers working unsocial hours. The NUM executive officially "rejected" the wage offer, although Gormley was anxious to avoid a strike because "*there might be an election and the Tories might win it.*" (he was later proved wrong - the government's part in crisis management was later taken over by the Labour Party under Wilson, and then Callaghan). An overtime ban was declared by the union on Nov.12<sup>th</sup> '73 and the Heath government declared a state of emergency *the next day!!!* Clearly the government created the crisis in order to mobilise the country and other sections of the working class against the miners. A national co-ordinating centre was established by the police. The TUC, the Government and the NUM tried to avoid an immediate strike: the TUC promised that if the miners got more than 7% the TUC would oppose any strike by other workers for more than this figure - the TUC would abide by Phase 3. In Jan. '74, as coal stocks dwindled, a 3-day week was declared for industry, the temperature of heating was limited, there were more power cuts and - horror shock! - television broadcasting stopped at 10.30 p.m. More than a million industrial workers were temporarily laid off. A general election was called 2 days after a union ballot went in favour of a strike, with Heath posing the simple question to the voters - "*Who governs the country?*". Heath had hoped the electorate would say he did, but in fact neither the Labour Party nor the Tories got a clear mandate, though Labour got more MPs than the Tories. The miners strike had little of the autonomous aspects of the '72 strike (though there was an independent form of solidarity with the strike which became very common: in response to the government campaign to "**S**witch **O**ff **S**omething" thousands of stickers were produced with "**Switch On Something**" and millions supported the miners by burning too much electricity).The NUM executive, with Scargill now part of it, co-ordinated

picketing nationally; pickets were limited to 6 people. After Labour won the election, the NCB increased its offer under pressure from the government, and the NUM called off the strike, though Scargill wanted to continue it.

We reproduce a part of an article by Joe Jacobs published in the libertarian socialist journal *Solidarity*, January 26<sup>th</sup> 1974:

One man who had been invalided out showed me his hands. They were red and torn. Parts of fingers were missing and bones had been broken which had not healed anything like a normal hand. The man was on social security, having had to give up work because of a chest condition. His hands, apparently, were not considered as being a good reason for not being able to work. He told me his story was by no means unusual.

The interesting thing was that this miner was receiving payments which were not much less than the take-home pay of those of his mates now working a basic five-shifts week.

Everyone was eager to stress that they were doing a full week's work without overtime. They denied they were holding the country to ransom'. They felt very bitter about the way the Government and the media were presenting the position.

The basic week's work resulted in gross earnings of £23 - £25. After stoppages, men with two or more children were taking home about £21. These reduced wages were beginning to bite; there was not sufficient to meet the rapidly rising cost of living, after payment of rent and other essential expenses

A young man, employed at a local light engineering firm, presented a sharp contrast to the miners' position. He was working 3 days and drawing 5 days' unemployment pay; gross pay £31 per week, take-home pay £29. When he worked a full week he grossed £37, and took home £31. He said I don't mind working a three-day week for only £2 less than full pay'. I wondered how widespread this was, although I don't want to imply that there is no suffering as a result of the imposition of the three-day week.

I felt the bitterness of some miners, living alongside men who were so much better off. They also felt bitter about the profiteering encouraged by the Government, while they were expected to work massive overtime in order to satisfy their modest needs. Everyone said we are not on strike - we are working a normal basic week, for basic rates, which is not enough to live on'.

One younger man who had only recently returned to the mine said I have five children. I'm not working for those rates when I can take home more cash if I go on Social Security'. Others said There is something wrong with a society which pays more for not working while people employed in one of the worst jobs imaginable are paid so poorly.'

When I asked how they felt about the need for more coal, the reply came from almost all present, in chorus. If they want coal, let them come and get it. We won't stop them'. When I asked who they meant by they', I was told all those who say the nation can't pay the miners more'.

We talked about the possibility of a general election if the miners didn't return to normal' (i.e.. overtime) working. Attitudes were mixed, and in my view very confused. Some said It would make no difference who formed a government, they would still have to settle the question of the miners' pay'. Others thought they would be better off under a Labour Government. Some had faith in their trade union leaders. Others were suspicious of them. One man said They can't settle on the basis of some productivity deal. We cannot work any harder'. He also said I am not a Communist, but what we want is a revolution'.

Most of the older men said they couldn't care less about what happened to the coal industry. There was nothing in it for them. Jam tomorrow' was always being offered, but it never came.

My overall impression was that these men, treated so disgracefully all their lives, had little or no faith in any solution other than their own efforts, namely withholding their labour in order to get more pay. When I asked how more pay would solve their problems, in the face of rising prices and other means of controlling their living standards, I met a rather fatalistic response. It was simply we will have to go on fighting for more. If we don't get more, there won't be enough miners left to produce the coal'.

The people I spoke to had not yet really begun to ask themselves questions about a real alternative to the present set-up. There was a feeling of impotence, expressed when they referred to the position they found themselves in. They felt despondent because of all the lies

about coal stocks, earnings, etc. They felt they were being made scapegoats. They were aware of the power of governments and their agents. What can we do?'

It was difficult to present the idea that the solution lay in their own hands, that we all had to reject the idea that political parties, trade union leaders or anyone else could do things for us. It is still very difficult for most people to develop confidence in themselves, to rely on their own efforts now, where they live and work. It is also difficult to develop a view of the possible alternatives to this society.

What the miners didn't seem to see was that in practice they were challenging the values of the society we live in, that they were forcing the powers that be to resort to measures which will in the long run expose the nature of this society. When the miners and other working people realise the power they have, real changes will become possible.

\* \* \*

By the end of July '74, the Labour Party had abolished the Tory-made structures of statutory wage regulation, but not before the TUC, in return for "free collective bargaining", had recognised that "*the scope for real increases in consumption is limited*", and put forward as a maximal demand the maintenance of the "standard of living" (read: the standard of survival, the standard of boredom, the standard of submission). In July, the left of the NUM bureaucracy won the day by getting a resolution passed which verbally opposed incomes policy. By September, however, the NUM was giving support to the new realism of the TUC in its social contract with the Government. A wage offer by the NCB at the end of the year was supported by the right-wing of the union on the grounds that it was within the spirit of the social contract, and by Scargill and the Left on the grounds that it had broken the social contract. No independent movement of miners challenged this.

For the rest of the lifetime of the Labour government (up till May 1979) it was the right-wing of the NUM which possessed the power over the top levels of the union, whilst the Left was building up a base over lower tiers and in areas such as South Yorkshire (Scargill was Yorkshire area president). By 1977, the Labour government's attempts to reduce real wages was being resisted through strikes whose origin was wildcat whether or not they were later made official. In some collieries in Yorkshire, there was a wildcat over early retirement, and a union ballot was the method used to defeat it, the same method used to isolate and defeat any rumblings for a strike from 1974 onwards. The centre and the right wing of the NUM saw the solution to the problem of restructuring exploitation and placating the miners' anger to be a productivity scheme. The left represented the real movement by stressing (rightly, even if with hierarchical intentions and methods) that reliance on bonus schemes was detrimental to safety-standards and to guarantees against injuries. The productivity scheme pushed for by the NCB would give miners in areas such as Nottingham and South Derby the chance of earning bonuses through a larger amount of overtime working than was possible for their fellow miners in other areas. The basis of the productivity deal was that the bosses and the union would agree to quotas *pit by pit*. Such schemes are designed not only to increase profitability through productivity, but also through dividing the miners and preventing strikes by means of conveying to a section of miners at a pit who are on strike by themselves that their action harms the bonuses of their workmates. The NUM executive and the NUM conference had rejected the deal, as had a national ballot amongst all miners. Gormley and the right-wing got the bonus scheme in through the back door with the support of Tony Benn, Minister of Energy and darling of the Left, by means of regional ballots which achieved a "Yes" vote in areas where miners would benefit and a "No" vote in areas where they wouldn't. This later had the devastating divisive effect it was intended to have, in the 1984 strike. But then Tony Benn, product of Leftism's moronic personality cult, was always a great champion of the miners: whilst devising the Notts-Yorkshire divisive plan, he could honestly claim that his blazing living room open fire was symbolic of his sympathy with the miners. As always, the symbol is a substitute for reality.

The Tories, of course, didn't bother to play such a nauseating patronising role. They acted more in conformity with their objectives - their explicit plan to crush the working class (or "management's right to manage", as Thatcher said). In 1978, the final report of the Conservative Party's policy group on the nationalised industries proposed:

1. In the face of industrial disputes, the eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories in a field they think they could win - railways, British Leyland, the civil service or steel. As

many know, it was eventually steel that was selected.

2. Every precaution should be taken to avoid a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries were considered unlikely to be required. They believed that the most likely battleground would eventually be the coal industry. For this end, they wanted a Thatcher government to:

- i. build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations.
  - ii. make contingency plans for the import of coal.
  - iii. encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary.
  - iv. introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.
3. The policy group believed that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be "to cut off the money supply to the strikers and make the union finance them".
4. There should be a large mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. "Good non-union drivers" should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection.

As part of this strategy, the NCB and the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) bought grounds in Rotterdam port to build up large stocks out of reach.

When the Tories under Thatcher were elected in 1979, they put forward their plan of increased grants for modernisation of the pits, with the medium-term objective of further reductions in total production and further redundancies. It became obvious to almost everyone that there would eventually be an all-out miners strike. The policies of the Union and the government since then revolved around the issue of when they would prefer this unavoidable event to happen, and how they could control it. For the NUM this meant achieving more investment in coal and escaping being surpassed by autonomous class struggle. For the government this meant attacking the miners' will through inflicting a devastating and humiliating defeat on them (the more humiliating the better - not just for the miners - but as an example for the rest of the working class) in the cause of the general profitability of British capital and to provide some ideological and practical consolidation for their monetarist, intensified market-oriented policies.

During 1980, the use of coal by British industry fell by 15% and consumption in homes fell by 20%. Thirdly, use by commerce and public bodies fell by more than 10%. In particular, the restructuring of the steel industry (the closure of some older plants and a greater reliance on imported coke) slashed the demand for coking coal, which affected the South Wales pits most of all. It became obvious that the government's monetarist plans for a self-sufficient coal industry by 1983-4 implied dozens of pit closures.

## Chapter 7:

### The Steel Strike

We interrupt this history of the miners to look briefly at a text about the Steel Strike of 1980, during which McGregor, later head of the NCB, was appointed to run-down and restructure the steel industry. This text appeared in *Solidarity* (May/July 1980 issue) and reflects some of the limitations of revolutionaries of that time to imagine the enormity of what was coming down.

#### GALVANISING THE STEEL STRIKE

The advance publicity given to the steel strike promised us yet another confrontation between the government and the trade unions. It was a confrontation which the unions were determined to avoid, and the government equally determined to provoke. With its *obsolete political ideology*, the Thatcher faction has convinced itself that the unions are unnecessary for the integration of the working class into the system of exploitation. The Left, unwilling to surrender the prize for senility without a struggle, descended on the picket lines to call for the defence of already discredited unions. This was the dual strategy of capitalism: where blue serge failed, blue denim stood ready to move in.

Both before and during the strike, union leaders emerged from their patient negotiations' to



sound warning against the social unrest and economic chaos which would result from monetarist intransigence. Again and again they insisted that their aim was not to confront the Tories, but to collaborate in ensuring the viability of the steel industry. With considerable pride they pointed to their record of aiding in the restructuring of the industry while averting industrial action. Since 1965 the number of workers in BSC plants has dwindled from 817,000 to 184,000 last year, largely due to the introduction of new technology in the form of electric arc furnaces. These have not only brought a dramatic increase in productive capacity, but have also made the steel industry less dependent on coal, no doubt in preparation for the Bennite nuclear future. In short, the unions were willing to implement redundancies in exchange for state investment, while Labour governments were willing to invest in the knowledge that a steel industry in private hands did not have the financial resources to maintain production in periods of recession and so guarantee the supply of steel if and when markets expanded once more. Despite this touching faith in the future survival of capitalism, the Labour Party was unable to prevent stiffer competition from countries such as Korea, Japan, and Brazil. The result was that the BSC faced massive interest charges (currently running at £208 million a year)~ a redevelopment programme that was only half complete (and required a further 52,000 redundancies), a declining share of the world market, and a new government that was ideologically opposed to nationalised industries.

In insisting that the BSC should force the pace of plant closures and redundancies, the Tories were merely accelerating a process which had previously been masterminded by the Labour left. However, a confidential report submitted to a Tory policy group in 1978 had suggested that a future Conservative administration would be able to withstand a lengthy strike in the steel industry. Recent statements by Joseph have confirmed that a combination of plant closures and asset-stripping is to re-establish the profitability of the industry (while rewarding the private sector with an increased share of the market). As long as supplies of steel were readily available and this was guaranteed when the unions dithered for six months before calling a strike - then industrial action by BSC workers could only serve to hasten the restructuring process. Confident that it had nothing to lose from the strike, the government imposed its cash limits and withdrew to await developments. Despite anguished pleas from union negotiators, the BSC went ahead with the rundown at Corby, insisted on a further 52,000 redundancies at least, and finally made its two percent pay offer. While the unions and the left squabbled about production statistics in an apparent attempt to prove that British steelworkers are more docile than any others, the BSC management carried out job reduction exercises and identified 2,300 non-core jobs in the profitable Sheffield steelworks group alone. This points to a sustained campaign of informal resistance which has successfully lowered output and imposed manning levels decided on by the workers themselves. Others chose to opt for voluntary redundancy, a timely rejection of fraudulent appeals for unity' from careerist shop stewards with an eye to the supposed dignity of labour.

The secret talks in which the ISTC saw its last hope of reasoning with management and hoodwinking the steelworkers foundered on demands for unconditional surrender. Not even the ISW could find any enthusiasm for the dismemberment of entire plants, particularly in view of its conviction that managerial ineptitude (the crisis of leadership!) was forcing the industry into irreversible decline. This has led the union leaderships, far-sighted in matters of preserving capitalism, to see themselves as its saviours until the return of a Labour government. Dismayed by the overt class hostility of the Tories, who are more interested in demonstrating their ability to rule like latter-day colonialists than in pandering to uppity workers or bailing out the nationalised steel industry, the unions moved in to rescue the situation. Their problem was how to do this without losing the already uncertain allegiance of their members, which they still need if they are to have a plausible claim to share in the functions of guiding and managing the economy as a whole.

Anxiety about the state of the economy turned to aggression as the bureaucrats found themselves squeezed between the intransigence of the government and the mounting anger of the steelworkers. Speaking at a TUC demonstration, Murray reasserted the unions' claim to be the authentic voice of the working class and issued a raucous threat: We are here to demonstrate our unity, and anyone or any organisation which in any way, whether by utterance, action or by seeking disruption, destroys that unity will have to answer to the working class of

Britain.' The belligerence of this statement was in marked contrast to the plaintive warnings about social unrest. With the mass pickets outside Hadfields and elsewhere taking on the character of workers' assemblies, decisive action was necessary to re-establish control of the strike.

It was soon to become evident that the strike would have to pass beyond the control of the unions and into the hands of the steelworkers if it was to achieve more than the accelerated restructuring of the industry. In the first week the ISTC issued instructions that the private sector was not to be interfered with, and throughout the strike the various unions notably the NUM, TGWU, AEUW, and NUR took it in turns to order normal working.

The local strike committees, although sporadically more militant than headquarters, also demonstrated their concern for normality. Little more than juntas of shop stewards determined to maintain their managerial prerogatives, they issued orders and shunted pickets around the country with as little effort to consult and inform as they had shown previously when taking decisions behind the workers' backs or negotiating redundancy agreements. The effect of this was to leave token pickets scattered about the country in isolated groups of three or four. Individual workers were able to discover what was happening only by courtesy of the media, as was shown by the ISTC's use of newspaper advertisements to urge rejection of BSC pay offers. Even so, the pickets took to using their own initiative when deciding which goods should or should not be allowed through. This deplorable disruption was ended either by withdrawing pickets entirely, as at the British Leyland plant at Bathgate, or by issuing specific instructions that only consignments of steel were to be turned back.

Where direct instructions failed, or where mass pickets converged, the unions made militant noises and sent vague appeals for solidarity through their bureaucratic channels. When it looked as if the strike might spread to miners in South Wales (whose jobs are also threatened), Murray stepped in to cool the situation and promised a day of token protest on 14 May, converting the threat of direct action into an ineffectual march against Tory policies. As one steelworker put it, Len Murray and the TUC are only talking in support of us. That's no good, we don't need budgies, we need help on the picket line.' Time and again the unions had to ward off justified suspicions that they were dragging their feet. Faced with a demand for action from Yorkshire miners, Scargill was able to post himself at the head of a flying column and march on the police line outside Hadfields, where he was able to exchange pleasantries with his uniformed colleagues. There was little else to do, since the day shift had already started work a couple of hours before.

The hostility and cynicism aroused by the unions made it all the easier for managements to address appeals to the workers over the heads of union leaders. As at British Leyland, the workers were faced with an unenviable choice between two gangs of unresponsive rogues who were clearly in collusion with each other. When Sirs sat down to secret talks with the chairman of Hadfields and agreed that the firm should be given immunity because of its financial problems (as if the workers had none!), this merely reinforced the climate of anxiety and suspicion. ISTC officials at Firth Brown, another Sheffield firm, were later reprimanded by the managing director when they suggested that the company would collapse if there was not an immediate return to work.

This was only one of a series of comic-opera reversals during the strike. We saw the right to work' slogan being brandished by both sides, one eager to cash in on the opportunity afforded by the strike, the other seeking support ~or meaningless and mystifying slogans, both convinced that an obedient involvement in unremitting production and occasional reproduction) is the only right and proper activity for the working class. Flying pickets were dispatched to ISTC headquarters in London and Scargill's command centre in Barnsley at the request of Hadfields' bosses. The BSC made reformist demands for more democracy in the unions and held its ballot about a ballot, the pinstripe (or should that be poloneck?) equivalent of the campaign being mounted by the Liaison Committee for Constitutional Reform(!), a ginger group within the ISTC. This time it was the government, not the unions, that was denounced for wrecking the economy, and Hadfields Chairman, Norton pranced and capered like any hysterical shop steward.

Aspiring state capitalists of the left persuasion would do well to note that their plans for workers' control' are by no means assured of success, now that the shop stewards who are to control the workers have lost their monopoly of populist militancy and appear more and more in the guise

of boilersuited bosses.

With the traditional labour movement reduced to muttering in dark corridors, it might appear that its authority is irretrievably lost and that the way is now open for the emergence of self-activity and self-organisation on the part of the workers themselves. But the appeals to outdated loyalties will continue, along with the oafish conduct that seeks to contain spontaneous activity within bureaucratic constraints. These pretensions will be enthusiastically supported by a left which has for years refused to recognise the elementary truth that the unions have become the major enemy of the working class.

In the meantime, the unions face an additional complication in the impending laws on secondary picketing which will flush them even further into the open. Prior's Employment Bill proposes to penalize those unions which fall in their attempts to curb effective industrial action. If it becomes law, it will mean more rigorous controls on local initiatives and spontaneous resistance, or overt collaboration with the police in removing troublesome pickets. Either way, the unions will not be able to avoid still more disaffection in the future, with a corresponding shift towards autonomous activity as traditional loyalties continue to disintegrate. And when workers come to confront these obstacles to their own emancipation, their actions will have to assume the character of a revolt if they are not to remain the victims of a luckless past.

We may leave the final word to Prior himself: *You can pass all the laws you like, but if you cannot get the consent of the people you cannot enforce these laws'.*

**P.S. (Sheffield)**

**We now return to the chronology of miners' struggles.**

## **Chapter 8:**

### **1981 - 1983**

...Tories test water...'All Lies' leaflet...NUM collaborates in closures...

At the start of 1981 the NUM executive started talking about threatening a national strike unless the pit closure plan was withdrawn, pushing for talks with the government. The executive realised that strikes could break out immediately. Gormley, still president, feared "*We'll have difficulty holding the lads back*", whilst McGahey declared that "*the union could be balloting for industrial action with the miners already on strike.*" and pre-empted independent action in defiance of union democracy in order to appear to be a man of the people: "*If the Scottish miners come out against the threat of closure, I'll not be telling them to go back, I'll be leading them out.*" In other words, "*If the Scottish miners come out independently of what I say or do, I'll have to pretend it was me who led them out*".

In February closures were announced in Durham, Kent and South Wales, with some compulsory redundancies. All of these areas had a left-controlled NUM area executive, and a history of independent struggle. A year earlier, the NUM in Wales had lost a ballot for a strike: the left had spent this time perfecting their organisation and aiming to ensure that next time there were strikes, they'd be able to control them. Unofficial strikes immediately broke out in the whole of South Wales, involving flying pickets and solidarity with railwaymen. There were also strikes in Yorkshire, Durham and elsewhere. Well over half the pits were shut down for 3 days. Scargill, as president of Yorkshire area NUM, opposed attempts by South Wales pickets to spread the strike to Yorkshire, but he didn't entirely succeed. It was this autonomous content which forced the government into verbally retracting its closure plan, agreeing to safeguard British industrial capital by restricting imports of coke, and the NCB withdrew its proposals. It was quite clear that the Tories were testing the water - seeing how the miners would react in order to better prepare themselves for the future planned confrontation. In exchange for a few worthless promises from the Tories, the NUM, including Scargill, did all it could to suppress the unofficial actions. All this was just a couple of months before the riots in Brixton of that year,

which sparked off a summer of rioting in July. But no connection was made between such riots and the autonomous action of the miners - not until 1984, when many miners retrospectively recognised themselves in the fury of the rioters of '81 against the State. At the time, however, almost all of them believed the media's version of events - crazed hate-filled black mobs etc.etc., despite the fact that they, in a milder form, were also victims of the media bullshit. In fact, the riots - during which Thatcher suffered acute insomnia but managed to dream up her plan for provoking a war in the Falklands as a way of creating an external enemy to unite the country - probably delayed the further announcements of pit closures until a couple of years later.

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## “ALL LIES”

- *CHAPPLE*

By our Industrial Correspondent

The TUC has had to issue a retraction of a statement which has been claimed to have been issued by Mr Frank Chapple, this coming years' chairman of the TUC. In it, Mr. Chapple is said to have denounced the call by rank and file workers of the NHS to occupy private hospitals and call for mass popular assemblies involving the unemployed, housewives, kids, the old, as well as present workers.

According to this reported statement Mr.Chapple denounced this so-called demand as a “vicious lie put about by a couple of wierdo revolutionaries whose lack of realism has made them delirious with rhetoric.” Mr.Chapple is expected to be given an award in the 1983 New Years Honours List.

Apparently, what these supposed popular assemblies were intended to discuss were problems like:

1. The abolition of wage slavery, capital, the State, the World Market, of all relations of domination and submission and of the whole of a world based on the division of desire from reality, the division of thought and imagination from life, the division of labour, the division of individuals into specialised roles with a function as a cog in the machine of the Abstract Economy.
2. The spreading of the occupation move-ment to offices, docks, factories, super-markets, governments buildings, schools, football stadiums, town halls, theatres, streets, museums, council estates, pits, uni-versities, etc. - all open to those genuinely intent on confronting the reality of life rather than playing a manipulative role.
3. How to overcome the division of the world into hierarchical roles which, amongst other things, turns people into full- time nurses and impatient patients.
4. How to revolutionise social relations so the 80% of patients whom even the mostconventional doctors admit are being treated because of blatant social irrationalities can discover their health in a revolutionary solidarity which discovers itself in rational self-assertions against the terrorism of class society. In such a struggle health can no longer mean mending someone so that they can filling themselves with ulcers, petrol fumes, windscreens, asbestos, coal dust or whatever.
5. How to organise the systematic destructions of: cash registers, parking meters, Rolls Royces, clocking-on machines, government computers, empty social security offices, all underground ticket machines, the Stock Exchange, etc., which daily colonise our misery.
6. How to face the immensity of our tasks and not resign ourselves to the massacres that constantly getting closer to home (in the Flaklands the masses of resigned spectators were treated to a little bit of dramatic slaughter in order to fatten them for a similar massacre in Ireland, or even here in England).
7. How to learn to extend the supercession of false identities that the riots, in uniting black and white, men and women, young and old, etc., momentarily cut across *all* the superficial identities

manufactured by an alienation which divides so its can rule.

The TUC have insisted that that neither this so-called popular assembly demand nor Mr.Chapples' apparent denunciation of it ever existed. "As fas as I'm concerned the whole thing is a complete and utter red herring designed to undermine my power. How, anyway, could I issue a statement about demands which nobody has ever made in the first place?". "And I certainly hope they never will", added Mr.Scargill, who was also present.

Mr. Chapple is 147 on Monday next, assuming he survives.

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Reproduction of part of a short tract distributed during a demo for the health workers strike in 1982 (most of the rest appears in "Miner Conflicts...")

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In January 1983, with Scargill now NUM president, closures were again announced in Scotland, South Wales and Kent. As pickets from Kinnel pit in Scotland gained support for their sit-in, McGahey called off the strike and Kinnel pit was closed. Why the strikers accepted McGahey's "lead" is the fundamental problem of the dialectic of leader/led which screws up all struggle. In Wales, a base movement of strikes forced the area NUM to make them official after first opposing them. However, the Welsh NUM ignored an 80% vote for a strike against closures. Welsh miners independently organised trips to try to co-ordinate the strike with other areas. They persuaded their comrades at Selby in Yorkshire to join the strike, but this was overturned by union officials and the threatened pits were closed. In Kent, the NUM opposed strike action over a union-boss deal over redundancies at Snowdon. By March, various NUM areas were trying to put an end to the autonomous content of the strikes by officially calling for strikes, whilst the NUM national executive tried to gain a grip on events by condemning the South Wales strikes as "unconstitutional". In June '83 Scargill said that he'd heard wind of plans to close 70 pits and scrap 70,000 jobs out of the total of 190,000 in the coal industry. By September, the NCB had built up coal stocks partly through overproduction caused by decreasing exports and partly through deliberate preparation for the virtually inevitable all-out strike they'd planned for. There were wildcat strikes and occupations at Cardown, Kinneil and Polmaise in Scotland - the Scottish NUM refused to back them despite the prospect of 70,000 redundancies. Previously, there had been walkouts at Solsgirth, Comrie and Seafield in solidarity with the struggle of the miners at Polmaise against closure, but these walkouts were ordered to stop by the Stalinist McGahey, which they did. In October the annual NUM conference voted for a national strike in principle but realised that the high level of coal stocks would mean that an immediate strike, if peaceful, unimaginative and traditional, would have no effect on the Coal Board until the coalstocks had been greatly reduced. So the union, in order to both oppose the NCB's closure policy and to put an end to the wildcat strikes and occupations in Scotland (18,000 miners on unofficial strike) decided on a policy of a preliminary ban on overtime working, which would allow the coal stocks to dwindle to be followed by an all-out strike at a later date. At this time there was a 7 week strike at Monktonhall pit in Scotland. The NUM negotiated what it called a "victory": since none of the strikers demands were met, anyone with an independent mind, with good reason, later questioned what the NUM's "Victory to the Miners!" would mean. In fact, this victory' was an agreement from the NCB to consult the NUM before making further closures (a pathetic agreement which they didn't even keep).

## Chapter 9:

### The printworkers struggle at Warrington

**Once again we interrupt the specific history of the miners to look at some other class struggle history that was going on at the time - the battle of the printworkers against Eddie Shah at Warrington, close to Liverpool. The first text - The Big Lie At Warrington - is by Wildcat (January 1984) and concentrates mainly on the contradictions of the printworkers union. The second - The Battle of Winwick Quay - is by A Communist Effort' (March 1984) and concentrates mainly on the tactics of the cops against the pickets, tactics which were refined during the miners'**

strike.

## THE BIG LIE AT WARRINGTON

### Introduction

The economic crisis of capitalism which now affects every country in the world, and is here to stay, has profound implications for the working class. Above all it has revealed the reactionary nature of the trade unions, and trade unionist ideas. The more the working class comes under attack, the more the unions call upon their members to be “reasonable” and accept these attacks. The *bureaucratic nature* of trade unions is a sure sign that they are not our organisations, but are imposed on us by the state in order to discipline us and prevent us from struggling effectively. The trade unions are the *division of the class* into separate and often competing grades, trades, industries, regions and nations. *Trade unionist ideology* justifies this division by spreading the lie that there need be no fundamental conflict of interest between capital and labour. According to trade unionist ideology, the combination of a “strong union” and “realistic management” will enable any dispute to be solved with a minimum of fuss, and without needing to involve workers from other unions.

The growing conflict between the trade unions and their members is a clear sign that there is no meeting point between our interests as workers and those of capitalism. Either capitalism will crush us as it descends towards economic collapse, barbarism and world war - or we must destroy capitalism. The struggle to destroy capitalism will be in large measure a struggle by workers to overcome the divisions and confusions imposed upon them by the unions and trade union ideology, and by so doing *destroy all unions and union bureaucracies*. In their place workers will organise their struggles through mass assemblies uniting all workers and democratically controlled by them.

On one hand the unions are faced with a growing disillusionment, cynicism and hostility among their members. On the other hand, the bosses are less interested in using the “mediation” of the unions to reach “compromises” with the workforce. The crisis is forcing them to take a much tougher line. The trade unions are finding that their usefulness to the bosses is declining, and their powerful position within the state apparatus is coming under attack.

This two-sided crisis of trade unionism forms the backdrop to recent events at Warrington. Now read on...

### How a Small Dispute Became a National Scandal

At the beginning of July 1983, the printworkers' union, the NGA, called out on strike eight of its members working for a small company in Stockport. The dispute was not about anything which directly affected these eight workers. What was at stake was the power of the NGA in the printing industry. Through its control of the printworkers the NGA has won the right to act as *personnel manager* for the entire industry; hiring and firing workers as it pleases in pre-entry closed-shop agreements with the employers. This uniquely powerful position of the NGA depends upon the preservation of craft privileges. The bosses need the special skills which the NGA jealously guards within its ranks. The workers tolerate the dictatorial behaviour of the union because of the high wages their craft status brings them. Now high unemployment and new technology mean that the “good old days” are nearly over for one of the last great craft unions.

Mr Shah, chairman, of the Stockport Messenger group, at first seemed to be according the NGA the respect its leaders felt they deserved. He signed a closed-shop agreement for his new printing works at Stockport, at the same time, as is customary, *joining the NGA himself, along with his fellow directors*. This fact should give food for thought to those who think that the NGA exists to defend the interests of printworkers. The NGA is part of the management, and *vice versa!*

However soon afterwards the Stockport Messenger Group opened two more print works in Warrington and Bury, using non-union labour at cheaper rates. The NGA called out its members in the Stockport works on strike, who were promptly sacked by the management. Having thrust these eight workers into the front line of battle, the NGA proved more reticent about giving them

support in their struggle to get their jobs back. With no prospect of an easy victory the dispute quickly became an embarrassment to the union. Two months later, in September, NGA officials said that the dispute was “the biggest issue currently facing the union” ... but not big enough, apparently, for them to do anything about it.

At this stage it seemed that the dispute might well end up like other similar strikes involving a handful of workers, which have dragged on, almost unnoticed, for months or even years. But instead it became, for a few days in December, front page news. It became what Socialist Worker dramatically proclaimed “a battle for the future of working class organisation.”

Why was it that this dispute became the battleground for the first test-case confrontation over the new union laws?

Partly it was due to the intransigence of the employers, who were determined to use the new laws to stop “secondary picketing” by the Stockport workers at the Warrington works.

More importantly it was due to the militancy of NGA workers which forced union leaders, very much against their will, to take a stand. Many workers in Fleet Street were eager to take strike action. After the success of the first one-day strike, the mass pickets were arranged to divert the energies of the militants into an action which was less effective but (so NGA leaders believed) less politically damaging.

Unfortunately for the NGA, the police (and the government which sent them in) had their own ideas about mass pickets. An eye-witness describes what happened:

“From early on in the night the pickets were content to block the road *en masse*. They were left pushing the police backwards and forwards for many hours using up a lot of valuable energy. At this point in time (up to 5 o'clock) the police were content to pull pickets from out of the front of the line. They did not arrest them but just gave them a good thumping. We believe that this tactic was deliberate and pre-planned, as it softened up many of the militant members of the demonstration. For a couple of hours before the vans came out the police used baton charges to disperse many hundreds of pickets. When the vans eventually came the pickets were in no condition to fight back, The police tactics had succeeded...” (From a leaflet published by Middlesborough Direct Action Movement, c/c Box A, 120 Victoria Road, Middleborough).

However, even if the police finally succeeded, the pickets did fight back. Another eye-witness, describing events on the same night of Tuesday, November 29th, reports:

“The police foolishly smashed up the NGA control van, causing union officials to lose control of picketing workers. The picket then defended itself against the police with bricks and bottles, barricades were set up, and local unemployed workers joined in the fight with the police.” (From a leaflet published by the London Workers Group)

NGA leaders were horrified by this class violence. Workers actually fighting back against the police. This wasn't what they wanted at all. Even more worrying, lots of the pickets clearly wanted to go back the next night and have another go. Union leaders were determined not to lose control of the struggle again. So they concocted an extraordinary manoeuvre to sabotage the picket. Pickets were bussed *en masse* to Manchester for a rally. While the workers listened to trade union leaders making militant speeches, thirty miles away the newspaper lorries emerged from the Warrington works almost unopposed.

If the unions had really wanted to win the dispute, there were many other forms of solidarity action which could have been used to hit the Stockport Messenger Group. Workers at Telecom could have been asked to disconnect the phone lines, postal workers to block the post, and power workers to disconnect the electricity ... But at this point NGA leaders wanted nothing more than to let the dispute slip quietly back into the obscurity from which it had emerged. Len Murray's “betrayal” was the answer to their prayers. NGA leaders must have felt like they'd won the pools: now they could call off the action and put the blame on someone else.

## The Limits of Militancy at Warrington

What appeared as a battle between the Tory government and the unions, or later between the NGA and the TUC, masks the fact that all parties involved are part of the capitalist state with vested interests in supporting the capitalist system. What is at issue in the dispute over the new union laws is: *who is going to control the workers?* The unions insist that it's their job. Thus Len Murray said of Tebbit, "Is he trying to stir up unofficial strikes? He must know that every union does everything in its power to control a strike".

In other words the unions are jockeying for position within the ruling class. The new laws threaten the power of the trade union bureaucracy and have provoked a real conflict between them and the government. But despite their differences, all sides in this conflict have the same fundamental aims. This is why they *all wanted to make sure that any confrontation took place in circumstances where, whoever won, the working class was bound to lose.*

This is the real reason why it suited all sides that the new laws should be "tested out" in this small dispute in far-away Warrington. They were able to ensure that despite Socialist Workers' grand claim that the dispute had become one between "the working class and the Tory government", the genuine interests of the working class were not represented at all.

The militancy on the picket lines went much further than the unions intended. NGA leaders joined Labour, SDP and Tory MPs, and the TUC general council in condemning the "violence" of workers defending themselves against the onslaught of military trained police riot squads. Surely if all these people were against them, many people will say, what the workers were doing must have been good! However workers militancy was not, and at Warrington could not have been, directed towards the right aims.

It is important that workers are prepared to use violence when necessary to defend their interests. However the nature of this working class violence is and must be very different from the violence of police riot squads or the army. Working class violence does not depend on military discipline and sophisticated technology of mass destruction: it is by its very nature turbulent and apparently uncontrolled, but in reality based on self-discipline and self-organisation, and fuelled by creativity, enthusiasm and, above all, *solidarity*. Workers can never hope to defeat the police in a set-piece confrontation such as took place at Warrington. But even these specially trained and well-armed forces must give way to the irresistible pressure of the mass struggle of the working class. When the mass strikes in Poland were at their height, even the Russian army hesitated to invade.

This is why in every struggle the aim of militant workers must be to *spread the struggle*. "Spreading the struggle" means increasing the numbers of workers involved. It means joining in a common struggle with workers from different unions, companies, industries and regions. And to achieve this it means broadening the aims and raising the demands of the struggle. In this context, it can be seen that the whole question of "secondary picketing" is a red herring. What the bosses and the unions call "secondary picketing" at best aims at limited solidarity action by other workers such as sympathy strikes, blacking goods etc. At worst it is no more than a ritualistic act. The aim of the bosses and the unions is to make workers think that strike is just the affair of the particular group of workers directly involved. To make an issue about whether we're allowed to engage in what they call *secondary* picketing, means accepting the bosses' definition of what is the legitimate *primary* area of dispute.



In fact workers habitually go beyond the limits of “secondary picketing” even, at times, such as today, when there are not many strikes. The action by workers at Moss Morran described, in the following article; the flying pickets sent by Yorkshire miners to call 14 pits out on strike over the over the victimization of one man; the picketting by Shell workers in their recent dispute which aimed to spread their strike to the tanker drivers - all these are examples of when workers in 1983 organised themselves to *spread their struggles*. Unlike the blanket media coverage given to the picket at Warrington, the media keeps quiet about these examples of workers successfully defying the new union laws in a way which went beyond the limits of “secondary picketing” as advocated by even the most “militant” of union leaders. In fact all these actions were *actively opposed* by the unions. This is why the unions could hardly have used them as the test-case for the new laws. At Warrington on the other hand, there was much less danger of the struggle spreading in a way which escaped union control. There was never any question of calling the workers at Warrington out on strike - they had been hand-picked by Shah for their anti-union views. Nor did the issue at the centre of the dispute - the victimisation of eight workers in a union somewhat isolated from the main body of the working class- have a direct relevance for other workers.

At Warrington the unions were able to take up the issue of secondary picketting as a principle. If through a struggle over secondary picketting the Shell workers, for example, had won their claim for higher wages, millions of other AUEW and TGWU workers might well have been inspired to follow their example. But the last thing the unions wanted was for workers to gain a sense of their *class power* through putting secondary picketting to practical use in a struggle over wages, conditions or factory closures.

Arthur Scargill could confidently polish up his radical image by calling at Warrington for the “biggest mass picket in history”, without any fear that this might affect the outcome of the strike at Monktonhall colliery which was at that time being sabotaged by NUM officials. This is the scoundrel who in 1981 addressed a meeting of striking steelworkers, pledging the support of the miners they desperately needed, while offering them nothing except ... a miner's lamp!

## The Unions and the New Laws

There is another reason why the unions could feel confident that the dispute at Warrington would not get out of hand. The NGA is possibly a uniquely well-disciplined union. When the NGA withdrew the pickets from Warrington, official Joe Wade was able to confidently predict that “if we give this instruction to our members, they are very loyal ... I'm quite sure that they will accept the advice that we give.” Very few other union leaders could have said this. Certainly not NUM leaders, whose members habitually reject their recommendation to strike and then come out against their orders when they are least expecting it. Nor AUEW leaders, who, after smashing the strike at Laurence Scott, to name but one, are virtually synonymous with shit in many parts of the North-West. But the NGA can still use its members like well-disciplined troops.

This is something which all unions leaders wish they could do. Indeed they used to be able to: after leading their members in a series of more or less successful strikes in the early seventies, the unions were able to call hundreds of thousands of workers out to demonstrate against Heath's Industrial Relations Act. But having used their power to help get Labour back into power in 1974, the unions collaborated with this government's austerity programme, of which they were the joint architects. They called, and still call, for “realism” in the face of the crisis which amounts to workers accepting wage cuts, worse working conditions, and redundancies. From the “ordinary workers” point of view they are no longer able to deliver the goods. Their attempt to mobilise support against Tebbit's union laws in the Days of Action was a miserable fiasco. On the other hand when workers do struggle, the unions are often unable to contain them.

The “loss of control” by the unions over their members is essential to an understanding of the new laws. The Tories are well aware of the value of the unions in controlling the working class. But they also know that workers do not have the same unthinking loyalty towards them as they used to. Their credibility is wearing thin. The new union laws are part of an attempt by the government to compensate for this weakness by creating an atmosphere of repression and fear, to frighten workers away from confronting the “tough” Tories. The Tories want to be *seen* to confront the unions because it fits in with this image: they decisively reject the ideology of “we're all in this mess together” which the previous Labour government used to carry out the same policies as the Tories, with the open collaboration of the unions during the period of the “Social Contract”. The new laws do weaken the power of the unions, which is why they tried - unsuccessfully - to mobilise their members against them. But the unions are still integrated into the decision-making apparatus of the state at every level, through their membership of hundreds of committees, The Tories are not seeking to destroy them, but to redefine their role in society in the light of the economic crisis which *forces* the bosses to take a much tougher line against the workforce. The unions are no longer to be the “free and equal partners” in all aspects of government, as they aspired to be under Labour, but to have a much more limited role of selling wage restraint, speed-ups and labour discipline to their members, within the framework of an acceptance of the fact that government policies cannot be challenged, since they are determined by “economic realism”, and backed up by “public opinion”. The new laws restrict the unions' freedom but offer them in return increased legal restraints against their more militant members who have caused them so much trouble in recent years.

A majority of the unions are now prepared to accept this new role. But they want the decision to collaborate with the government to appear to be forced upon them by their members, They will not be all that dismayed by the “defeats' at Warrington.

### **Where Next?**

For the working class what happened at Warrington has a different significance. As the mass picketing was underway, Socialist Worker wrote:

“But it is not just the NGA which is threatened, based on tight-knit class loyalties. So if the NGA is beaten at Warrington by the use of the law, then very few other groups of workers are going to feel they have the power to defend union organisation under the same threat.”

In fact no single group of workers is powerful enough today to win major victories on its own. This idea that workers should “take on the government” union by union, with the “weaker unions” waiting for the outcome of struggles waged by the stronger ones, is an ideological attack on the working class, Its aim is to prevent the unification across union boundaries which is becoming more and more essential as the deepening crisis erodes the economic power of individual groups of workers. The example of the defeat of a “strong union” can then be used to foster demoralisation among the rest of the working class.

The 1981 steel strike provided a classic example. Other groups of workers, while waiting to see if the steel workers could win what was seen as a test-case confrontation with the Tory government, held back from taking the very actions which were desperately needed by the steel workers, and could have led to the success of their strike. Then the defeat of this “powerful group of workers” led to the downturn in class struggle from which we have yet to emerge.

In fact there is no reason why the “defeat” at Warrington should prevent workers from continuing to successfully defy the picketting laws. However union leaders will try to use it to justify their suppression of future attempts by their members to do so - as part of their overall strategy of reaching a compromise with the Tory government. In this they are supported by arguments like those used in the above quote from *Socialist Worker*, which can only contribute to any demoralisation the “defeat” might have caused.

But what in any case would the union “victory” which the SWP called for amount to? Something like the victory claimed by McGahey at the Monktonhall colliery, where none of the workers' original demands were met ... but management agreed to use the “officially agreed negotiating procedure” in the future. In other words, management will work more closely with the NUM before making any further attacks on the miners!

Workers have shown time and again that they are quite capable of successfully defying any picketting laws. But the workers at Shell who had broken the picketting laws without giving them a second thought, were finally defeated by a series of union manoeuvres. The unions are a greater threat to our struggle than any law: we know the law is against us, but the unions stab us in the back. Workers do not yet have the confidence to openly defy their unions. But when the picketting laws are next broken during the course of a major struggle, the unions will line up with the government against the workers, and then the stage will be set for the real battle to be fought.

WILDCAT, January 1984.

## **The Battle of Winwick Quay**

On the night of 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1983, took place the biggest battle between strikers and cops in Britain since Grunwicks 1977 and before that the struggles of 1972-4. 4,500 workers fought a battle with 2000 cops, including official police, Tactical Aid Group squads, and a paramilitary' private security gang hired personally by Edward Shah. The police - all sections - were very well organized and the dispersal and combat tactics were reminiscent of those used in the 1981 riots in Moss Side and Toxteth, when squads of the Tactical Aid Group were also deployed. At one point, Land Rovers chased pickets back across a rough field behind the factory whilst squads with helmets, visors, and padded jackets managed to push back several groups of pickets to the nearby M62 motorway.

The action began on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup>, when 2000 demonstrators who had gathered in front of the printworks at Winwick Quay experienced a disciplined police assault. First, the police loosened up the crowd by walking amongst it in groups of four (it, of course, shows a weakness of the picket that they allowed the police to do this without attacking them); secondly, a large group of about 200 or 300 police in a nearby car park formed themselves in a phalanx of “flying wedge”. This wedge marched in disciplined fashion into the centre of the crowd to physically split it after having already spread it out....Thirdly, police from the middle of the wedge, presumably themselves in smaller wedges, further subdivided the crowd. It took the police over two hours to clear the workers from the yard in front of the factory, but they were unable to prevent them from re-grouping later, on the edge of the main road which led to the estate. Police then assembled in front of the entrance to the main access road to the works, and began to try to clear the road and push the pickets further back. By this time, the riot squads had arrived and

formed into small combat groups *behind* the police line. In a psychologically well thought-out manoeuvre, the official police then moved forward and suddenly opened up gaps in their ranks to let the riot police through to attack the pickets. Apparently the pickets then dispersed in fright, they had probably not expected a battle against riot police. However, the more radicalised of the pickets could still manage to re-group at 3a.m. And, as they were attacked by riot police, dragged blazing braziers onto the road - probably not as a barricade in the sense of a defended position from which to attack, but as an immediately accessible way to halt the police advance without explicitly aiming to extend their own territory. Still, the pickets managed to attack the police with bricks and bottles, and 25 cops were injured, along with 18 of the workers themselves. 86 arrests were made; one worker was arrested for carrying a .45 automatic but it turned out to be only a replica...

Let us note that at this time the leaders of the NGA were ostensibly “in support” of a mass picket, but of course for non-violence, orderly behaviour, no autonomous initiatives, no attacking the cops, etc. Joseph Wade, boss of the NGA, stressed on television that what he wanted was a small semi-illegality to “protect trade union rights under the law” in order that trade-unions could pursue their legal function (mediation). Remember that even peaceful mass pickets, or picketing at anywhere else than one’s own work-place, are now illegal. He and other bureaucrats could even blame “police provocation” and police brutality (“bad management of the police”?) as instigating the battle, thus displaying his own belief that his own bureaucrats could curb workers’ anger more effectively than the police and courts. The capitalist nature of trade-unions became even more glaring when they tried to organise sit-down passivities when nearby there was a raging battle of strikers against riot police.

Significantly, Robert Maxwell, another press boss who has never shied away from sacking strikers en masse (for example, the printworkers at Park Royal), was reputed to have telephoned Edward Shah to warn him to cool things down in order to forestall “disastrous” effects in Fleet Street. This surprising revelation shows the fear, and at the same time the strategic consciousness, of parts of the British bourgeoisie: it may have kept the number of strikes down since 1978-9, but is aware that it has not yet definitively succeeded in demoralising proletarians, whether in waged work or on the dole. Just as in the economic sphere, in the political sphere too there are no more long-term plans of the rulers, even on the scale of 4 or 5 years. Just as the Russian capitalist class has had no faith in its recent 5-year-plans, so now its British counterpart increasingly play everything which concerns politico-economic plans on a year-to-year level. Note that on a military counter-subversive level, though (defence against possible proletarian assaults), the bourgeoisie, or at least its strategic centres, is capable of extremely intelligent planning for contingencies, militarily and psychologically.

From: A Communist Effort, March 1984.

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## **Chapter 10:**

### **The run-up to the Great Strike**

On November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1983 the NUM started an official overtime ban., which, on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1984, Scargill claimed was having a “devastating effect”. In a sense , yes - the miners had lost a good proportion of their wages usually earned by doing overtime; colliery winders in particular lost up to a third of their wages. By March each Yorkshire miner had lost an average £360. According to one method of calculation, the NCB actually profitted from the ban (through reducing stockpiles rather than continuing over-production). Nevertheless, stockpiles *had* been considerably reduced. In January to February 1984 there was action by Bogside and Polmaise miners in Scotland against pit closures, whilst there were spontaneous walk-outs throughout Scotland in response to new shifts and a productivity deal. The Scottish NUM executive refused to call an all-out strike, saying there was no support. Polmaise miners stormed out of the meeting and verbally attacked McGahey.

By March 1984 it was clear that the NCB were trying to provoke a strike - probably in the hope that - due to the relatively lesser use of coal during the summer - it would all be over by November or December '84. These provocations included:

- a suggestion by MacGregor that compensation paid to miners whose homes were damaged due to subsidence of the ground beneath them due to coal mining was too much and that miners were often craftily putting in “unjustified” claims.

1. the laying-off of Staffordshire miners on Mondays, in order for safety work to be done which would usually have been done during overtime.
2. petty arguments over break-time and the interpretation of work-records.
3. locking out miners late for shifts after having attended union meetings, especially at pits with a reputation for militancy such as Monktonhall and Polmaise.

The scene was now set for the all-out confrontation planned, in very rough outline, by the Tories some 6 years previously.

## **Chapter 11:**

### **March - April 1984**

*...the inevitable' strike...from wildcat strike to official strike...  
...ballots and bourgeois democracy...cop repression...  
...killing of David Jones...imaginative actions...Ravenscraig...  
...Edlington schoolkids...'Misery of Unions' leaflet &  
the Barcelona dockers...*

*“Suddenly, there it was on the pages of the daily Sheffield Star and local TV and radio:*

*the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the miners' strike. The memories: 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1984 Cortonwood near Barnsley to close - what immediately became known as "The Alamo" - the point where the miners said enough is enough followed by an immediate wildcat strike throughout Yorkshire and beyond. I just burst into uncontrollable floods of tears. It seemed like yesterday but recollections crashed and collided within me as instant pains in my heart and head became excruciating. The emotion was almost too much to bear...everyone involved in the strike was about to be thrown into a maelstrom they've never really gotten out of all these years later."*

- Jenny 's Tale \[7]  
(<http://www.revoltagainstplenty.com/index.php/archive-local/116-the-miners-jenny-tells-her-tale.html>)

On March 4<sup>th</sup> the NCB under McGregor, a finance capitalist with a record for running down industrial capital, threw down the gauntlet to the miners: the NCB announced the closure of Cortonwood pit, South Yorkshire - a closure which was to take place on 6<sup>th</sup> April. The miners "inevitably" took up the challenge. Sure, nothing is "inevitable" - they could, of course, have rolled over and died, as some oh so clued-in middle class people later, retrospectively, suggested they really should have done, as it was the only sensible' thing to do: given the circumstances of the government deciding the battlefield it was, apparently, "inevitable" that the miners would lose. But you can't choose the terrain on which to fight, since the enemy occupies it totally, everywhere. And against such smug determinism, the complacent dismissal of those who are petrified about *doing* anything against this miserable world [18] - often because they have lucrative niches within it, the miners were determined to determine their own destinies knowing full well that to let the State win an easy victory would invariably accelerate the rate of humiliation. The path of least resistance is the quickest descent into hell. They chose, in a "now or never" situation, the only dignified path to follow, the most basically, *minimally*, sensible thing to do - they chose to fight.

And everyone who supported them knew that this was it. All the struggles of the post world war world were at stake (few realised how the struggles of the previous 200 years were also at stake). A sizeable minority of the population clearly realised that if the miners went down so would they.

Next day there were spontaneous walk-outs across Yorkshire and Scotland. Yorkshire NUM later called a strike, though Scargill was initially opposed to a strike because coalstocks were too high, but because of its momentum, reluctantly supported it (making it official a week later, on March 12<sup>th</sup>). The media throughout the strike ignored his initial attitude and the fact that it had been a wildcat by persistently calling it "Scargill's strike". 6<sup>th</sup> March, the NCB announced that it aimed to close 20 pits and lose 20,000 jobs within a year. These jobs were to be lost by means of voluntary redundancy - miners from any pit to be closed who didn't want redundancy would be offered "relocation money" to work at a pit elsewhere. The Scottish NUM made the wildcat strike official. 7<sup>th</sup> March - the government announced a new scale of redundancy payments, now available to miners as young as 21, and roughly equivalent to £1000 per year worked down the pit. 8<sup>th</sup> March - NUM national executive backed the area executives of Scotland and Yorkshire and announced it would back any other area which officially called a strike. 10<sup>th</sup> March - faced with thousands of flying pickets, the NCB decided not to take legal action against the NUM under the laws making secondary picketing illegal, for fear of escalation. 11<sup>th</sup> March - NUM executives in Lancashire and Nottinghamshire announced that they were to hold ballots. They warned pickets from other areas to keep away, on bourgeois democratic grounds - i.e. to try to prevent any offensive solidarity (initially Welsh miners had been against going on strike because they weren't directly effected by the closure plan, but Yorkshire pickets had persuaded them to come out; this was not the kind of thing Lancashire and Notts wanted). 2 days later the NUM presidents of these areas condemned the behaviour of Yorkshire pickets.

In the following few weeks of the strike one of the most widely publicised issues was the

attempt by the union to have an official national strike by means of a series of decisions by area NUM executives, with the blessing of the National Executive. This, according to the union rule book, would have allowed an official national strike without a national ballot. The Left of the Union opposed a national ballot because they didn't want to split the union, like in 1926. Militant miners, rightly, opposed a ballot because they did not see why scabs should have the right to vote them out of a job. Indicative of this difference is that there are some militant Leftist ex-union officials who nowadays have their doubts about the refusal of a ballot during the strike - questioning it in terms of tactics.. For them, though they were never entirely open about it, the question was always just one of maintaining the unity of the union, i.e. a tactical question - not a question of the principle of not voting someone out of a job, let alone one developing from a critique of the contradictions of bourgeois democracy.

If the bourgeoisie are always so keen on democracy when it's convenient for them - whether in Iraq, Iran or South Africa, or during an independent struggle - it's because when everyone is isolated as constituents alone in a polling booth they are passive before the endless manipulative monologues of the false hierarchical choices competing for their vote like competing used-car salesmen trying to get you to part with your cash. Democracy is like commodity consumption: your desires and needs only count insofar as they can be reduced to something that can be counted, something measurable, like a sack of potatoes. When people determine their own existence, a vote is usually a distraction from the central questions: what do we want, what do we need, what can we do together to achieve this? As a Fitzwilliam miner said, towards the end of the strike, "Who wants democracy when you can have a gun?". The ideology of first getting a majority ignores the fact that it is always the aggressive initiatives of a minority which develops something significant: the majority only know what they are told, not what they can discover for themselves.

However, those who called for a ballot or for no ballot were united on one thing: workers' activity over the general conditions of their strike should be mediated through the union. This was one of the essential mystifications, which we'll look at later.

March saw the massive use of flying pickets from Yorkshire, Kent and the North-East in Lancashire and Notts. These pickets succeeded in closing down 14 out of the 25 Notts pits, all of the 5 Lancashire pits and 8 out of 9 in Derbyshire. On the enemy's side, there was the first use of the "National Reporting Centre" in the strike. This was supposed to be an information H.Q. of the police, without having anything to do with a national police force (in Britain at this time there was the absurd lie that the area police forces are relatively autonomous without any permanent structures for central co-ordination). 2000 cops were drafted into Notts to stay in army bases. The police started a big operation on several cross-country motorways in order to stop the movement of flying pickets. Every capitalist political fraction from the SDP (a centre' break-away party from the Labour Party that found Labour too left-wing, now merged with the Liberals) leftwards had something to say about the police's "infringement of civil liberties". The slimy David Owen, then leader of the SDP, an ultra-slime who even made slime look tasty, who supported the closure of pits on economic grounds, complained about the cops' stopping Kent miners at the Dartford Tunnel and about their questioning miners on their political beliefs. Well everyone had to jump on that obviously crude dropping away the mask of the State, just to show that there were some right-wing politicians who weren't *totally* against the miners, because, after all, they might win. No-one dared say the truth. In 1975, the National Security Plan involved a nationwide operation by the military carried out in secrecy. *"Every motorway intersection, strategic railway stations, ports, fuel depots and warehouses were surveyed by army officers with a view to defence, or demolition, in the event of an invasion or civil war. The intelligence gathered in this operation was used to draw up contingency plans for all eventualities, from limited strikes that effected essential services to a major civil disturbance country-wide."*

There were also riots in Ollerton, Nottinghamshire, where thousands of Yorkshire miners were

picketing. In view of the likelihood of trouble, even some of the Left of the Union tried to stop pickets going. The CP fellow traveller Jack Taylor (Yorkshire Area NUM President) told his opposite number in Nottinghamshire, *"There may be a few renegades going, and there's not much I can do about them."* Some of these "renegades" were wearing "Official Picket" when they turned up. The riot not only involved fighting between pickets and the cops but also between local anti-strike proletarian scabs and pickets. Spencerism (see chapter 1), helped by Tony Benn's divisive ballots of 1978, had returned to Nottinghamshire. When 24 year-old David Jones [9] was killed by a scab's brick on the night of March 14<sup>th</sup>- 15<sup>th</sup>, a Union bureaucrat from Notts phoned Scargill and Taylor to ask them to calm the situation in the belief that they would be more likely to be obeyed than right-wing bureaucrats. Scargill stood on top of a car and, in order to *"take the heat out of the situation"*, as Scargill himself put it, called for 2 minutes silence. This helped to channel the energy of the rioters not into escalating the riot, but into pressurising the cops into taking off their helmets in sympathy with the dead picket. How English! Meanwhile the media portrayed the strikers as semi-terrorists terrifying scabs and their families - and the death of David Jones was the fault of "Scargill's strike". Scabs were portrayed as "rebels" who were simply demanding the "right to work". Rebellion was seen as accepting the State, courage was seen as walking to work guarded by hundreds of cops, the right to work was seen as supporting the States brutal weapon of unemployment. The media's inversion of reality knew, and still knows, no bounds. The difference then is that these brutal and insane lies were being contested - in the streets.

March 16<sup>th</sup>, the day after David Jones death hit the headlines, miners from Bold colliery in Lancashire spontaneously decided to go on strike, independently of the Union and despite the Lancashire ballot going slightly against a strike. Undoubtedly David Jones' death had hardened the resolve of miners with some integrity. However, elsewhere in Lancashire, Frank King, branch secretary at Parkside pit said, with incredible insight, that pickets calling out scab' and blackleg' *"make it hard to cross the picket line"*. It's the way he tells it. This comic routine was followed up with Gaskell, branch secretary at Goldorne pit, complaining that the *"pickets... jeering and shouting... had a bad effect on the afternoon shift"*. Could Oscar Wilde have put it better?

A Doncaster area NUM official came to the picket line at Harworth colliery, and asked the Yorkshire pickets *"to withdraw back to Doncaster because a deal had been struck with Chadburn relating to the ballot."* and that they should only send a token lobby of 4 men to every branch. In Lancashire, an NUM official declared, *"Things were getting too hot with the picket...we decided to quieten the situation"* and called a one-week official strike for March 26<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>. A picket from Castlehill, Scotland, reported: *"At pithead meetings the Friday before the strike started, we were told the best thing for us to do was to enjoy a long lie-in on the Monday, leaving it to the branch committtees to make sure all pits were out in Scotland. Fortunately we ignored that..."*. In the first few weeks picketting was organised at local level. By the end of March picketting was organised from Barnsely (NUM HQ), though there was room for local autonomy. But the cops had tapped the NUM headquarters, and also many of the phones of the local branch secretaries. If only at a tactical level, centralisation was a disaster.

Fortunately, alongside the attempts of the competing left and right NUM hierarchy to control the strike, and to be seen to control the strike, imaginative actions were beginning to become widespread:

- miners blocked motorways by driving their cars in convoys going at 5 m.p.h.

- isolated NCB offices were attacked with petrol bombs

- "Hit squads" began to be organised, consisting of strikers mounting night-time raids on NCB property

- miners' wives were beginning to organise food and collective kitchens, picketting, collections of money, etc., although this was usually done on the basis of a sexual division of labour (e.g. men on the picket line, women organising food).



Much of this was done with the support and sometimes involvement of local NUM officials, but they no more played a part in determining the course of these actions than did any other, non-role-bound striker. Undoubtedly if asked, most of those involved in the action would have said "We're the NUM", but then often that was just short for saying they were striking miners. It was a weakness not to have found the language of autonomy' - of recognising that you were organising things yourself, but then that's part of the struggle, though one can over-emphasise it just as much as one can ignore it.

March 28<sup>th</sup>, sailors from Liverpool decided to black all eventual delivery of foreign coal.

April 6<sup>th</sup>, pickets trying to prevent the arrival of 50,00 tons of Australian coal at Port Talbot, South Wales, fought a battle with the cops. Also in April: at Creswell, steel bars were thrown over some rails to provoke short-circuiting; at Cawock, some NCB vehicles were damaged; at Stoke-on-Trent, the weighing machines of the pit were sabotaged and cables were destroyed; at Trenham, pickets armed with iron bars wrecked the cars parked inside the colliery.

As suggested in the Tory Party's pre-'79 plan, access to social security benefit on the part of striking miners' families was vastly reduced: women with 2 kids were only entitled to £12 per week social security.

The main event in April, though, was the situation at Ravenscraig Steelworks in Scotland, which became the scene of some of the most violent picketing and the most arrests: the steel union, under the tutelage of Thatcher's darling - Bill Sirs, managed to prevent any strike of the steelworkers, but there were arguments between the steel union's bureaucracy and the NUM over precisely how much scab-produced coal to allow into the plant. Sirs made his famous remark about not wanting to see "his" workers "crucified on someone else's altar", preferring to prepare their crucifixion on his own altar. Eventually, and surprisingly considering the NUM wanted to win this strike even if their hierarchical mode of controlling it undermined such a victory, the NUM conceded to the steel union's demands over the amount of coal to enter Ravenscraig, and the mass pickets were called off without further trouble. Why did the miners accept this? It was pretty demoralising - and showed the extent to which traditional Trade Unionism weighed like a nightmare on the minds of the living. The Ravenscraig workers had themselves been threatened with redundancies during the previous years, and indeed were still under threat at this time - and Ravenscraig was closed down a few years later. The son of a Sheffield steelworker recently told me that in 1980 the steelworkers were disappointed with the fact that miners solidarity had gone little beyond words and token 1-day strikes, that they'd felt let down and isolated. Undoubtedly this played a part in the lack of solidarity during the miners strike, but it was a stupid pretext - cutting off their nose to spite their face. Miners had been disappointed by the very sparse solidarity of the printworkers during the miners strike, but that didn't prevent them from going down to the printers' picket lines in Wapping in 1986 to join in the fight against the cops. It's what people do in the present to overcome their past failures that counts.

In Edlington, Yorkshire, in April schoolkids came out on strike in support of the miners. Teachers called the cops to push them back into school.

*"I went to Edlington after hearing about the kids' solidarity action at a meeting in the Doncaster area. At night I spray-painted graffiti on the walls of the school there - slogans like "No classes today - No class society tomorrow!" and "Teachers are cops!". The next day I went to the small picket line huddled round a brazier not far from the school during the evening. I felt awkward at first, being an outsider, armed with some leaflets entitled "The Misery Of Unions", feeling a little embarrassed like I was some militant intervening'. I didn't immediately give out the leaflets because it really would have been too much a politico role, but instead asked the pickets if they wanted something to drink - from being a little morose, and wary, in the very cold night air, they chirped up, saying "Oh yes please!" - so I went off to the nearest off-licence and got them a couple of cans of beer each. I got talking a bit and one guy, a single miner, complained about the Union - how they'd evicted him from his NUM subsidised property because he hadn't paid the rent (this, after receiving very little strike pay, was hardly surprising). He said he'd always had rucks with the Union bureaucrats. I got the impression they had picked on him because he*

was a single miner - they wouldn't have been so brutal with a family. I asked about the schoolkids and the pickets told me that during that day the kids had come out on strike again and had "played hide and seek with the cops as they chased them up and down the High Street". I gave out the Misery of Unions' leaflet that follows this brief account, but didn't discuss it. They were very friendly and invited me into the social club where we chatted about this and that, though I still felt a bit awkward. Just before I left, I handed the guy who'd been evicted a text on the riots of less than 3 years previously - "Like A Summer With A Thousand Julys", very briefly explaining its contents. He gave me a suspicious look as if he thought of me as some member of a political group. Nevertheless, this friendliness was a nice contrast to the mentality of the 70s, when often a narrow corporatist mentality prevailed - often if you approached a picket line, you'd be ignored or referred to the shop steward. Here, the miners, despite an understandable wariness of what they saw as politically-motivated outsiders, were pretty open to strangers. And this, despite the title of my text. A few radicals assumed that the miners would be similar to their experience of other strikers in the 70s - keeping their distance, stand-offish, corporatist. And they used this experience, along with not wanting to be considered Leftists, or as interventionists', as a pretext for not really getting involved, a pretext for them keeping their distance, as a pretext for not testing themselves and their ideas in a more concrete social movement - not testing them in a situation where their ideas and desires could begin to be recognised according to their historical effect. Reality is something that has to be constantly tested - one can never assume that past experience will be repeated. Sure, going along to a situation as an outsider' is a minefield of presumptions, expectations and pretensions, but what the hell! - a guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do. Undoubtedly it's a bit awkward, particularly at first - but then so is talking to someone you fancy. And when people are starting to move - that's the best time you want your hate for this society to connect to what's going on"

The following is the leaflet minus a few ads' for other texts and the mention of a future publication which never materialised. Some of it also appeared later in - "Miner Conflicts - Major Contradictions" - which we've cut out here:

## THE MISERY OF UNIONS:

### **A Recent Example Of Class Consciousness In Struggle: Barcelona 1979.**

The class struggle in Britain, despite its' ferocity - particularly up until 1981, has so far not produced any theoretical clarity from the insurgents which could help to extend and communicate the critique the masses of individuals have often so well expressed in acts (particularly in the riots and, to a lesser extent, the Winter Of Discontent). So far there have been no instances of a genuinely collective theoretical creation that can stand comparison with the assembly statutes of the Barcelona dockers in strikes from 79 on. Being a popular assembly, people from outside, including foreigners, were given the right to speak and enter (more recently in Spain, there have been joint assemblies of employed and unemployed). What finally emerged was a revolutionary tract going beyond trade unionism and dealing with the wider realities of class. The only comparable instances here, at least on the level of *practice*, though not on the level of *explicit consciousness*, have been the occupations of Plesseys' in South West Scotland and the Fisher Bendix factory in Liverpool in 72. Following the example of Plesseys', the workers of Fisher Bendix created an open assembly ("our struggle is your struggle") where wives, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cats, dogs, and lovers could come along and have their say. But it also remained a Liverpool family affair, and it's hard to know whether foreign revolutionaries distributing anti-capitalist ideas would have been welcome or not. Certainly none of them produced any of their *own* theoretical perspectives, unlike in Barcelona. Since lack of clarity could mean the destruction of the planet, and certainly means the *living* death of all of us, it feels like a minimum contribution to produce the following extracts from a tract produced collectively in the docks of Barcelona in 1979. The strike from which it emerged came after several years of wildcat strikes, riots, occupations and mass assemblies in various parts of Spain in the period after Francos' death. It was written by revocable delegates, elected by the mass assembly of the docks, and presented for debate at a congress of

assemblies and their delegates. Copies of it were also sent to dockers in Rotterdam and Liverpool, though in Spanish, not in Dutch or English. More recently, Barcelona dockers have been in contact with wildcat dockworkers on strike in Denmark, as well as, it seems, the dockworkers here, though the precise details of this struggle I have no information on. Nevertheless, it seems that - even if the marginals are largely isolated, the workers, at least, are starting to confront the power of the international commodity economy *internationally*.

Translating these extracts does not imply total agreement with every aspect of its' positions, many of which have been superceded by events anyway (e.g. limiting the membership to wage-earners; the tendency towards an assemblyist ideology which fetishises democratic form the more the class struggle retreats, where form substitutes for developing individual and class initiative).

The following is an extract from the first english translation of the text, the whole of which is available from: B.M.Combustion, London WC1N 3XX (full address). Send S.A.E. and ask for the text "Our Organisation".

"...The decision of the Assembly of the dockers of Barcelona was to create an organisation where all the power of decision remained always in the hands of the Assembly: Unitary, of the Class, Autonomous, Independent, Democratic and Self-Organised.

Unitary: because it tends to unite all of the dockers of the port of Barcelona, independent from their political, religious, cultural, etc. opinions.

Of the Class: because all its' members have to be wage-earners, and for this reason belong to the working class, and consequently antagonistic to capital. Their demands won't remain reduced to the economic level, without also being social in the widest sense, up to the elimination of exploitation of man by man, and the alienation of work for capital.

Autonomous: because it will be the workers themselves who will decide the aims to pursue, which means to consider and employ the methods needed to regain possession of their lives.

Independent: because it is not, nor will not be, subordinated to any political party, nor to any union or ecclesiastic organisation, nor to any other kind - neither to the Public Administration, nor to the State. It will be allowed to contact union groups that are representative of the working class, always given that they show mutual respect for the principles of *Liberty, Autonomy, internal Democracy and Independence*.

Democratically Self-Organised: because it will be the workers themselves who determine the organisation and organs it has to have. In the same way, their representatives will be elected amongst and by its members, necessarily dockers, who will also be freely revoked whenever the majority of those they represent consider it necessary. In accordance with the forementioned, we will take care to avoid all bureaucracy, not being able to allow those who occupy bureaucratic positions without being a docker, to vote on any question, decision or problem. Our way of functioning during these three years has been a struggle for loyalty to these principles. As an organic form of functioning we have maintained: a General Assembly every two months; an assembly of the 24 delegates at least every week; two elections to the committee of delegates; absolute lack of bureaucracy between the delegates and distribution of the function: necessary to accomplish the administering of tasks; continual information to the Assembly of the measures taken; a bulletin of information for the free expression of all the dockers.

We were confronted with serious problems in our practice:

(a) The lack of class consciousness. The degree of integration into the present-day society of consumption that had been reached. The ideological vacuum which we suffered from and the internalisation of bourgeois legality.

(b) The problem of facing a difficult epoch of crisis and political change where all the forces of the Left showed themselves interested in helping Capital overcome its' difficult situation.

(c) Constant attacks by the bosses of the docks in order to obtain a change in our organisation of work such as to permit: a superior level of manipulation which would realise their profits; a greater authority over manual workers; an extension of privatisation, favouring the installations and trade of the docks.

(d) There were hardly any organisations like ours which would give us better support and

mutual encouragement. By means of the democratic illusion we have in some ways suffered the surrender and desire for pacification which developed the large unions and has put the workers struggle into retreat. This reduces the possibilities of co-ordination and the inter-change and solidarity of the struggle. (e) The continual attack on the part of the State and the bosses towards all the minority, assemblyist, autonomous organisations. This attack we have also shared with the CNT (the anarchist union), which, nevertheless, did not stop them from being seduced by the siren songs of the Grand Negotiations, the offers of participation, the promises which come from on high.

(f) And that which has been the gravest of all - the continuous attack launched principally by the central unions - the CC.OO (communists) and the UGT (socialists). They have not grasped the decomposition suffered by such an important sector as are the ports for the economy of the country. Let's not forget that the ports could play an important function of pressure within the political-economic framework of the country in relation to the internal repercussions and the international response that the actions within them could have. It is for this reason that the political realists understand that it's a sector which should not be left in the hands of anybody and which they are interested in dominating to support their politics.

Their efforts have been continually directed at hindering all success in the struggle and all collective negotiation in the ports. Questioning the validity of representation directed from the base by committees of delegates, they proposed themselves as the sole valid expression and representation of the whole of the working class of the country by the fact of being majority central unions, even though the extent of their presence in the docks is minimal, a fact that has led them to be constantly defeated in their intentions. The systematic use of the means of publicity, which in this epoch, that calls itself democratic, already dominates to a vast extent, boycotted all our information and attacked us mercilessly as if we were to be treated as enemies of the class.

Without doubt, the principal theme of their attack has been to define us as cowards and craftsmen. Without wanting here to enter into our defence, it is worth us simply stating that it is in our constant struggles, in the radicality of our methods, of our achievements in struggle and difficulties we've met against the pacts and surrenders to the bosses, in the supportive solidarity of other comrades and sectors of the class to the extent that that was possible for us in each situation, in the critical capacity of our analysis of the capitalist organisation of society, etc. - it is in these which, in truth, we are: our definition and defence is in our movement, in our actions, in our daily practice. And this is public and daily and in the service of the whole of the working class - and it is from them that we await the verdict, and not from the politicians with opinions and ideological systems mediated by external interests.'

\* \* \*

**ARBEIT MACHT FREI**



Inscription at the gate of Auschwitz: "Work Makes You Free"

*"We haven't had fascism in this country because...the trade union movement has done what in Italy & Germany had to be done by the police force." - Peregrine Worsthorne, Tory assistant editor of The Sunday Telegraph, in a TV interview on 11th May 1980.*

Trade Unionism is a deadweight habit from the past whose only aim is to maintain an image of opposition in order to prevent *real* opposition. At best' the Union defends (more often merely *pretends* to defend) the interests of the wage slaves as *wage slaves*. Thus even the most extreme' unionists function as cops: e.g. Derek Red Robbo' Robinson complained after he had been sacked by British Leylands' boss, "I have solved more strikes in BL than Sir Michael Edwardes has provoked and that's saying something". In the 60s over 90% of strikes were wildcat, outside of the Unions' initiative. But in failing to develop openly the critique of commodity production inherent in their practice by the 70s the vast majority of strikes, being official strikes, became associated with Trade Unions, who took on the image of protecting workers' interests. Even in the Winter Of Discontent, when strikers had become "free collective vandals" (Callaghan) and the bourgeoisie complained of the truckdrivers "taking managerial decisions" (Sunday Telegraph), these striking workers pretended they could merely use' the unions, and go beyond them when they wished, which they sometimes did. The workers' initiatives against the circulation of commodities were represented as "the fault of the *unions*", who were blamed for not being *efficient* cops. The defeat of capitalisms' Social Contract reinforced Trade Unionism as the *apparent* enemy of the dominant class, and thus became ideal as Thatchers' bogey. And if proletarians seem to be on the retreat, it's in part because most of them have rarely seen the Unions for what they are: pimps negotiating the rate at which you get screwed.

*There followed a paragraph on 1926 and the difference between then and what was at stake in this strike, which was used later on in - "Miner Conflicts - Major*

Contradictions”.

Part of this text, part of the bit of the Barcelona dockers statute, was reproduced, under pressure from independent French comrades, after the strike in the paper of the miners' national Rank and File organisation, but it was in a censored form.

It should be pointed out that assemblies by no means automatically imply that people determine their own struggle. The dockers assembly ended up eventually - in the late 80s or early 90s - as a kind of base union, negotiating redundancies, but even before that it had become too much a reference point - a friend of mine went to the assembly in the mid-80s and asked a woman there some questions about the struggle, what was going on - and she had nothing to say but, “*go to the assembly - ask them*”, rather like some people on strike will refer you to the local shop steward because they don't have an opinion or because they're suspicious of outsiders. Nevertheless, towards the end of the miners strike, the dockers assembly in Barcelona put out a call to all dockers throughout the world to refuse to handle any coal for Britain. If the strike had continued beyond a year, this international support might very well have been significant. But unfortunately it came too late in the strike. Should some situation reminiscent of the miners strike ever arise again in this world, people internationally are going to have to move quicker, recognise what they can do and spread the struggle to their own terrain, but quickly. Though the internet provides a technological base for such a project, the internet is a double-edged sword, and States throughout the world are watching how it could be used against them and planning counter-attacks (particularly in the form of simple shutdowns of particular sites - which they tried to do with a section of the Indymedia - but also viruses etc.). Plus at the same time, people have so got used to isolation and sitting in front of a computer that merely informing people of what is happening in XYZ country on the internet doesn't mean people will recognise what they have in common with such people and what they could do to struggle with them outside of just putting something else on the internet.

For some analysis of the assembly form, see the section on the Zapatistas in - “You Make Plans - We Make History” ([http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page\\_id=453](http://dialectical-delinquents.com/?page_id=453))

\* \* \*

## **Chapter 12:**

### **May - June 1984**

.....More imaginative actions...Orgreave...  
...Central London comes to halt...Maltby riot...shops looted...

May 4<sup>th</sup> Bogside colliery in Scotland became unserviceable because of subsidence and flooding. On the motorway from Port Talbot to Ravenscraig, the cops escorted a lorry convoy very fast, but pickets still managed to smash quite a few of them up using the overhead bridges as vantage points.

In Notts, some strikers' wives convinced some of the wives of scabs to go on strike against housework.

In Mexborough, Yorkshire, following the banning of spikey punk hair and clothes kids wrecked part of their school and then came out on strike in solidarity with the miners. In a village in Fyfe,

schookids decided, independent of any outside suggestion, to go out after school to march in support of the miners and stop scab coke lorries getting through to Ravenscraig. They were stopped by the cops but the initiative was taken up by the old age pensioners of the village who, both men and women, harranged and battered on the lorries to such an extent that the next day several drivers reported to their ' haulage firms that they felt too ashamed to continue delivery of scab coke.

May 7<sup>th</sup>: striking miners from Markham, Derbyshire, cut through an 11,000 volt cable, cutting off supplies to the Oxcroft disposal plant near Bolsover and the nearby village of Clowne. The cable was cut open with a saw and acid poured onto the inner plastic cores before it was short-circuited with a screwdriver. Not recommended to amateurs. Some people were badly damaged sabotaging electric cables etc. during the strike.

Late May at Bentley (Yorkshire) concrete blocks were thrown into the cage and chimneys were destroyed. At Silverdale (Staffs) the pit cables were cut. At Harworth (Notts) pit offices were ransacked. At Betteshanger (Kent) 8 pickets held and blocked the bottom of the pit.



Orgreave cops against miners

Late May to June saw the calling of a union mass picket at Orgreave Coking plant, which was to be the scene of more encouraging actions: there the rioting got out of the control of the Union, partly because it spread out onto open ground, thus immediately superseding the cliched push n shove ritual confrontation so beloved of Leftists. A telegraph pole was used by the strikers to roll down the hill on the advancing cops. The same use was made of a burning wagon. Barricades were erected and set alight. "Pickets" would attack the cops in small groups from the rear. Lamposts were uprooted and walls pulled down for ammunition. There was, without doubt, a momentary practical breakthrough away from the ritualised spectacles of picketting. Given the fact that the cops knew perfectly well where "surprise" pickets were going (they'd bugged the NUM phones, after all), pickets were very often very contained. What's wierd is that throughout the strike branch secretaries would continue mentioning things on the phone even though it was obvious the phones were tapped. A few places had a rota of different strikers phones being used - helping by-pass the cop and MI6 buggers. Even better - a few used no phones at all, using a rota of different organising groups to reduce the possibility of leaks - later done by some of the hit squads. Why this was very rarely done for picketting can only be put down to the NUM s mania for maintaining control. And permanent control of phones is the compulsion of bureaucrats; in many uprisings the phone exchange buildings prove to be a vital centre of conflict (in May 1937 in Barcelona, for example).

Orgreave (May to June '84) was intended to be the miners ' Waterloo. Pickets physically prevented from going to Notts were positively encouraged by the police lines to go to Orgreave. Awaiting the pickets were 6000 cops intending to escort the highly paid scab lorry drivers. The cops marched military-style up and down the long straight road past the coking plant, bringing with them a retinue of cavalry, ferocious dogs and vans full of armour and weaponry.



England's green and pleasant land: Orgreave 1984

The media too played its part: footage on the BBC News showed miners setting fire to a shed requisitioned by the cops followed by the cops charging in retaliation. As always, the reality was the reverse of the image: it was the cops who baton-charged up till then peaceful pickets, and the miners who retaliated by burning down the shed, the BBC just swapping the video sequence. But, to show some pretension to balance, towards the end of the Battle of Orgreave, they *did* show footage of a cop repeatedly hitting a miner who was on the ground on the head with his truncheon, about the only cop violence they did show; the cop in charge justified this savagery with the words, "*That picket could have had a knife on him*". Given the general recognition by strikers that the media was an arm of the State, there should have been a boycott of the media - a refusal to give interviews as a clear public statement that the media was part of the enemy. Although physical attacks on the media were a fairly common part of the struggle, this was contradicted by the fact that loads of NUM officials as well as miners who had no official status continued to politely talk to their would-be executioners. When I suggested a media boycott to an NUM branch secretary he said, "*But then we'd never get our ideas across.*" On the contrary - the idea that the media are part of the forces that have to be opposed would have been clearly got across to those willing to listen, whereas some people talking to them whilst others were rightly attacking them just communicated confusion. But behind this attitude was simply the flattery some people get from their 15 minutes (or whatever) of fame. As one Derby miner said, "*Scargill's vain...a peacock - hates to go anywhere there's no cameras.*"

But what began for the Government as an exercise for the National Riot Force in humiliating the strikers ended in the government not really winning a clear victory. For one thing, in the middle of June British Steel suspended the lorry convoys. But sadly not for long. And word got round to an increasing section of the UK population about the viciousness of the cops, which meant the government had partly lost the propaganda war.

However, unlike at Saltley in '72, the Coking Depot was not closed down. Partly because, unlike at Saltley, no-one went round the workers of the nearest major town - Sheffield, just up the road - to demand that workers practically recognise themselves in the miners strike and down tools to come down to Orgreave, or better still, do



something independantly. Scargill, domesticated by media attention, fetishised this media and contented himself with making an appeal on TV - hardly a substitute for one-to-one contact, hardly a substitute for offensive solidarity. And even those who were critical of Scargill didn't want to see the difference between talking on telly and speaking to workers directly. And Scargill maintained his image of credibility - he claimed to have been pushed to the ground by the cops. In fact, as he admitted about 16 years later, he lost his footing on the sloping field and slipped. This was the occasion for a top cop at Orgreave to bemoan with self-righteous indignation, *"It's the lies that get me."* This said whilst constant statements were made that the cops were only responding to the violence of the miners. Which is not to justify Scargill's pointless lie intended to make him look like a victim just like everybody else. However, it's true The Great Leader did get arrested. One radical Yorkshire miner and his wife were not so taken in by this image of credibility: "Scargill goes down to Orgreave in his chauffeur-driven car, gets himself arrested, and has his chauffeur pick him up at the police station."

*"There weren't many arrests at the time. People got arrested when they went to hospital. One lad was surrounded by horses and beaten to the ground. I tried to talk him into going to hospital. But when we got there we were told not to go in - they were arresting injured miners."* - another miner at Orgreave.

Undated: Some miners poured a mixture of oil and gloss paint onto the convoy from Orgreave as it was passing under a motorway bridge. The aim was to black out the windscreen of one of the lorries - they missed but caused a number of police motor bikes - outriders who escorted the convoy and radioed to other cops to nick any stonethrowers, etc. - to skid and fall over.

Also undated: Knottingly Town Hall Notice board spray-painted with "Police Scum, Police Filth, Fuck off Kinnock." (Kinnock, fearing the prospect of having to ride the tiger of a victorious miners strike, or - just as bad - be toppled from his leadership of the Labour Party if they won, had made his reluctance to support the strike very clear, if muted - *"Lions led by donkeys"* was his recuperative put-down of the strike, though he was always careful to support the ordinary' miner and certainly pretended to support the strike).

Many miners were arrested in Notts for simply distributing "The Miner", the NUM rag, through people's doors. Likewise, throughout the strike, many people collecting money for the miners were arrested &/or had their collection boxes confiscated.

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, at the height of the battle of Orgreave, there was an interesting miners support demo in central London. The following is an eyewitness account:

*"Central London came to a standstill on June 7<sup>th</sup> '84 as the various battles at Orgreave started getting underway. Channel 4 (Strike: When Britain Went To War', Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2004 shows a traditional pro-miners strike demo strolling down Fleet Street with a voiceover saying "Central London came to a standstill". This was true but, inevitably, banal, and made it look like any other big demo - say, the anti-Iraqi war ones of 2003. What happened was a little different from most demos. For a start, the demo wasn't that big - 10 to 15,000 It started off from Kings Cross, rather boring amid the usual paper sellers, me with a couple of comrade-friends, and a little bag of scurrilous badly stenciled but readable double-sided A6 size leaflets, small, crammed full with meaning and to the point (such modesty!):*

Next to a picture of cop with a skull for a face and a £ sign on his helmet:

Bollocks to false choices!

Work or Dole, Left or Right, Unions or Bosses - We're getting burnt - burn 'em back!

Smash wage slavery! Smash the commodity economy! Smash hierarchy! Smash the show!

Picture of Molotov cocktail burning.

Victory to the rioters of Orgreave, Mansfield, Caen, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Morocco, Tunisia, Hong Kong, Gdansk, Miami, Toxteth, Brixton, Amsterdam, Berlin, Zurich, Soweto,

etc.etc.etc.etc.etc!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Destroy capitalism before it destroys us!!!.....for the end of alienation, for the beginning of conscious history!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
On the other side were 2 newspaper cuttings, one from the Daily Mirror, Monday May 21<sup>st</sup> 1984:

# Police sell bus to the pickets

Striking miners have tricked police into selling them a bus. Officers thought it was meant for a group of pensioners. They even had a whip-round to pay the road tax. But miners made a deal with the old folk at St.Helens, Merseyside. They agreed to pay £1000 for the bus - and give it to the pensioners AFTER the strike was over. The bus was waved through police lines at Parkside Colliery, Merseyside, by officers who thought the pickets on board were their own reinforcements.

Then:

The latest car sticker: **MINERS DO IT WITH TELEGRAPH POLES.**

( a reference to the previously mentioned incident at Orgreave when striking miners used a big telegraph pole to attack the cops)

A cutting from the Times, July '81 -

## 2000 Hurt in Job Training

More than 2000 young people are injured each year in accidents while working in the Government's Youth Opportunities Programme for the Unemployed. In the 12 months to June the accidents included five deaths and 25 amputations and now the special programmes board of the Manpower Services Commission is to seek advice from the Health and Safety Executive.

And next to that:

The Right To Work = The Right to be humiliated, to be exploited; the right to be forced to sell our activity in order to buy our means of survival from a system which insults, isolates and lies to us without end; the right to produce surplus value to maintain the accumulation of commodities & of commodity relations. The right' to be reduced to the absolute margins of existence - with or without work, food or video recorders - is the only right' capitalism grants to the vast majority. The choice is simple: death to the world market and it's guard-dogs - or else *our* death - slow or quick.

\* \* \*

Short but sweet.....and sour.

*I gave out a few of these but not many - it felt like I was competing with the SWerps or with Militant, so I mostly left them in the bag. I walked along the demo with a can of beer, losing my friends but chatting a bit, a bit awkwardly, with people on the demo, partly about Orgreave. We walked from Kings Cross up Grays Inn Road, towards the end, near Theobalds Road, when there was a tussle with the cops; they were trying to nick some oldish (50s - my age now) miner, and slapping him around a bit, and demonstrators were trying to stop them. I chucked what was left of my can of beer at the cops and from what seemed like nowhere, a snatch squad of three or four grabbed me; I dropped my bag with the leaflets, clung like fuck onto a lamppost whilst struggling with the rest of my body but they still managed to get me and I was pushed, my arms in a twist, into a building for traffic wardens. Amazingly, they didn't thump me, even when I asked the arresting cop, "What does it feel like - sitting on a volcano?", to which he remained silent, which was his right. I was then shunted in a van off with a couple of other blokes who'd been nicked to a police station near Covent Garden, where the cops, surprisingly hurriedly - in 70 minutes or less, went through a bureaucratic procedure that would normally take at the very least 4 hours for 4 blokes- we weren't even put in the cells, and they didn't have*

time to verify names and addresses. The arresting cop, who was taking down my details, said something like, "We've been reasonable with you haven't we - not as bad as you people who are always against things think we are - we haven't beaten you up". One bearded miner, when asked his age, said, "You can't charge me - I'm only 13 - I'm under the age of criminal responsibility." Normally cops, when they release you under your own surety, just put you into the street, but these decided to put us in a van and when we asked, after a minute of driving, what they were going to do with us, they said, "We've got to take you back to where you were arrested." One miner says, "They're taking us somewhere so they can torture us". We notice the traffic outside is completely blocked and that they're cops on motorbikes up ahead clearing the traffic to make a path for us to get through. And as we turn from Southampton Row into Theobalds Road the whole of Theobalds Road is blocked with cops across the road and cops on horses lining it all the half mile or so up to Grays Inn Road, with hundreds of them surrounding the main police station there, and demonstrators mingling around, with a couple of buses stopped in the middle of the road. As we got out the cop van the crowd cheers, a brass band strikes up something or other and men rush to carry the released miners on their shoulders, followed by loads of cameras. I duck and dive out of the way, totally paranoid of the cameras, and run back to the lamppost where my bag of scurrilous leaflets remains, untouched. As I pick it up I bump into a friend. I tell him what's just happened. "Oh - so London stopped for **you** Apparently the miners had gone up to the bus drivers and told them that they were forming a picket line because miners had been nicked and one old miner had been beaten up, so the bus drivers stopped because they didn't want to cross picket lines. Can you imagine such solidarity today? (well, it could happen - but it would require more intimidation and probably more violence against the cops who are psychotically super-confident and always raring for a punch-up; nowadays a few blokes outside a pub on a Saturday night, chucking a couple of glasses into the road, can get an instant response by the riot squad dressed in all their gear, shields ready along with all their other new equipment). The whole of London at a standstill for almost 2 hours in mid-week - it was a great feeling. And it was just a third of the demo - about 4000, the rest having marched on before the tussle with the cops. Compare this with the demo of 250,000 against the decimation of the pits in 1992 when nothing happened. It shows what people can do when there's a movement of solidarity, confidence and practical hope in the air."

On the previously mentioned Channel 4 programme mentioned at the start of the above eyewitness account (January 24<sup>th</sup> 2004) a striking miner said about the demo: "You can't lose when you see that many people walking up road - I mean they absolutely stopped London...How can you lose? - I thought - you can 't lose this" Yet they **did** lose, and we lost with them. Nevertheless, it was touch and go - so near yet so far. But more about that later.[9b]

Also on this day, June 7<sup>th</sup>, railwaymen at Charing Cross spontaneously went on strike after the arrest and assault of a driver, and also because railwaymen had seen the police brutality outside the Shell building that day - as far as we know, the first post war instance of a wildcat over police brutality. Cunningly manipulative as ever, LBC, the London phone-in radio station, invented the ridiculous idea that miners were embarrassed by this inspiring example of class solidarity. Whether this ideological divide and rule tactic had the desired effect of railwaymen mistrusting miners, though, is unlikely.

Some time this month (no date), 25 windows were smashed in the pit shower block and four scab cars in the car park at Harworth pit, North Notts, had their tyres slashed and windscreens smashed.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> at Maltby, 200 miners linked up with local youth to attack the police station, to loot and wreck some of the shops refusing to give credit. Some also wrecked shops that were giving credit [10]. It happened over two week-ends running. Several cops were injured, including the police chief. On the third week-end, local branch officials of the NUM toured the streets to ensure that there was no repetition. Although the Maltby branch secretary, Ron Buck, made the obligatory criticism of the police and their arbitrary arrest policy, he condemned the violence, putting it down to skinheads, some of who were from outside the village, and dissociated the NUM from this violence. This, presumably because of the simplistic popular image of skinheads as fascists (at the time there were a minority of explicitly left-wing skinheads, including a rock band, The Redskins). Although putting the violence in the village down to outsiders, this bureaucrat had to admit that miners had been involved in anti-cop violence in Armthorpe,

Woodlands and Barnsley. Amongst the usual cop brutality, one person arrested was denied insulin for his diabetes, a potentially life-threatening act.

On June 27<sup>th</sup> the Yorkshire NCB offices in Doncaster were attacked by more than a thousand miners. NCB employees were forced to shelter for a bit in the local police station after bricks, stones, eggs and bottles were thrown at the scab office workers and windows smashed. This was a successful surprise attack - the cops having been diverted to Scunthorpe, where 25 police units faced just 9 peaceful pickets (one suspects that this was down to an intelligent diversion of phone tapping - deliberately misleading the cops). Also on June 27<sup>th</sup>, pickets ambushed a convoy of scab buses and cars heading for Shirebrook colliery in Derbyshire, about half a mile from the pit gates. Two pickets were hit by a mini-bus. A scab leader's car was jostled and kicked. The NCB claimed that the number of scabs was over 500 in Derbyshire - the true figure was just over 100 out of 10,500. As the handful of scabs were bused out of the pit, a line of cops three-quarters of a mile long stood on either side of the road, whilst the mini-buses carrying the scabs had been fitted with grilles and the drivers wore crash helmets.

## Chapter 13

"Miner Conflicts - Major Contradictions" - was published 4 months after the start of the miners strike 1984-5, at the start of July 1984, with the aim of influencing discussions and events. Whether it did so or not - at least in any significant way - is another matter - though it certainly contributed to the subversive atmosphere of that time. Although there is some overlap of facts with the rest of this long history, there are plenty of facts that appear in the rest of "So Near - So Far" that do not appear in "Miner Conflicts...", and a few facts that appear in "Miner Conflicts..." that don't appear in "So Near - So Far".

# miner conflicts - major contradictions

Published beginning July 1984

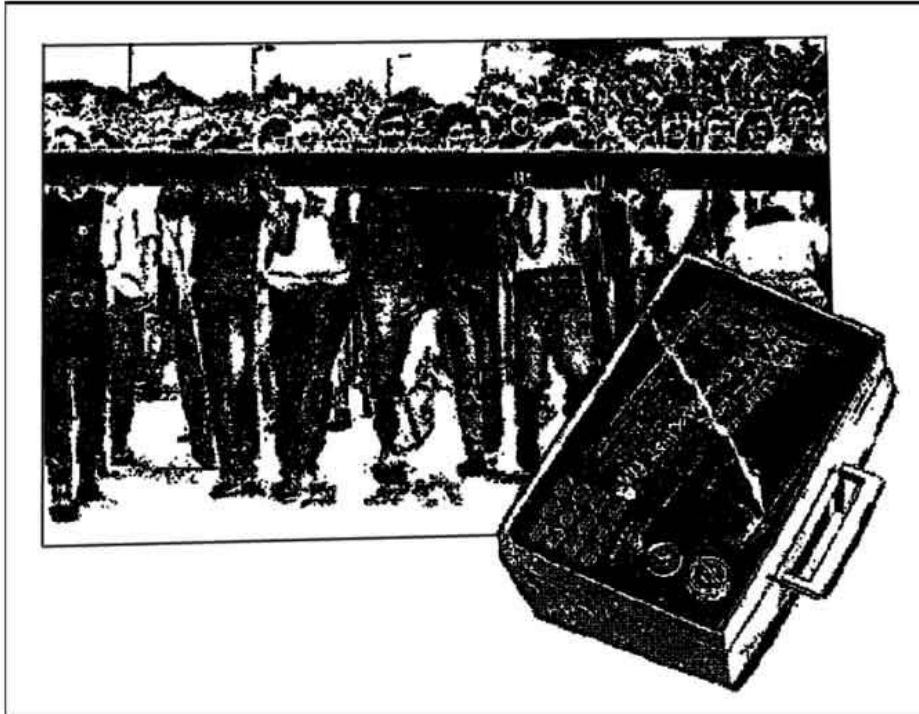
**The ruler's greatest fear is coming true: despite all the humiliations the ruling show can think up, the most active section of the striking miners are beginning to prefer life on strike to life at work.....**

**"...the way I look at my TV and video is that if they got burnt I wouldn't lose a moment's sleep....It's when your backs are against the wall and how you react that matters"**

**- Keith Boyes, Maltby miner.**

Not at the Margins of What is Collapsing

Not at the Margins of What is Falling  
But at the Centre of What is Unifying  
At the Centre of What is Rising



*Bad reproduction of picture on the cover: miners carrying a telegraph pole ready to roll down towards cops at Orgreave, juxtaposed with upside down broken telly with "Keep things as they are: Vote for the Sado-Masochist Party" graffiti as image on screen.*

"It's a mucky awful job...(but)...I'm angry because of the threat...of losing the community" - Kent miner on BBC 2.

The dominant image of the lives of striking miners and their communities is one of misery, of sacrifice, of demoralisation: selling precious' heirlooms, having to return their rented videos, "reduced" to eating in soup kitchens, husbands and wives falling out because of the pressures. Contrary to this contemptuous (and contemptible) misrepresentation, mining communities, and those who identify with the struggle, are actually beginning to discover real life outside and against the commodity-spectacle. Despite all the arrests, the beatings, the killing of two miners by scabs, the media bullshit, the relative poverty, and all the other humiliations, strikers are beginning to discover the joy and dignity of solidarity and struggle. Compared with the new experiences of the most active sectors of the strikers, even a victorious conclusion to the strike, followed by a return to normal work, would be a depressing anti-climax. Compared with the 21 months of demoralisation following the Falklands massacre, the miners' strike is already a victory, however partial.

## SOME VICTORIES

1. The growing confidence of increasing numbers of wage slaves to push for their own demands, however reformist.
2. The increasing sense of solidarity. Three examples:(a) The development of international blacking,' in particular, the blacking of imports and exports of coal from and to the UK by dockers and seamen in Australia and New Zealand.(b) When 4 men 3 of them miners, were arrested at Grays Inn Rd. on the miners' demo on June 7th, a third of the demonstration -about 4 thousand or more, including a large brass band -stopped and refused to budge until they were released 1 and a half hours later. This brought much of the area to a complete standstill, since the buses refused "to cross picket lines".(c) Also on June 7th, railway men at Charing X spontaneously went out on strike after the arrest and assault of a driver, and also because railway men had seen the police brutality outside the Shell building that day. This is the first instance since the war of a wildcat strike over police brutality. Cunningly manipulative as ever, LBC invented the idea that the miners were "embarrassed" by this inspiring example of class solidarity.
3. The increasing by-passing of exchange and money relations amongst strikers and their friends. For example, the relatively informal communal allotments springing up, where food is grown and distributed free to those involved, a practical example of the old slogan, "From each according to their ability to each according to their needs".
4. The breaking out of the isolation of single miners which has developed as a result of communal eating, and other ways of living differently.
5. The fact that proletarians are talking to each other a lot more and are generally more hopeful than at any time since the riots of '81. Even many of those husbands and wives for whom the strike has emphasised conflicts that already existed and have thus broken up, have discovered they prefer to develop new relationships than continue petrified ones.
6. The development of self-managed schooling, without specialist teachers, in Wales, because families can no longer afford the cost of school buses. A more profound critique of mis-education is shown by the riots of schoolkids in mining areas. In Edlington kids came out on strike in support of the miners. Teachers called the cops to push them back into school. This didn't stop the kids coming out again the next day and playing hide and seek with the cops as they chased them up and down the High Street. In Mexborough, kids rioted and smashed up the some of the school over the banning of punk clothes and hair .Then they all decided to come out on strike in support of the miners. In a village in Fyfe, schoolkids decided, on their own, to go off after school and march to stop scab coke lorries travelling through to get to Ravenscraig. They were stopped by the cops. But the initiative was taken up by old age pensioners, both men and women, who harangued and battered on the lorries to such an extent that the next day several drivers reported to their' haulage firms that they felt too ashamed to continue delivery of scab coke.
7. The increasing initiatives to occupy NCB property, and even NUM property dominated by Right Wing scab stewards. The increasing tendency to not take policeviolence and intimidation without a riot - e.g. in Maltby, or at Orgreave.

The Family:

First Factory Of Alienation,

First Factory Of The Alienation of Men From Men,  
Men From Women,

Women From Women.

The  
The  
Of  
Of

8. The massive autonomous involvement of women in the strike, often presented by the media as heroic, but though "one's heart goes out to them" they seem a little "too bitter, over-emotional, and not really rational like the working miner's wives... not really feminine", as doubtless many passive spectators would patronisingly put it. Unfortunately, too many of the women in mining areas have not gone beyond the traditional nurturing feminine role in the strike: sure, a few get nicked on picket lines - but few have gone beyond the non-violent image of women pushed by the sacrificial feminists at Greenham (the women who threw egg at the Maggot this June are the exceptions that hopefully will prove to be the rule). Shortly before her murder by the State, at the combined hands of the fascists and the no lesser thugs of the 1919 German equivalent of Kinnock, Benn & Hattersley - Noske, Scheidemann & Ebert ("Socialism means working a lot"), Rosa Luxemburg stated "The worst mistakes of the masses are far more useful than the very best correct lines of the very best of Central Committees". Applied to the relations between men and women today, "The worst initiatives of men & women in their struggle to determine their lives against hierarchy are far richer than the very best correct' roles developed by the very best feminist &/or syndicalist &/or leftist ideologies.

During this strike conflicts become collective and public, which is progress of some sort: that arguments -over who does the organising of food, who looks after the kids, who does the cleaning, and who goes on the picket lines, over resentment towards the classical masculine insensitivity of some of the miners in their silly chant, "Get Yer Tits Out For The Lads!" -that these basic inequalities and contradictions have become openly discussed is a beginning. But solidarity and common struggle has yet to arrive at anything much more than a one-way unity, with women providing harmony and continuity & support without getting any reciprocal encouragement from men, at least not without a big up-hill struggle. Even if their collectively doing the cleaning and cooking is more fun than doing it on their own at home, listening to Jimmy Young, Brian Hayes, John Peel or whatever, despite the inadequacies of this amelioration of the division of labour, there are still, at the moment, far too few women in the strike demanding that men be far more willing to share these activities, whilst the women go off and fight on the picket lines (like in the mining strikes in Harlan County, USA, in the 1970s).

The fact that in the summer of 1981, women here were seen in the riots fighting, in however relatively proportionally smaller numbers, alongside men was a memory the spectacle of Greenham Common came to repress. In those July '81 days, women often got genuine warmth and comradely recognition in the streets, even if by August the usual sexist crap was back to normal. The temporary defeat of a common enemy -in '81, the cops -develops men and womens' consciousness of their real unity, their strength & sensitivity, & always wipes out the most superficial hierarchies between men & women, which has been manipulated by ruling morality in order to divide and rule, fragment, isolate and repress. The defeat of the cops on the streets helps to defeat the cops in our heads: in Brixton April 1981, gays fought alongside straights', blacks alongside whites, men alongside women... It is *this unity* that neither misogynist macho-stereotypes nor feminist stereo-type-casters ever talk about because it would mean the end of their perfectionist' models of human behaviour: if revolution also means a process of de-conditioning it must also imply that the revolt against the separation of men and women can only be developed by *historical decisions*, by individual and group *interventions against habitual contradictions*. The most habitual separation is that between politics and the critique of everyday life, to the point whereby most men know how to formulate this separation but are going to have to be given a kick up the bum if they are to go beyond simply clever formulations'.

9. The pleasure of inventing methods of avoiding the police blockades, having to use the imagination adventurously.

**DAILY MIRROR,**  
**Monday, May 21, 1984**

## POLICE SELL BUS TO THE PICKET

Striking miners have tricked police into selling them a bus. Officers thought it was meant for a group of pensioners. They even had a whip-round to pay the road tax. But miners had made a deal with the old folk at St. Helens, Merseyside. they agreed to £1,000 for the bus - and give it to the pensioners AFTER the strike is over. The bus was waved through picket lines at Parkside colliery, Merseyside, by officers who thought the pickets on board were their own reinforcements.

Despite all this it would be uselessly optimistic to understate the enormity of the problems and contradictions involved in this struggle.

The conflict between miners and miners pumped up by the monologues of the media and maintained by the cop's prevention of communication between striking miners and working miners, is a conflict in miniature of a global conflict, and the conflict within the lives of each proletarianised individual: the conflict between the perspective of resignation, of life reduced to each against all, of life reduced to survivalism, -and the perspective of class struggle, of the dignity of individuals against all that insults them, of the movement towards community.

Partly because of the confusion and insufficient explicitness on the part of striking miners about what is involved in this struggle, the working miners who epitomise the perspective of petrified impotence, seem to have a monopoly of "reasons" for running scared across the picket lines. The working miner has all the reasonable lies of the commodity economy on his side: he knows that £1,000 for every year worked isn't bad compensation for having slaved his guts out to be able to consume the videos and three-piece suites of his choice. The cynical dreariness and hierarchical security' of an isolated family life', filled with all the sleep-inducing consolations that bureaucratically manipulated bonus schemes can buy, seems almost natural' to those who see their own narrow immediate interest as separate from their class interest. It is not merely the cops and ruling ideology which break up the possibilities of class solidarity: the Notts miners are not victims - they have consciously chosen to accept all the hypocrisies of the State. They know all the media crap about the cops protecting their "Right To Work" (read: Right To Be Exploited) is bullshit, even in it's own terms: it's a "right" their continuing to work is going to take away from thousands of others. They know that all the media crap about "Democracy" (read: the right of each isolated intimidated individual to choose who is going to isolate and intimidate him) is bullshit: when - in 1977 - all the miners voted overwhelmingly against productivity deals, Nottingham area voted separately, and undemocratically, for their own bonus scheme. They know that they too will be the victims of pit closures. Some of them also know that their collaborationist past - the forming of the breakaway boss union in 1929 - didn't stop Notts' miners being sent to prison in 1936 for going on an unofficial stoppage (unofficial strikes had been prohibited under alaw passed in 1927 as a response to the vast unofficial strike which developed the day after the TUC called off the '26 General Strike). Those who choose, with the support of the whole weight of the commodity-spectacle, to reduce their lives to a narrow survivalist notion of their immediate interest obviously regard history, both past and possible future, with equal indifference. For the same reason, it's pointless asserting a simple rationalist argument that if proletarians don't resolve to destroy the commodity economy the exigencies of international competition have an even chance of assuring the survival of hardly anybody - either through nuclear war or through ecological collapse: these possibilities are just as likely to reinforce people's helplessness, which, if accepted, always leads to a mercenary expedient attitude in the present, just as they are likely to incite proletarians to recognise that their own sense of strength and contact in the present can only come from a class conscious attack on the world that constantly threatens them with death and destruction. The working miners have to be



attacked for what they are: not simply as scabs', but as the personification of all those proletarians who, through their resignation and survivalism, support the hierarchical violence of the State and the commodity (that a working miner in Ollerton killed a striking miner, David Jones, with a brick, is the most obvious symptom of this sickness; that a 55 year old miner, Joe Green, who stood to gain over £30,000 redundancy pay, got killed by a scab truck-driver at Ferrybridge, a death belittled by the cops as "a traffic accident", illustrates how sick all the scabs collaborating with the State to break the miner's determination are). Contrary to the advice of the union officials who patronisingly tell "their lads" to cool their anger towards the working miners, anti-hierarchical violence towards those who prefer computer games and dining out to comradeship and friendship, is the only sane response. Those who, by their complicity, support the brutality of the cops and the repressions of the magistrates, the suicidal desperation of much of the unemployed and the mutilations and killings that take place on the Youth Training Schemes, deserve everything they get, and a lot more. This is the most immediate way of confronting those who choose to accept the status quo, who choose to remain indifferent to their own misery, as well as that of others, who choose to pursue an idea of their self-interest isolated from the self-interest of other proletarians. But such a confrontation must also be *theoretically* armed if the struggle is to break the internal coherence of the ideologists of capitalist progress, such as MacGregor or Thatcher: the working miner has all the rationale of the irrational commodity economy on his side, whilst the striking miners have yet to link their immediate struggle to any coherent long-term goal. In fact, Scargill's economic arguments (import controls etc.) are completely incoherent - they merely show how he can speak the rulers language, the language of commodity production and wage labour, in order to hold out the possibility of dialogue with these scum who constantly seek to break up any dialogue amongst the slave class. An *explicitly anti-economic* consciousness has so far not developed. Of course, so long as capitalism continues, the ruling thought which rules the minds and bodies of the masses the world over, maintains the belief that not only is a successful anti-hierarchical revolution impossible, but also that any immediate anti-economic revolt is unrealistic', pointless, pure wishful thinking doomed to defeat. Nowhere is this impotent pessimism contested with anything better than an impotent optimism, at least on the level of ideas. The fact that many union officials' speeches come out with phrases like "defeat is unthinkable", as if they could avoid defeat simply by striking it from their minds, does nothing to undermine the resignation of the pessimist. Those striking miners who recognise that the possibility of defeat, like the possibility of success, is dependant on their own initiatives (e.g. the first flying pickets, which were not controlled by the NUM; the saboteurs of working pits; the organisers of motorway "chaos"; the smashing of TV cameras and general attacks on the media; the wives' boycotts of shops not giving credit, and other forms of solidarity activity done by the women; occupations of various buildings; etc.etc.) have yet to initiate a general questioning of class society which could also challenge all the justifications' for submission. For example, it's purely defensive to reject calls for a national ballot on the basis that no-one has the right to vote other miners out of a job. If the more rebellious proletarians (whether miners or not) don't initiate some real democracy - some form of mass democratic dialogue - by occupying large buildings or any other large area, and attack both the dictatorship of the media, and the confusions of the Union bureaucracy, as well as the limitation of the strike to just a miner's struggle, then any rejection of the dominant notion of democracy will appear abstract, an argumentative manoeuvre. To be sure, the first flying pickets, initially opposed by the Stalinist bureaucrat Jack Taylor, were set up by a mass meeting of the miners. Yet in not retaining this initiative, in allowing the Yorkshire NUM to bureaucratise the flying pickets, these miners had to inevitably suffer the manoeuvres of the NUM in repressing unofficial actions: as one miner said. "We were getting things organised...there was no problem with filling petrol tanks" until control was centralised (Socialist Worker, 21/4/84).

*"We were the first branch in the Doncaster area to go out picketing into Nottingham and we went to Harworth colliery. And that was the only time I've seen a trade union official on the picket line Jim Tierney from Castlehill Pit in Scotland reported things were very much the same up there. "At pithead meetings the Friday before the strike started, we were told the best thing for us to do was to enjoy a long lie-in on the Monday, leaving it to the branch committees to make sure all the pits were out in Scotland. "Fortunately we ignored that, but it was the Tuesday*

*before we got all the pits out. Again last week our area strike committee, of two delegates per branch, booked eight buses to come down to Sheffield to picket the executive meeting. But then we were told we weren't getting any money for the buses. The Scottish leadership had taken a political decision they didn't want people down there! At the same time, pickets were being sent out when they weren't really needed, as when they were sent to Northumberland after the coalfield had voted to strike. Or again, when there was a plan to send hundreds of them to Longannet power station at ten in the morning just so that two representatives of the Scottish TUC could pose in front of cameras. Fortunately on that occasion, the strike committee got people there for half six in the morning and stopped the place."*

( Pickets quoted in *Socialist' Worker*, April 14th 1984)\1

For example, saving pits isn't the real reason for the strike, even though it's the inevitable starting point (after all, all attacks on this society begin on the enemy's terrain). The cries about the Dignity Of Labour' are basically lies which most miners don't believe. The real reason behind their rejection of the £1,000 for every year worked, held out as a bribe and compensation by the NCB, is the fear and horror of the isolation, of the loss of comradeship, of the sense of futility, of the destruction of the element of community amongst the most historically subversive section of the working section of the British proletariat, of the indignity of having the ruling class disorganise proletarians here any further. Miners know full well that, because the work is miserable, it's the friendship and solidarity between them that makes life worthwhile - "Because", as a Kent miner put it on TV recently, "it's all we've got". When the BBC reporter interviewing him smugly asked whether the average one and a half hours sleep a night some of the pickets were getting was "really worth all the trouble", the picket said, "Well, if we don't do this one and a half hours of sleep a night now, we'll be having 15 hours a day in bed, staring at the 4 walls". Even with thousands of pounds in the bank, unemployment is generally more desperate than employment not because wage slavery is "dignified" or "useful" (to whom?) but because in the desperate conditions of separation imposed by this society, the false choice between work or dole is the choice between the *possibility* of a common recognition of common enemies and common problems, of a common struggle, and, outside of riots, the choice, mostly, of staying stuck and isolated swamped by the degrading bullshit of TV and the consolations' of records, and other drugs. Of course, all proletarians can struggle - in work or out of it: but in the face of a deliberate - and largely successful, so far - attack by the ruling class on the solidarity and survival standards of the masses here, to fight pit closures is one of the possible starting points for reversing the demoralisation of the past 8 years, accelerated by the Thatcher government.

miners collage pdf

*This collage was printed in the middle of "Miner conflicts..." but seems to be too "overweight" to be uploaded in anything but pdf format. It was produced by 2 working class punks - New Zealanders - Pete and Sharon, good decent people who supported the strike throughout. Pete got nicked on a miners' picket line just before Christmas 1984 and spent Christmas inside...I wonder where they are now...?*

## **UNEMPLOYMENT- ITS CAUSES & SOME RESULTS**

Unemployment is obviously one of the most central means of intimidating the proletariat which capital has developed globally over the last ten years or so. That it is also a means of running down uncompetitive forms of fixed capital gives un-employment an image of an unfortunate, but inevitable, result of the market economy - a partial truth which not only ignores

how the various rulers are capable of consciously manipulating the market in varying degrees, but also ignores the fact that the world market is the essential fate' which proletarians have no choice but to utterly destroy if the world is to be consciously transformed and re-created to express the desires and possibilities of the masses of individuals (that coal stocks are the highest ever is one example of how impotent is any attempt to fight the symptoms of capital whilst arguing in capital's terms: the rationale of the commodity economy forces the rulers to pull the rug out from under every alienated labourers' feet in order to rationalise the unprofitable contradiction of over-production, which, of course, is only possible in conditions of alienated labour). One of the few expanding industries after the law and order industry and the new technology industry is the overwhelming commentary on the misery of unemployment. Everywhere the results of unemployment are denounced - atomisation; the big leap in suicidal tendencies and breakdowns; intensified survival panic; speed-ups at work, vastly increased productivity, cheap labour; a big increase in the criminalisation of the survival means of the dispossessed; a great increase in vicious, and ultimately self-destructive, desperate behaviour on the streets and at home; greater paranoia about the State and mistrust of friends'; a general sense of retreat (exemplified by the big leap in marriages) not yet matched by a sense of the self-defeating nature of such retreat (exemplified by the big leap in divorces); a massive increase in one of the most dangerous forms of commodity fetishism - drug addiction, often with the deliberate collaboration of sections of the State; etc.etc.

One result of this retreat into pure survivalism increasingly imposed by capital is the growing tendency to valorise one's means of survival as an escape from recognising and reversing one's retreat, and the retreat of the rest of the class. In this defeat before the crisis of the commodity economy, proletarians hide this sense of defeat by justifying positively the specialisation of abilities proletarians are forced to develop in order to compete on the ever-shrinking market. The inevitable compromise involved in surviving in this society , and the indignity of this compromise - which everyone with any sense seeks to destroy *in time*, is hidden by an ideology which pumps up such skills, and makes them superior to other forms of slavery. Legal skills are ideologised as better than illegal ones, or vice versa. Plumbing, piano-playing, inventing such novel commodities as the kiss-o-gram', are hailed as somehow more 'dignified' or creative' than burglary, shop-lifting, insurance fiddles or whatever.

And the more marginalised sectors who burgle or shop-lift to survive claim that their *illegal* forms of survival are more dignified' - because *autonomous* - than the others, as if in all cases it's not the alien economy, and it's increasing pressures, that calls the tune. This simply reinforces the ruler's moral hierarchy, even if the more marginalised sectors reactively invert this moral hierarchy by asserting an antimorality which pretends that illegal work is not really work, contemptuously dismissing the mugs' who are into' straight work. Either way, divide & rule. This support for commodity relations is most clear amongst those marginalised who resort to mugging - a substitute for the slightly more difficult and risky task of ripping off businesses, the State or the rich. Mugging is an expression of the ability of the rulers (the organisers of the paucity of normal survival means) to force the more fatalistic sections of the masses to seek immediate means of survival which not only insure no long-term solutions but also hopes to insure that the only solutions are bourgeois ones. Muggers use the desperate times to justify their own self-defeating contribution ' to the suffocating good neighbourliness ' of pseudo-community policing (of course, as the Newham 8 found out, any response to street violence not sanctioned by the State will be dealt with by the State even more forcefully than the State deals with the attacks themselves, if the State can get away with it). Whilst proletarians do not seek to break with and attack the objective miserable weight of the immediate this immersion in the everyday assures that everyday is just one more nail in the coffin. Tonight's mugger could become tomorrow's mugged -or else prison. If successful, the muggers' sense of achievement is about as self-defeating as that of "our boys" in the Falklands: pure image to compensate for the impotence and isolation. Whilst the lads in the Falklands were given a moral face to hide the sickness, the mugger asserts his amorality as something less hypocritical, more "honestly" cynical than the dominant show. Resigned to the present decomposition, he proudly asserts his reduction of others to commodities as being just the same as the bosses who force OAPs to die of hyperthermia as a punishment for not paying their electricity bills. This separation -amongst the marginalised' and the straight' proletariat -still tends to manifest

itself in the conflicts with the State: the unemployed who see rioting as their form of attack, tend not to identify with, even less intervene in, the strikes of the traditional sectors, just as the strikers tend not to identify with riots. Amongst the more class conscious sectors, not so tainted with leftism on the one hand or anti-workerism on the other, this separation is breaking down, especially amongst the young: e.g. the youths who supported the picket at Warrington by burning barricades and attacking the cops, or the schoolkids at Mexborough who smashed up their school over the banning of spikey hair and then came out in support of the miners. The conscious breakdown of this separation, with the rising tension in Liverpool offering the most likely opening on this front, is the sole possibility for any successful subversion of capital, a movement of riots, strikes, occupations and mass assemblies the example of which could fire the imagination of proletarians internationally.

The supercession of this separation is dependant on recognising how our enemies benefit from us seeing work, legal or illegal, as the solution to unemployment (a good example of the contradictory nature of accepting the rulers' false choices was given in a TV interview with a Young Liverpudlian heroin addict, who claimed he started his addiction when he had a "good job", which he lost because of the addiction. and that if only he could find a "good job" he'd be able to kick the habit). Unemployment has partly been the ruler's conscious weapon to divide proletarians off from each other, roll back the tide of proletarian subversion exemplified by the massive successful strike and occupations movements of the early 70s, and the Winter Of Discontent of '78 -'79, and make British capital competitive again. Loss of the memory of this history (in particular, of one's memory of one's own relation to this history), impotent despair and cowardly self-contempt are the predictable fates of all those who leave the *implications* of their resistance to class society to be determined by the perpetuators of this society. Unemployment and the economic crisis a social crisis which is partly a result of the struggle against the miseries of work and State domination, just as it is partly a conscious attempt by the ruling classes to find a solution to this massive resistance on the part of the producer-consumers to their allotted role as competitively-priced objects in the World Market, is the most blatant of these implications. Absenteeism, sabotage, pilfering, and general, commonplace, forms of resistance, have always played an important part if undermining the system of commodity production, which is why the rulers are doing their best to reduce these forms of opposition to the bare minimum ( e.g. containerisation of the docks not only vastly reduces the number of workers, but also makes the perks of ripping-off as well as the chances of international solidarity through the blacking of particular imports and exports, virtually impossible). Nevertheless, in themselves these acts of resistance have hardly ever considered themselves strategically or as objectively significant, and therefore have hardly ever known how to become a more consciously strategic opposition to capitalism. That's why capitalism can straight-forwardly wipe these pockets of resistance out - which is why the ASLEF drivers got flexibly roasted, with the help of the TUC, in response to their resistance to work (likewise, a similar imposition of the disorganising rigours of commodity time is being imposed on the scene-shifters at the BBC, who'd also worked out various fiddles). That flexible rostering has not produced any increased profitability for British Rail shows that the intention of such progress' is not just governed by immediate economic considerations; the tendency to impose an almost military rigidity of time-control on the railways was aimed not merely to speed up the circulation of commodities and prepare for the exigencies of a possible war, but also aimed to demoralise all autonomous resistance to capital and wage slavery here in the aftermath of the Falkland-Malvinas War. Whilst those sectors of the working proletariat who are still capable of resisting work do not co-ordinate their agitation, and on the basis of it's most class conscious Possibilities, they will inevitably watch this agitation die a slow death. In avoiding the conclusions - both theoretical and practical - of their struggle against a humiliating world the masses of individuals are forced into a retreat where they feel they have to *justify* their constantly frustrated anger at capitalisms *inevitable* hypocrisy. In response to the economic crisis, many workers now feel somehow forced to guiltily excuse wage demands which mean wage cuts, when 13 years ago they were demanding 3 times the amount merely as an excuse to avoid what most people openly recognised as the tyrannical meaninglessness of work, of the production of surplus value for a boss. Nowadays, so the Trade Unions, the Labour Party and all the rest of. The capitalist institutions tell us, all the workers should be happy about is that they have a job, even if there

still remains a little contest over how *much* they should be fucked over. So that you can compete with your fellow wage-slaves in Japan or wherever, money, exploitation, bureaucracy, capital accumulation, exchange and trade relations - and the States which determine these - all these have to be taken as *fate*, the *unquestionable*.

If the class struggle is to get off the defensive, it must learn from it's own history, that unemployment is partly capital's answer to the vast resistance to work, and that confidence that goes beyond merely reacting to the rulers' moves, can only come from openly refusing the false choices they pose. The humiliation of coal dust or the humiliation of the dole? During the '72 strike miners were asked if they realised that by refusing to do maintenance work they were putting the future of the pit in danger. One replied, "So what, who wants to go down the bloody pit, anyway?", whilst another said that in closing down the pits they had already saved several lives. And after the dispute had been settled, some sections of the miners refused to go back to work, despite a 20% pay rise, thus showing as much a resistance to forced labour as contempt for the Union hierarchy that negotiated the deal. Naturally, the real abolition of forced labour could only take place if workers seized and transformed the mines along with all the other things that are theirs anyway (of course, when leftists talk of "workers' power" or of having "less work, more leisure" they can only see this in terms of developing State power, which, whether by violent or peaceful means, they aim to paternalistically use as a means of reforming the flagrant irrationalities of the current capitalist crisis).

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## **ROW OVER NEW THINK TANK "MINISTRY OF TRUTH" REPORT LEAK!**

**By Our Political Correspondent, MANNY PULATION**

A row blew up yesterday over a new leak from the Governments' secret Think Tank, a body set up to make tentative proposals for the development of the isolation and degradation of the individual at the hands of the State and the hierarchical exchange economy it manages. The Prime Minister was quick to pretend to be enraged about the leak. Apparently, though she was genuinely enraged about a leak that claimed that she herself had leaked The Ministry of Truth proposal just to test our public reaction.

The controversial Think Tank report supports "*the setting up of a Ministry of Truth whose task will be to ensure the co-ordination, elaboration and perfection of the work already being very well achieved in denying the possibility of organising a world without alienated labour, the State and all external authority.*"

The report went on to suggest the inclusion of two departments within the Ministry: "...a Department of You-Don't- Like-This-Society-But-What-Else-Can-You-Put-In-Its '-Place, whose task shall be to repress the memory of history: that of yourself, that of your relation to the history of others, that of the society as a whole and that of interactions between them." Part of the function of this department will be, the controversial report continues, "to obscure all the positive and negative achievements of every revolt since The Ranters of the English Revolution to the rioters of Brixton and Toxteth, via the revolutionaries of Hungary '56 and France 1968."

The report went on to suggest a further department: "A Department Of Fatalism, whose task will

*be to present the problem of alienation as merely an existential crisis, the "human condition", something absurd to be dramatised in an artistic or cocktail party anecdote form."*

Immediately the Labour Party complained that the report failed to suggest "A *Department of Harmony, Community and Humanity*." A Labour Party spokesman suggested that "*the task of such a department should be to present an illusory togetherness based on a repression of the essential conflict between those who wish to live and those who wish to preserve the Grand Mausoleum of Commodities.*"

Certain right-wingers and liberals supported the aims of of the proposed ministry but suggested that the name should be changed to one more in keeping with democracy: "*Ministry Of Truth smacks too much of 1984. How about "Ministry of Freedom Of False Choices Under The Law & Order Of Things, Their Price & Their Owners?..."*"

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### **New Technology - Same Old Living Death**

"It's bloody miserable working here - and all that work could be replaced by micro-chips...still, if that happened we'd all be unemployed...If we're going to be able to use the technology, we'd have to have a revolution;..but that's another matter..." - Ford Dagenham shop steward during the Ford strike in November 1978 against the Labour government's Social Contract.

The development of the new technology is part of running down industries where large amounts of proletarians have been *dangerously brought together*. New technology not only speeds up the rate of profit, but also functions as a way of developing a much smaller amount of skilled labour. The bourgeoisie can afford to compensate this relatively small isolated sector with comparatively higher wages, particularly as they hope to assure the acquiescence of this sector by force-feeding the whole population on vast overdoses of bureaucratic-scientific ideology. From the moment we learn to switch on a T.V. we are encouraged to model our lives on the patterns of organisation and consumption employed by hierarchical power. We are all encouraged to play the role of bureaucrat and scientist in the discomfort of our own home, and to view our lives as a series of processes and procedures existing independently from our own good sense.

This is how and why the rulers need to develop nuclear power, for example, which in this society requires the same mass policing year in year out that some of the Nottingham collieries have been getting recently (of course, it's not a moral question as the ecologists would have it, hoping thereby to reduce their opposition' to narrowly defined symptoms of the irrationality of capitalism, so as to encourage the development of commodity production and alienated labour in socially concerned' guises - Boeing's investments in solar energy , for example). In developing nuclear power, the present government is merely continuing the process pursued by the last Labour government, when Tony Benn, as Minister of Energy, even armed the Atomic Energy Authority (the opportunism of this patronising ponce is shown by his celebration of the miner's struggle, and even of the "great Liverpool uprising of 1981": when he was part of Callaghan's Cabinet, more pits were closed than by the Tories by far, just as riots were put down with the full force of the government of which he was a part). It's worth recalling the minutes of a Cabinet meeting leaked to Time Out not so long after the '79 election: in it Thatcher said that developing nuclear power was necessary to combat the militancy of the miners. This, and not the global energy crisis was her main reason. It is because of this that much of the media attack the miners for a "nostalgia" for their opposition to the progress" of nuclear fuel. This is a clever ploy in so far as nostalgia' implies fondness for past battles that many young

miners have little chance of critically appreciating and a defence of a craft' status attached to one's wage slavery that few young miners identify with. This nostalgia is particularly debilitating when miners, and those who support them, believe they still have a greater potential for attacking the ruling class than any other sector of the proletariat, and at the same time it helps them suppress the consciousness of their *own* interest, which can only be to re-organise the basis of the economy so that *no-one* has to go down the mines and inhale the coal dust that the new machinery has vastly increased. To defend this misery *is* nostalgic, in the sense that nostalgia is a sentimental fantasy about the past which can only be defended by forgetting the miserable part of this past. Rather than repeating the mistakes of the old Luddites, the miners could learn a lot from the new Luddites, who had no position in this world to defend - the rioters of 1981. An explicit attack on all the false choices of the commodity economy - progressive' or nostalgic' - is the only way of posing a future in which the whole of the working class could recognise itself.

## Life Under The Last Labour Government

### Some Excerpts From This England', 1978.

# The suffering is there of course. A young stockbroker told me: The difference in my standard of living has been enormous. I bought a house on a £27,000 mortgage two years ago and now I cannot keep up the payments.' At 28, he is used to making about £20,000 a year. Today, he is making nothing - except his basic salary of about £5,000. - *The Times*

# Crawley council, in Sussex, is to scrap its heating scheme for old people. I am afraid some pensioners will have to make a choice whether to eat properly or keep warm', Councillor A. C. W. Crane said. This year the subsidised scheme would have cost the council £4,500 and costs were going up all the time. We just could not continue it.' - *The Times*

# Very conveniently for part-time doctors and private patients, the hospital has 18 pay-beds in a separate unit of 10 single beds and four double rooms. Patients pay £28 a day for hotel and hospital charges, and hospital staff say that most come through one of the private medical insurance schemes: We get people from all walks of life: we had a coalminer in once.' - *Observer*

# When he gets a chance, Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn, our Secretary of State for Energy, likes to sit by an open fire at his home in Holland' Park, London, sipping a large mug of tea and reading his official papers. His blazing grate is symbolic, an indication of sympathy with the miners. - *The Times*.

# Coal Board chief Sir Derek Ezra collapsed from heat during a visit to a Kent pit yesterday. When he recovered, he delivered a speech criticising Kent miners for their low productivity. *Daily Mirror*.

## 1926 & All That

Almost 60 years ago - in 1926 - British wages slaves contested the power of Capital to determine every aspect of their shattered lives. The combined weight of the mine owners, the whole of the capitalist class and its Tory governments' control over the means of intimidation, the servile strike-breaking fodder in the Army, the mercenary troops of student careerists, the

power of Winston Churchill's media-muggers, a gang of collaborators called the TUC, a protection racket of political opportunists called the Labour Party - all, *without exception*, combined to weigh down, defeat and demoralise the masses of individuals in struggle. But despite the fact that, on the day *after* the TUC called the General Strike off, there were 100,000 *more* people on strike than on any previous day of the strike, despite the fact that their morale was also much tougher, despite the fact that many strikers had improvised local councils of action and developed spontaneous and widespread mass picket lines without the control of the Unions, when the TUC said, "It's all over" it was *the habit of obedience* which blinded them from seeing their own initiative & pushed them back to forced labour. Proletarians sell themselves out by putting their faith in bureaucrats who invariably "sell them out".

It is an evasion of reality to blame leaders (of Trade Unions or of political parties) for selling out' those they claim to represent. Sell Out!' is a habitual complaint which, in not taking direct responsibility for the course of a struggle, merely functions as a complaint by those who want to be led, those who still believe that there is someone who could save them from their misery. Like the Malcolm X chant in the song "No Sell Out", people vaguely hope that if they repetitively mou7th the name of a famous leader and demand "No Sell Out!" like a hypnotic mystical incantation, they can magically insure that they don't get sold out. When individuals resign their power to bureaucrats, the bureaucrats *inevitably* manipulate the authority which these masses insufficiently contest. The failure to grasp the moment, or at least sharpen ones' grasp over what people have already achieved, is the retreat and defeat of class consciousness which is the basis for all demoralisation. Of course, it's easy, even if necessary, to denounce the obvious shits, just as it's so obviously essential to attack the masses own worst enemy - their lack of audacity. Nevertheless it's only *easy* to do this if the ivory tower of hindsight blocks you to seeing what's at the base: *here* is 1926, & *here* we must jump. As in 1926, today you & I are up against similar enemies (though often they're more subtly confusing). Today also, the central failure of those proletarians who consider themselves the most conscious is to actually communicate their critique to others in struggle, not only against all political, union & cultural manipulations of these struggles, but also against their own narrow arrogance which thinks itself "less resigned" than "the others". Proletarians are not going to break with their demoralisation and extend their revolt without also extending the *consciousness* of what they've done and haven't done - and that applies to those proletarians who consider themselves "class conscious" as much as to those who pretend to themselves that they're not.

Of course, 1984 both *is* and *isn't* 1926. For one thing, the stakes today are infinitely higher: the 30s at least had some street life - the 90s look like having neither streets nor life, if our rulers and their false opposition have their way this time round. Today, the *whole* of our truth, our friendships, our critiques, our desires, our loves, are at stake. Today, it's either All or the Nothingness of accepting our fate, and the lying apologies that go with this acceptance.

In 1926 a small group of strikers tried to set fire to the Times with lighter fluid from a tiny can. Shall the masses of today repeat the same mistake? Or shall we see something more than the Deptford Fire marchers of '81 shattering the windows of Fleet Street scum, or the ASLEF drivers refusing to distribute their lies early 1982? Or shall we be reduced to thumbing our noses at an increasingly intimidating world? The defeats of '26 softened the masses for the degradations of the Depression, the massacres of World War II, and the utterly boring passivity of the consumer society. Today the consequences of defeat could result in a qualitative deterioration of human communication that will make Auschwitz seem like a vicars tea party. The consequences of victory, which will have to be global and irreversible, will have to result in a qualitative explosion of human communication that will make a vicars tea party seem like Auschwitz. Between the two what's the choice? All or Nothing.





In the early 70s STRIKES 1926 (now simply Strikes) became a gruesome chain of restaurants where the modern proletariat can momentarily become the Master Of The Menu, whilst someone else plays the servant. Here, we can choke on our mono- sodium glucomated hamburgers in the luxurious discomfort of glossy vinyl furniture, gleaming mirrors to dramatise each frozen gesture, and large posters of proletarian demonstrations from the 1920s - men running from the cops, kids & women begging for scraps, hunger marches, images of defeat and despair, to give us the feeling of comparative progress, perhaps. After all, the modern poor don't need the cops to chase them away: the minimum charge just to keep in the warm and have a cup of tea, the polite smile of the management telling you to fuck off in the nicest possible way, and the anxious stares of one's fellow' customers are all enough to kick those lowest in the hierarchy out into the welcoming streets. For those of us privileged' enough to be able to afford to provide the management with a profit, the surroundings invite' us to console ourselves for our present impotence with an image of an even greater one. After all, if we didn't have this consolation we might remind ourselves that, even if the management condescendingly allows' us to consume to the rhythm of the muzak, we still remain desperate for some meaningful contact. Sure, *things* have changed: but outside of class struggle, our domination by things & their price has become increasingly confusing & subtly debilitating. The essential degradations of daily life, of the inability of human creativity to qualitatively transform the world about us, has vastly deteriorated - in many ways, because capital has been able to integrate the image of opposition, based on past defeats, into it's horror show, into the development of the tedious passivity of a consumer' capitalism which is now decomposing faster than a vampire in daylight. Will today's proletarian struggle become yet another commodity for the consumption of future slave-spectators? Or.....?

## The Confusions Of Unions

*"It is the organisational form itself which renders the proletariat virtually impotent and which prevents them turning the Union into an instrument of their will. The revolution can only win by destroying this organism, which*

*means tearing it down from top to bottom so that something quite different can emerge.” - Anton Pannekoek.*

*“Our quarrel is not with the unions... Our quarrel is only with the extremists who want to destroy the moderates in the unions -who want to destroy the unions*

*themselves as they exist in this country.” - Edward Heath, February 10th 1974.*

Even if the media bills Scargill as extremist, he clearly has much in common with Edward Heath, the former P.M. Both of them have realised how Trade Unionism is the enemy of the real unity of the proletariat, which rears its' violent head every time the masses of individuals band together against work, against forced unemployment (like the occupations of the early 70s, particularly at Fisher Bendix) and against being policed, bossed about and insulted by two-faced functionaries. At Pilkingtons, in 1969, the workers on strike wrecked their' union office. In Port Talbot, the same year, steelworkers told the press that they had neither leaders nor spokesmen: “We are our own leaders”, they said. In 1972 dockworkers tried to do over Jack Jones, who, inevitably, had sold them out. In 1977, firemen, fucked over as usual by the deal the bureaucrats fixed for them, went “on the rampage”, hurling smoke bombs, damaging engines and smashing glass in their fire stations. Nowadays, the media bills Scargill as extremist to hide people from the authentic extremist position. Scargill isn't even as verbally extreme as the trade unionists who were around at the time of the '26 General Strike, like Purcell, who said, two years before the strike, “Workers must organise specifically and universally in direct opposition to capitalism and its political methods Our patriotism must be that of loyalty, unashamed and unflinching, to our class the world over...” or Swales, who said at the Trade Union Congress 9 months before the General Strike, “We shall be wanting neither machinery nor men to move forward to the destruction of wage slavery and the construction of a new order of society...” But in 1926, they were so scared of an autonomous movement that they ended up selling out on even the most measly attempts at proletarian self-protection. Nowadays, Scargill's rhetoric doesn't sound even as daring as these creeps. Everyone can be completely sure that, just so long as they let him, he'll end up just the same as the Purcells and Swales of this world - selling a demoralising defeat to his followers, possibly in order to get them to participate in an election for the bosses of the Labour party, but certainly in order to preserve his miserable role of House Rebel in the decomposition of the capitalist economy. Like Christ, rebels' like him who set themselves up as models, always end up as saviours of hierarchical power, even if they personally get nailed to the cross for a while. But, as the 1981 riots show, the masses are growing weary of apparently well-meaning, honorable' failures. Perhaps, horror of horrors, they might learn some of the basic lessons of these riots, the memory of which was meant to have been crushed by the great show of State power launched by the Task Force. Learning from history would mean that not only Mrs. T.'s skin would be at stake, but perhaps even the skins of the Leftists also. In September, 1982, Arthur Scargill, star of screen & negotiating table, acted like the Dixon of Dock Green that he is: when miners, on their own initiative, occupied the National Coal Board, he rushed along and politely, but firmly, ordered everybody out or else... The miners preferred to avoid the alternative choice by reluctantly obeying. But Scargill did at least make up for it by having a little tiff with Ezra later that afternoon. Such behaviour is typical of a man in his position: bureaucrats always have to *represent* opposition so as to better de-fuse it. As his predecessor, and apparent rival, Joe Gormley said during the '74 strike which kicked out Heath, “If it [the strike] was called off, the members might walk all over us.” (*Times*, 9/12/74). Scargill has to appear militant merely to maintain his position. He certainly can't repeat the mistake he made in the spring of '81, just before the riots, when he steadfastly refused to encourage his' Yorkshire miners to strike against threatened pit closures, an order ignored by his' lads in four of the Yorkshire pits, and much resented, though relatively privately, by many sections of the Kent miners. Sure he may boast that he got nicked at Grunwicks, and even fantasise aloud about it having been a “victory” (like Dunkirk, no doubt), but that's so that you can forget about that awkward incident during the strike when he led the masses of miners away from the picket line because it was more important for him to play out the usual sheepish demo show than actually

win a real battle. Of course, nobody simply gets sold out': rebellious workers get sold out partly because they have already sold their own voice, their anger and their desires, to bureaucrats like Scargill, who, in representing these points of view in the Courts Of The Bourgeoisie (the media and the negotiation rooms), acts as an immediately secure link with what appears to be realistic. Everywhere there are people acting for themselves in various ways, but very rarely speaking for themselves. Because hierarchical security appears everywhere. as the only realistic and apparently safe path, the masses of individuals demand what seems secure according to the criteria demanded by that omnipresent God, the World Market (hallelujah!). Realism leads people to demand retirement at 55, no pit closures and £115 basic - which, even if accepted, which they won't be, are pretty minimal compensations for a wasted life. Moreover, these kinds of demands inevitably succumb to the logical implications of the contradictions of a globally competitive capital. In fact, any struggle against the graveyard of the old World which is not to become self-defeating can only find the help and recognition of other struggles in the world by explicitly opposing the trivialising and brutal world of domination and submission in its totality. Those who only half rebel and who do not draw more daring experimental conclusions from their rebellion and the failures of this rebellion, merely dig their own graves. It's either All or apologies for Nothing. What else is Scargill's programme for the rejuvenation of British capital by means of import controls etc.? It's simply a programme which perpetuates workers' illusions of some external hope within the false choices of the commodity economy. As usual for someone with a hierarchical niche, he can only reduce peoples' margin of choice to that of two evils'. It's precisely his kind of reasonable' Leftist nationalism which breaks up the British proletariats' possible unity with the proletariat of other countries, the only practical unity, which, in undermining capitalist competition and the inevitable disasters which follow, could maintain even the present defences against the degradations of capital" Luckily for bureaucrats like Scargill, most people have been demoralised (by a daily life colonised more and more by external authority and the media that confuses this situation by presenting false choices which perpetuate the disease) struggling to destroy this irrational world of money, investment, trade and mass starvation seems like a romantic dream. Having censored this possibility from their minds, they feel happy' merely to cheer radical-sounding Leftists, who represent something apparently more dignified than the usual apologetic stance with which many feel obliged to present themselves.

The best reason' for the pathetic cowardice of the scabs is the nauseating spectacle of striking miners chanting "Arthur Scargill, Arthur Scargill, We'll support you evermore evermore...", particularly amongst the Yorkshire miners. Perhaps they see this as simply for the media, a tactical display of unity, whilst behind the scenes the reservations towards this hypocrite are kept personal, sarcastic jokes behind his back. Nevertheless even as a tactic such displays are worse than useless: they reinforce not only the idea of the regionalism and parochialism of the Yorkshire miners, over-developed by the rising success of many Yorkshire football teams, and which helps the boss's divide and rule - but, more vitally, they act as away of dismissing all the excellent critiques of Scargill, amongst which is his need for the media, even a hostile media. In repressing their own misgivings about this creep under the pretence of an image of unity, the more radical miners allow the media to take up this critique, in a manipulative form. A good example of these contradictions were expressed in a recent meeting of miners reported by the smug drone, Terry Coleman, in The Guardian, April 16th, 1984. (see *bottom of paragraph*) So refined are the middle class sensibilities of this hack that the vulgar disdain of the miners for an orderly meeting' was really too much for him to stomach. Their refusal to remain polite spectators was an implicit rejection of those tedious rituals where you're meant to keep still and listen, where no-one really meets at all. A good reason why paid scribblers servile to their masters and to their detached reflective' role would clearly find such impolite disrespect for the domination of the hall by the stage and by microphones so nerve-wracking. After all, people were meeting, and without hierarchy: not only did the poor imbecile feel excluded, but also he couldn't play the role of good journalist and report the monologues from the platform. But, more importantly, it's a sign of the striker's confusion that, despite their excellent attacks on BBC cameramen, journalists and even threats to the liberal-leftist careerists of Channel 4, that they should cheer the media's defender in this situation, Scargill, who, though obviously critical of the media, indulges in a polite dialogue with what he claims are his enemies. Are they so blind to

his patronising vapid flattery? -"The young miners of this country represent the finest in trade unionism", which is implicitly nationalist, and pumps up miners as a radical' elite. Are they so blind to his classic inversion of reality? : "When the Coal Board told me I was getting nothing, I had the right to come and ask my members for your support", as if he hadn't been opposed to a strike at the beginning, as if it hadn't been the members' who had taken the initiatives in the first place, thereby going beyond being mere members'. Our enemies' apparent enemy - in this case, Scargill - is no friend. Each proletarian must see through their own eyes if they wish to avoid the trap of identifying with the present rulers' opposite numbers.

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## **Excerpts below from the Terry Coleman article in The Guardian, April 16th,1984**

*There were some older men, but the marchers were mostly young, and they began to look like a football crowd. They ran through the open doors of the hall, scrambled for seats, then changed their minds and scrambled for other seats in other parts of the hall. Two men jumped from the balcony into the stalls.....A TV camera was spotted, and at once there was a chant of "Get out, you bums, get out", and "Press out, Press out". This was a ritual chant. The miners turned on a TV crew and ran them out. Arthur Scargill himself was very nearly shouted down when he intervened.....Mr Scargill and Mr Benn were to be the principal speakers, but four others spoke first, though they were barely given a hearing.....A voice was raised to defend the Nottinghamshire miners, at which scuffles broke out, and then scattered fights, and amid the pandemonium a man on the platform, having noticed a camera recording this, hurled himself off the platform and down the aisle at the cameraman. Mr Scargill tried to restore some order, this time shouting through a loudhailer, but even with that it was three minutes before he could be heard.....Only bits here and there were audible. Even then, groups round the hall hardly listened at all, but engaged in their own conversations, arguments, and skirmishes.....It took all of Mr Scargill's popularity, strength of will and strength of voice, amplified by the loudhailer, to produce anything like order, and still sporadic scuffles continued.....There was not quiet even when Mr Benn rose to speak. He is the most eloquent and reasoned of speakers, but even he did not get an attentive hearing....and then the audience took up the chant of "Arthur Scargill, Arthur Scargill, we'll support you evermore, evermore."*

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Dispossessed of All Countries Unite!

We Have Nothing To Lose But Our Illusions That We Have Something To Lose!

*"The miners, said Scargill, were fighting "the social and industrial Battle Of Britain". "Once that was joined, the Government could not afford to lose - not only this Government, but government... Thus no chances have been taken"*

**(Peter Jenkins, SDP comedy writer for The Guardian)**

Since early April this year, there have been four mass strikes in Europe (Asturias , in Spain; Lorraine in France; a General Strike in Belgium - their third in 8 months; and a mass strike of print & engineering workers in Germany). Outside of Europe, there have been massive riots in the Dominican Republic and Haiti; Indian dockers have seized arms and attacked the cops as part of a national dock strike there; and the National Guard have been called out to attack picketing copper miners in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, who've been on strike for ten months. In Asturias, the barricades and battles with the cops has also been over pit closures: there they

went way beyond the unions by extending the strike long beyond the time limit the bureaucrats had stipulated. And in Madrid, construction workers seized the chance opened up by the miners and blocked roads with bricks, cement and plaster, whilst in Valencia, steelworkers went on a wildcat strike against redundancies. Yet Scargill still talks of import controls (which undermines international solidarity) and the Battle Of Britain. In France steelworkers have covered roads with coils of metal, whilst in three towns (Marseille, Metz and Longwy) steelworkers have pulled up the railway tracks, like their comrades in Poland had done 8 years previously, whilst in Toulon a union controlled job centre got trashed, and in Metz the local socialist party headquarters was attacked, though not burnt down as the Poles did to the CP headquarters in 1970. Two other socialist Party HQ's were attacked in France in April, whilst in Caen a Tax Office was swamped by tar unloaded from a lorry. Also in Caen, there has been a big riot, and the Post Office was occupied by Post Office workers, trying to sabotage the growth of the new technology. Meanwhile there have not only been mass walk-outs on the trains in Liverpool, but also looting there, as well as in Derry (condemned, of course, by the petit-bourgeoisie of the IRA). Battle Of Britain? The real struggle - to defeat the inevitable humiliations and isolation and survival miseries the crisis of competing national commodities impose on the proletariat everywhere - can only be affirmed internationally and with an increasingly desperate negativity. Demanding reformism in one country, the pseudo-community of the dispossessed's attachment to their existing position in the economy, insures merely a re-arrangement of insults, usually at the expense of other proletarians elsewhere. Proletarians of all lands have nothing to lose but their resignation to false choices. Recently a Barnsley miner tried to get Scargill to express solidarity with some miners in Sheffield's twin town in the Donetz basin in the USSR who'd been sent to a lunatic asylum for their opposition to the State. Scargill's retort was to ask him why he didn't show support for El Salvador. The global spectacles' competition between eastern State capitalism and the democracies' of the wealthier capitalist nations is inevitably supported by the pseudo-oppositional bureaucrats of the West (that many Nottingham miners have Polish family connections -as high as 50% in Ollerton - is certainly one of the reasons why they've not come out on strike: the scabbing can't all be put down to bonus schemes, media manipulation and complacent consumerism[2]). Scargill's effective solidarity with the East European ruling class which he tames at pragmatically opportune moments, is ironic when one considers how much scab coal is being imported from Poland (which is also ironic from the point of view of the scabs with Polish connections: their anti-proletarian stance is objectively supported by their Polish enemies - Jaruzelwski & co.).

At the same time as some of these events were happening, the BBC news show, Sixty Minutes, itself the target of recent physical attacks by Yorkshire miners in Barnsley, broadcast a speech by Thatcher made whilst opening the bunker where Winston Churchill and his cabinet met during the war. In it she said that it was essentially Britain's "sense of humanity which triumphed over evil". Her speech was followed by a clip from Churchill's during the Battle of Britain, "United We Stand - Divided we Fall" (nevertheless, as all the bourgeoisie know, Churchill, who had once hoped that Britain, in its hour of need, would have a Hitler to unify it, had his private plane waiting to take him to Canada should Britain have ever fallen to the Nazis). When it comes to anti-fascist rhetoric the bourgeoisie are far better at it - and ironically it is anti-fascism that unites both East Europe and West: it was, after all, the basis of the spectacles' harnessing of the proletariat to the interests of national capital, whether the capital be bourgeois or bureaucratic.

That World War II is being evoked now is illustrative of the various competing capitals' attempts to tie the desire for community to the interests of various national capitals, whilst crushing the real affirmation of proletarian community now being fought for internationally: this spectacle of unity under the State via the use of war and the threat of an external enemy has already been tested in the Falklands-Malvinas war manipulated by the State. Ironically, Scargill, who supported Argentina's militarised capital during the 1982 conflict, now conjures up the very same anti-fascism that Thatcher was able to manipulate. Certainly the spectacle is totalitarian - its' primary forms - the market and the State - dominate the worlds' citizens everywhere. But to

suggest that the British spectacle has become fascist merely hands over to the dominant class an argument it is best able to dominate. The nostalgia that the bourgeoisie condemns in the miners, the self- same bourgeoisie evokes when it suits it to assert the only form of community it is capable of asserting: the hierarchical community' united behind the ruling class of which World War II was *the* model. In this context it's not surprising that in January 1984, the TUC issued an internal document urging recognition that "strikes hurt the community and they hurt workers" and urges the bureaucratic machine to model itself on its collaboration with Churchill's National Government in World War II, when health and safety regulations at work were suspended, workers were not allowed to change their place of wage-labour without permission, overtime was forced and the wages earned thereby had to be lent to the government, and strikes were effectively made illegal and punishable for "sedition". Nevertheless, to label this possibility as "fascist" is to ignore the tendency of all States in the present crisis, whether State capitalist, social democratic, monetarist or whatever to intensify their repressive means of divide and. rule as a way of trying to insure the survival of the commodity economy, even if it means little else survives. Nevertheless, unlike in fascism, false opposition is still necessary because not all forms of real autonomous opposition have been repressed and demoralised, which would be the only basis for the total integration of trade unions into the State, which was the hallmark of fascism. This is not to make light of the fact that all strands of the commodity economy here are increasingly losing their pluralistic face: that there has been a virtually complete blackout of all the mini-riots here since 1981 and of most of the previously mentioned events in Europe, is just one instance of this intensified repression. Fortunately, proletarians are becoming increasingly aware of this unity of lies: that's why even Channel 4 newsmen were threatened by Yorkshire pickets.

*"The active refusal of Power's attempts at categorisation and the re-invention of a language of revolt which is necessarily incomprehensible to the State, insure an increasingly clear polarisation between pro- and anti- spectacle forces. Nothing befuddles and angers Power more than a refusal to acknowledge its authority."*  
- from a revolutionary video, Call It Sleep'.

## Future Shocks

In the summer of 1981 - with there having been riots over the previous 18 months in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Lyons, Berlin, Switzerland and throughout Britain, as well as a mass movement in Poland - there was sufficient practical critique on the streets to make thousands - maybe even millions - feel optimistic about a revolutionary movement. Few then anticipated martial law in Poland. Or, more vitally for us here, few anticipated the Falkland/Malvinas War, prepared with even greater calculation than the Polish military put into martial law, prepared with even greater finesse than sections of the Italian State put into kidnapping Aldo Moro in 1978, prepared to intimidate with a far superior subtlety than Goering put into the Reichstag Fire. After every subversion of hierarchical power, sections of the State manipulate a crisis, or allow' an obviously avoidable crisis to occur, in order to confuse the masses of individuals from the real internal threat with a common external enemy.

Terrorism ends up creating within regional areas the same conditions of conservatism and nationalism that is initiated by international wars. In Italy in 1978, after several years of riots, strikes, occupations, a general resistance to work and to political forms of organisation, the Prime Minister was conveniently kidnapped and killed by a section of the Red Brigades, a section that had been partly infiltrated and manipulated by one of the more right-wing gangs that dominate the Italian State hierarchy. Supported by an outraged public opinion, trumped up by the political parties, by neo-fascist bombings attributed to anarchists and the left, and, above all, by the Italian press, the Italian police unleashed a wholesale repression which saw thousands arrested (few of them terrorists) and many more very successfully intimidated.

It could happen here. If the State can get away with the Falkland/Malvinas War, with all it's

obvious incongruities, then they could easily get away with blowing up a working colliery and blaming the massacre on pickets. After 1981, the show of State power in the South Atlantic not only made death seem attractive, not only made sacrifice seem brave, not only demoralised the massive rage which clearly hoped for a qualitative extension of the '81 riots into '82, not only demoralised millions into an overwhelming sense of retreat and helplessness, but based this intimidation on the horrific sense that if they can get away with that they can get away with anything. But they can only do this if each proletarian allows them - which is one reason to speculate on the possible manipulations the State will get up to in order to head off the present wave of class struggle. The killing of scabs by provocateurs claiming to be striking miners might sound far-fetched, but it's probably nothing compared with the conspiracies they could hatch up. A terrorist bombing blamed on the strike movement could force a blanket repression of all forms of class anger, justifying armed raids on whole mining communities and elsewhere, and could very easily force a return to work (like the nurses did after the IRA's Hyde Park & Regent's Park bombs of '82).

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FALKLAND/MALVINAS WAR:**

*"If we were unprepared, how is it that from next Monday, at only a few days notice, the Royal Navy will put to sea in wartime order and with wartime stocks and weapons? ...preparations have been in progress for several weeks."* -John Nott, Minister Of Defence, in the House Of Commons, the day after the Argentinian occupation (see Hansard for April 3rd 1982).

More immediately possible is the closing down of one of the steelworks -a closure conveniently blamed on the miners' strike but which was a move British Steel had already contemplated before the strike. Bill Sirs, who in 1980 the Sunday Times praised for his handling of the steelworkers' strike, is doubtless getting the thumbs up from the government to sacrifice the miners on the altar of his career: he can be guaranteed to scapegoat the miners for any closure he collaborates in as a way of evading accusations of "Collaborator!" Doubtless the steelworkers have forgotten that being good and submissive and doing what the bosses tell them didn't save the whole of Consett being sacrificed on the altar of Sir's paycheque. The rulers, and their guard-dogs in the Trade Union bureaucracy, quite rightly regard respectable good behaviour, that of the Good Citizen, the Good Worker, as a sign of weakness, and reward such timidity with the kick in the balls it invites.

Another possible future is that a big build-up in the Gulf war is allowed to happen, paving the way for a compromise on the basis of pulling together for the National Interest: if oil is threatened, coal will be needed, particularly if the country starts moving towards a war economy. NUM propaganda about *British* coal is as nationalist as any Tory's: developing British coal could be the basis for a massive intensified collaboration of unions in policing their members "in the National Interest" of course -a new Social Contract (probably *without Thatcher*). Even anti-Americanism could be manipulated to assure the acquiescence of large sections of the Left, perhaps ~ a National Government. Possible possibilities', possibly .Of course, what happens in the future is usually the possibility you least expect -mainly because each person's actions can change history: unless predicting possible futures is used to prepare for such predictable futures and to intervene to challenge them then all the predictor ends up being is a useless prophet, a Cassandra, resigned to being always right - *but too late*, content with a posthumous truth.

Waiting for the Sell-Out'?

No More NGA-type Cop-Outs!

Waiting for the Spectacle of the Just' War?

No More Falkland/Malvinas Con Tricks!

Waiting for the Next State-Manipulated Terrorist Atrocity?

No More Reichstag Fires!

No More Lies!

No More Waiting!

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**Quote from Daily Mirror, September 14th 1984:**

“Arthur Scargill is basically a shy person. The reason many people find him arrogant and offensive is that he is trying to compensate for his natural diffidence. The miners' president himself is the source of enlightenment in yesterday's issue of THE DERBYSHIRE MINER, a union newspaper. In an interview he told the editor, Mr Bill Moore, that to overcome basic shyness he talks quite a lot and puts his views forward in a positive manner to avoid seeming totally ineffective “and that's regarded by most people as being offensive, particularly on TV, and as being rather arrogant,” he said.

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Nevertheless, King Arthur hasn't always been so reasonable and image-conscious. Before climbing up the ladder of the NUM, seeking a power position with its own investments in British industry, he participated as a brilliant strategist when the miners defeated the cops at Saltley Coke depot, in 1972. This defeat for the State was organised not merely by the miners, but by the mass of the whole of the working class community' (a community based, of course, on defending itself, rather than one based on individuals realising themselves in a collective destruction of all the lies of external power, which can obviously only happen on any vast and irreversible scale from the revolutionary moment onwards). In '72 this struggle became autonomous because it refused to confine itself to the legal limits demanded by the union bureaucracy .At that time, even if many involved propagated trade unionist ideology, their practice, and Scargill's as one of them, was to confront many of the aims of integration that trade unions had developed in order to save and perpetuate capitalism. During this period, miners showed their contempt for work and the violence of commodity production often by explicitly rejecting the same economic reasoning with which Scargill, and others, compromise themselves nowadays. For example, during the '72 strike miners were asked if they realised that by refusing to do maintenance work they were putting the future of the pit in danger. One replied, “So what, who wants to go down the bloody pit, anyway?”, whilst another said that in closing down the pits they had already saved several lives. And after the dispute had been settled', some sections of the miners refused to go back to work, despite a 20% pay rise, thus showing as much a resistance to forced labour as contempt for the Union hierarchy that negotiated the deal. Naturally, the real abolition of forced labour could only take place if workers seized the mines along with all the other things that are theirs anyway.

Joe Wade, famous for his condemnation of the riot at Warrington which followed the cop's dismantling of the loud-speaker system belonging to the NGA of which he was General Secretary , has been quoted as saying, in relation to the miner's strike, “If the Brigade of Guards goes down, what chance has the light infantry?”. Malcolm Pitt, Kent N.U.M. leader, seems to be the person most fond of quoting this military metaphor. For bureaucrats and leaders class struggle is reduced to classical military battles because they are fearful of all initiative that escapes their discipline: for the Left bureaucrats it's always a question of using the troops to promote their own authority. That various factions of the left-wing of the NUM are competing not just with the Right, but with each other, and using different sections of the miners as ideology fodder in these power battles, is the result of this military mentality. As part of this power battle



between different sects who have different plans for when they get to control the State over the miner's backs, a large section of miners were deliberately sent to Nottingham when the first battles of Orgreave were getting off the ground, thus helping the cops to maintain the thick blue line. The manipulators, nostalgic as ever for '72 -'74, when miners were in an objectively far more powerful position, hope that the troops will somehow cause a sufficient threat to the present organisers of British capital, that they will be able to come to power on their backs, led by the 1980s equivalent of Wilson-Callaghan (Benn? Livingstone? Scargill?) to counter the 1980s version of Heath (Thatcher).

The image of the past victories of '72 and '74 is like a great weight on the backs of the miners, the idea that they alone hold the key to working class victory. But the miners hardly have any greater a part in the maintenance of the economy than any other sector nowadays: the crisis of over-production', partly a conscious choice on the part of the more foresighted managers of the commodity economy, undermines any notion of the miners as an avant-garde. Either they seek the practical recognition of a common necessity to wreck proletarianisation in all its forms -from every sector of the class who are prepared to make solidarity a *practical* force and to recognise a common attack on this world as *their only possible hope*. Or they allow themselves to be used as the pawns of chess-players prepared to sacrifice them wherever it helps to further their pseudo-oppositional careers. It is the nostalgia of the union leaders who somehow hope to become as central a part of the running of the commodity economy as they did from '76-'79. But, as the Winter of Discontent showed, it is dangerous for capital to have the unions so closely associated with the government of the day, for, without the pimps of wage labour *representing* an opposition to the State, autonomous opposition tends to develop with far greater speed.

"How dare you say that people like Malcolm Pitt, who've been imprisoned for refusing to submit to the Tory magistrates' vicious bail conditions, are merely a *false* opposition to capital? What about Scargill, getting beaten up, getting nicked on the picket lines. Haven't they laid themselves on the line like many others?" you may well ask. But, of course, being arrested has never been *in itself* indicative of a rejection of hierarchical aspirations. The rulers arrest pseudo-oppositional leaders as often as they arrest people who pose a real threat: sometimes this is even a conscious decision on the part of the rulers, a way of getting the real threat to identify uncritically with a figurehead. Besides, to believe that the enemy's enemy is our friend is to take our judgmental criteria from the rulers, even if we invert such criteria. By this method one can end up supporting Emmanuel Shinwell, because he was imprisoned after Red Clyde in 1919. Or Kadar, imprisoned and tortured by Stalin, brought in as leader to crush the Hungarian revolution of 1956 precisely because of his anti-Stalinist past. Prison or martyrdom is no indication of radical credibility: those who hold it up as such are those who will be demanding worse sacrifices from their followers in exchange for the sacrifices they've made for them (this need for a credible image is the obvious reason behind the decision of the bureaucrats to suspend payment of their salary for the duration of the strike; whether this gesture of equality will also mean they'll refuse back-pay once work in the mines resumes is another question).

## Some Facts Concerning The Recent History Of The NUM:

1977: The Labour Government forces miners to accept a productivity deal in exchange for guarantees' against closures These guarantees' were forgotten, but the miners have yet to recover from the divisions sown by the productivity deal.  
1981: the NUM call off the South Wales miners action in exchange for worthless promises from the Tory government. Scargill. as President of Yorkshire Area NUM, opposed attempts by South Wales pickets to spread the strike to Yorkshire.  
January 1983: the NUM sabotages growing rank and file movement against pit closures. In Scotland as pickets from the Kinneil pit gain support for their sit-in, McGahey calls off the strike. Kinneil pit is closed. In Wales, the NUM ignores an 80% vote for strike action against job losses. Miners at Selby are persuaded to join the strike by Welsh pickets. The decision is overturned by

NUM officials. The threatened pits are closed. In Kent, the NUM opposes strike action against a compromise deal over redundancies at Snowdon pit. March 1983: Scargill calls for a national strike against pit closures !! ! 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1983: Start of the overtime ban. Coal stocks are 60 million tons. Oct/Nov. 1983: 7-week strike against redundancies at Monktonhall pit in Scotland. The NUM negotiates what they call a 'victory'. None of the strikers' demands are met. 14<sup>th</sup> January 1984: Scargill says the overtime ban is "having a devastating effect". It is - for the miners. Derbyshire face-workers' wages are down to a basic £76 per week. By March, each Yorkshire miner has lost £360. NCB coal stocks are estimated at 50 million tons.

Jan/Feb 1984 : Action by Scottish miners at Bogside and Polmaise pits against closures. Spontaneous walk-outs throughout Scotland in response to new shifts and productivity deal. Scottish NUM executive meeting refuses to call an all-out strike, saying there is no support. Polmaise miners storm out of the meeting and attack McGahey. March 1984 : The confusion during the present strike is just the culmination of years of confusion caused by the NUM's divisive manoeuvres. The NUM, like other unions, defends its own power and influence within the capitalist system, the same system whose crisis has caused the run-down of the coal industry. Thus the 'victory' McGahey claimed at Monktonhall was simply an NCB agreement to consult the NUM before making further closures. The NUM accepts the need for these closures. It supports token actions by miners, but has consistently opposed or sabotaged any effective action.



*Scargill and MacGregor before the strike*

The need of the NUM to "take the heat out of the situation" (Scargill) is shown in the apologetic defensive reaction to the riots in Maltby over two weekends this June, which the Union blamed on "skinheads", presumably because of their un-warranted fascist connotations. In the face of massive State repression, the killing of two pickets by scabs, and the growing 'rational' violence of the irrational market economy, so-called 'mob violence' is a minimal expression of self-pride and class consciousness. Only those who wish to preserve a 'pure' image, which means doing fuck-all against the brute force and cynical intimidation of the State, wish to pretend that miners are merely victims, that they're not out to do anything but win support for their just cause, that this support is dependant on presenting a moral case. That shop windows were smashed in Maltby might threaten the 'support', usually merely pragmatic, of shopkeepers giving food on credit, mainly because the shops would be boycotted if they didn't. The ambiguous position of shopkeepers, often opposed to central power yet supporting it ultimately as a necessary evil', means that they generally feel threatened by any serious radical opposition, since the mentality associated with their mode of survival tends to make all reality outside of the 'reality' of the market completely incomprehensible to them. That's why many of them identified with the Falklands/Malvinas War, the spectacle of all the daring they lack, a 'sacrificial courage' which makes all their trivial banal sacrifices seem somehow worthwhile, a spectacle that compensates for and insures their timidity before the great 'nation which shits on them as much as most of the rest. In the months April to July 1981, these petit-bourgeois were given a shock which still haunts them. In those heady days, looting, a practical solution to the poverty imposed on the strikers by the State and the NUM's lack of strike pay, became almost as commonplace as a traffic accident, and infinitely more friendly.

**Originally this text concluded with an article about looting during the riots of 1981. We have put this in the section on "Shopping" in the Daily life Section, under the title SUMMER SALES**

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Highly recommended: Like A Summer With A Thousand Julys' (<http://www.revoltagainstplenty.com/index.php/archive-local/37-like-a-summer-with-a-thousand-julys.html>) a critique of Britain up until the end of the Falklands/Malvinas war. The best account of the riots, published in spring 1982. Available from Revolt Against Plenty (this recommendation was not solicited by the authors of this text).

\1.Phoenix note: Dave Douglass refers to this quote as part of his criticism of this text in 'Pit Sense versus the State' published almost 10 years after this text was written (in November 1993, by Phoenix Press, P.O.Box 824, London N1 9DL). Its criticisms are dragged out of context but, since all he says is that it was written by BM Combustion, with no full address there's no way anyone, who hadn't heard of it or who wasn't in some so-called radical milieu who knew what the full address for a BM' post box was, could verify his quotes against the original. It's to the credit of the publishers, however, that they sent me a copy of some of the relevant pages before publication, inviting me to comment on them. I didn't respond to the invitation, partly because I had no desire to become involved in an impractical polemic on a battlefield chosen by an opponent. DD slags off in particular this quote, which he attributes to Socialist Worker, though in fact it's a quote from a striking miner in Socialist Worker. He gives no date for this quote but then goes on to say how much bollocks it is to say officials weren't on picket lines because officials were arrested at Orgreave - some two months after the period this striker is talking about (moreover, the miner is talking about his own precise experiences at his pit, not about NUM officials in general). The impression given of this text is that it's so out of touch that it's not worth reading. In this typical Leftist deceitful amalgam technique' he connects things that have no connection in order to make them seem the same - in this case the SWP and me. Worse, sandwiched between different attacks on this text, he attacks the crudely anti-strike propaganda of Ian MacGregor and two obnoxious journalists (Martin Adeney and John Lloyd), which subliminally puts my text and the reactionary texts in the same boat. The distortion of the point of view of opponents is sadly typical of those who have an ideology and a role to defend, those, regardless of their ostensible desires, who are incapable of advancing the struggle one millimetre.

\2:Dave Douglass really goes to town on this in Pit Sense...(although he attributes this bit, inexplicably, to the magazine Freedom). Although this is fairly tentatively stated, and in a text which very clearly sides with the striking miners and attacks scabs, DD deliberately quotes out of context and implies that I support the Notts scabs on the basis of their resentment of Scargill's support for the crackdown in Poland, a fact about Scargill which DD fails to mention, preferring only to attack Walesa and Solidarity. Though he rightly attacks Solidarity for not blacking the export of coal to Britain he fails to mention that it was Jaruzelski's government, which Scargill supported, that was doing the exporting. In the crackdown on the movement in Poland in 1981 - which was not merely a crackdown on Solidarity but on the whole of the class struggle, 6 miners were killed by the State when they occupied their pit. Now Scargill's (and effectively, DD's) support for East European Stalinism was probably merely a pretext for certain Polish miners scabbing, and there's no justification for it offered here - merely a bit of an explanation (after all, it requires a greater degree of integrity than Scargill or DD to support a strike apparently led by a man who had nothing but praise for the murderers of Polish miners, possibly people known to you or your family personally). At this time I had no knowledge of Polish miners in Britain - but it seems they were a very insular and servile lot, uncommunicative outside of their Polish circle, and were only interested in making as much money as possible in as short a time as possible. Clearly no integrity there.

## Chapter 14:

### July - August 1984

#### **1<sup>st</sup> dockers strike...Fitzwilliam riot...hit squads and more local riots**

##### The Dockers' Strike:

From the 9<sup>th</sup> July, at midnight, the leadership of the TGWU called a national dock strike. It seemed at the time there was the chance of a "second front" being opened up in the class struggle. Particularly as one of the main basic issues was at stake in both the miners and the dockers situations: job security. Many dockers had already shown some solidarity with the miners by blacking some coal and iron ore movements. But it was wishful thinking.

The strike was called by the TGWU's national docks committee after British Steel had used workers who were not registered dockers to unload iron ore at Immingham dock on the Humber. The ore was bound for Scunthorpe steel works and had been blacked by Immingham dockers in support of the miners. The use of non-dock labour was a direct contravention of the terms of the National Dock Labour Scheme (DLS) which provided dockers with job security and large redundancy payments should they choose to leave. The union case was partly that British Steel had been asked not to bring in private contractors to move ore until the outcome of the 9<sup>th</sup> July negotiations were known. The union leaders had been hoping that by then some kind of deal would have been cobbled together over the miners' strike so that the dockers could be kept out of it. The effect of the national strike call was to push the issue of how to organise effective blacking of coal and iron ore neatly to one side, turning it into a national disagreement purely within the dock industry between the TGWU and the National Association of Port Employees (NAPE) over the precise wording of the DLS agreement. At the same time, it played on dockers' real fears over the future of the DLS which had come under greater pressure from the Government and employers as the volume of port trade had declined and dockers had become less and less willing to accept voluntary redundancy as unemployment had risen. The truth of this could be seen from the way that, as the strike was called, a train-load of iron ore was taken from Immingham to Scunthorpe unhindered. The 13000 registered dockers in the DLS ports stopped work as soon as the strike was called, but the major non-DLS ports (around 22000 were outside the scheme) such as Felixstowe, Harwich and Newcastle, carried on working. The effect of the stoppage at this stage was to strand 75% of cargo along with over 100 tankers and cargo ships, although there was every possibility that cargo could be re-routed through non-Scheme ports.

Throughout the strike there were virtually no picketing initiatives taken. This was not something that could simply be put down to the dockers' reluctance to participate in the strike, or even to bureaucratic union control of the strike. The simple fact was that there had been traditionally very little reason for dockers to picket out other dockers. Until the few years previously, they had tended to "strike first and ask questions later" when their mates in other ports were in trouble, and strikes had been completely solid. For various reasons - the temporary security dockers had gained, the destruction of dockland communities, etc. - striking dockers could no longer rely on this sort of automatic solidarity' possibly even less than the miners could.

4<sup>th</sup> July Felixstowe finally voted to join the strike, but they were not prepared to disrupt passenger services. 16<sup>th</sup> July, Dover voted to stop all freight but on the same day tugmen in Swansea went back to work, as did 200 dockers at 2 oil industry supply bases. In neither case did the striking dockers do anything to counter this.

Over the next couple of days the reluctant strikers of Dover were given just the excuse they'd been waiting for when lorry drivers began to blockade Channel ports in protest at not being able to take their lorries onto the ferries. It began with a small number of owner-drivers using their lorries to block the entrance to a Townsend Thoresen ferry at Labis and quickly spread to

Ostend and Zeebrugge. 300 lorries which had been parked on the M20 throughout the strike began to move off in convoy for Dover to negotiate with the harbour board. By next day the dockers' shop stewards had called off the freight ban "because of fears of violence in the port". So much for shop stewards.

Much was made by the press and TV of the fact that many of the lorry drivers were in the TGWU, which hid the fact that that great bulk of them, including all the initiators of the blockades were self-employed owner-drivers, a petty-bourgeoisification of lorry drivers developed by capital in the aftermath of the Winter of Discontent, when lorry drivers were the most combative. Nobody tried to burn their lorries.

With the precedent set by Dover, the strike collapsed. The next day there were votes all over the country to return to work. The dock bosses never even made any promises about any future breach of the DLS, promises they could have made because such promises are always empty - they just reaffirmed their commitment to existing procedures. All this was hailed by the TGWU's national docks officer, John Connolly, as a "great victory!"

During this strike, the miners blocked and occupied the Humber Bridge. Although some dockers met up with them, there was no attempt on either side to push things further, to spread the action and continue contacts - a great opportunity missed...

A major attack on cops and the NCB by striking miners, young supporters and the unemployed in Fitzwilliam, W. Yorks. 8 cops came to the house of a 26 year old miner to arrest him, but he refused to come out until they got a warrant. Word got round the village that the guy was to be arrested, so a crowd of 200 - miners and their families went to the police station where a local NUM official received an assurance that the guy would not be arrested if he went the next day to the police station with the branch official and a solicitor. But after the crowd dispersed, a police transit van repeatedly passed the guy's house with a cop inside shouting "Brendan, Brendan - we're coming for you". Consequently, nearby Hemsworth police station, with only 3 cops inside, was besieged, its windows broken and the cops knocked out. So then, shortly before closing time, over 80 cops - many in riot gear - marched on the Fitzwilliam pub, where about 200 locals had gathered and physically battered them through the main doors into the tap room, breaking windows and glasses. Brendan, the wanted guy, was arrested and handcuffed to a lamppost with a friend who was knocked unconscious with a truncheon and kept in hospital overnight. The guy's girlfriend and cousin were also arrested. In revenge, nearby Kinsley drift mine was attacked by about 200 where management, pit deputies and security guards barricaded themselves in for 3 hours as the windows in every building were smashed, along with the clocking-on machine and a forklift truck was used to smash down gates and take three vans, 2 being burnt, the other one just smashed up. £100,000 worth of damage was caused.

At Rossington, 300 pickets chopped down trees across the entry road to the pit and kept the cops at bay with burning barricades and fire hoses. After consulting with the NUM branch committee, the cops withdrew and the branch committee called in 4 top Yorkshire officials, including Jack Taylor, to disperse the crowd. They moved amongst the pickets saying, "*We must be disciplined. We are the generals. If you don't take our leadership the fight will be lost. What you are doing is illegal. You'll be charged with unlawful assembly and riotous behaviour.*" This was the same NUM praised by the anarchists of Black Flag and DAM (Direct Action Movement), the same NUM which Class War refused to criticise because it was more concerned to court popularity than to try to help win a real struggle. Fortunately, none of the pickets moved in response to the cop-initiated NUM warning. In fact, some of them responded by occupying the pit yard, holding the management hostage, destroying the miners' personal records held in the colliery offices and rebuilding the barricades. The cops asked Jack Taylor and the rest of the NUM officials to fetch out the management hostages but the pickets refused. Finally, 2 cop vans led by Rossington officials got through to rescue the managers. They left

under a hail of bricks leaving the assistant colliery manager behind, caught on the picket's barbed wire. He was finally rescued an hour later. Meanwhile, a group of women found a scab in the main high road and beat him up. Jack Taylor told a radio interviewer later, "*I'll walk with them[management], I'll drive the vans, I'll do anything to get them out except carry them on my back.*" This is the same Jack Taylor who Dave Douglass (the previously mentioned anarcho-demagogue who flirts with the media, and who joined Class War during the strike) defended against accusations of being a Stalinist - "*Jack Taylor is not a Stalinist by any definition*" (Pit Sense versus the State, 1993). It takes a Stalinist not to know one. \10b

**14/7/84:**

A march of over 1000 miners from North Derbyshire cross the Notts border to go to Warsop colliery where there are officially 60 scabs. In the inevitable confrontation with the cops, a fence gets ripped out of the ground and the wooden stakes are used as weapons, thrown like javelins at the cops. One cop gets his ribs cracked and another an eye injury.

Towards the end of July (no date) cops arrested 3 people, including a sailor, suspected of planning several night-time sabotage expeditions. Next day, the sailors from Felixstowe (the port where the arrested sailor worked) went on strike and the 2 were immediately released.

**7/8/84:**

20 strikers break into Longannet mine in Fife and overturn a van belonging to a scab. A scab's car in Hucknall, Nottingham, has his brake pipes severed. Lorry drivers at a coal loading point at Maryport, Cumbria are attacked and injured; one driver has his arm broken.

**8/8/84:**

One formerly striking miner returned to work in Betws pit, South Wales. The people of the village blocked the pits gates and besieged the scab's house. Some of the people from the neighbouring village of Blaendgarw attacked the cops from the rear. Lots of those arrested managed to escape.

**11/8/84:**

8 young strikers from Shirebrook pit in Derbyshire and a farm worker set alight the shelter of a haulage company holding 5 NCB buses used by scabs - all buses were burnt out, causing £65,000 worth of damage, but the guys got caught. On January 8<sup>th</sup> they all got two and a half years, except the youngest, an 18 year old - he got 3 years. In 1969 young radical threw a molotov at the Ulster Office in London - the guy done for it, though not the guy who did it, got 9 months and friends were shocked. Nowadays, for doing what the Shirebrook guys did you'd probably get more (recently some first-time offenders - East European women - got 15 months inside for stealing £300 from Sylvia Syms the actress, money stolen without any threat physical or verbal, whatsoever).

**16/8/84:**

In Brixton, S.London, an arrest in Railton Road turns into a fight and a barricade is built.

Round about this time (no precise date) 6000 people encircle Gascoigne Wood pit to prevent the entrance of only one single scab. Police vans were attacked. The cops and the scab were forced to retreat - "It was operationally unsafe". In Brodsworth, Hatfield and Armthorpe, pits very close to one another, people built barricades and attacked the cops, using what the cops called "guerilla tactics" (no precise date).

In Bedwas, after a miner had returned to work, safety cover was withdrawn, preventing all work below - the NCB, by law, were compelled to cut off the electricity supply after a 24-hour period if maintenance men have not done their work. Safety cover had already been withdrawn at Solgirth, Frances and Monktonhall pits.

**20/8/84:**

N.Derby scab gets a burning rag pushed through his letterbox in the middle of the night. No-one hurt. A garage blaze destroys 2 NCB vehicles in Retford. A coal lorry has its windscreen broken on an opencast site at Stavely. A stone is thrown through the window of a scab at Shirebrook. An electricity pylon for the Oxcroft coke plant in Derbyshire got sabotaged.

**21/8/84:**

3 burning barricades across the road face cops escorting a solitary scab into Silverwood colliery, Rotherham. 8 cops are injured as the strikers mount hit and run attacks on cop cars, slipping out of the woods, hurling stones and metal bars, and disappearing again into the depths of the woods again shortly before 4 a.m.

Armthorpe: up till this time, for four and a half months, the picket line at Markham Main colliery

in Armthorpe was one of the most peaceful in the country. Token pickets were organised between the NUM and the local NCB management at pre-arranged times, whilst the NUM official would phone the NCB manager to allow miners in to do safety cover. On this day, 3 scabs from outside the village (the NCB always targetted those furthest from the centre of the dispute to persuade them to go back to work), broke the strike for the first time. The convoy deploying the hooded scabs rushed through the entrance, scattering pickets and knocking several down. Cops from Manchester taunted the pickets waving £10 notes (the cops were raking it in in overtime, whilst the pickets relied on collections) and rolling coins at them.

**22/8/84:**

Armthorpe: after a negotiated cop/NUM deal to reduce both cops and pickets because of the tension arising from the previous day, the cops withdrew from the village. When local council workers arrived in the morning to use road building equipment parked outside the pit entrance one of the few remaining pickets persuaded them to drive their vehicles and abandon them in the pit entrance (earlier that month, council workers driving to work had been stopped and searched by the cops in an aggressive and threatening manner, so the council workers had a clear sympathy for the miners). Pickets then used a crane, taken from the pit yard, to barricade the road with concrete blocks, and hijacked an excavator to help in the building of the barricade. A brazier was overturned to set fire to tyres and the barricade became a burning one. Other pickets roamed the colliery, causing damage to lighting and television monitoring equipment. Managers at the colliery, who should have left work at about 6 am, were trapped there and not relieved till noon.

Consequently, 52 transit vans of cops drove into the village to occupy it. Armthorpe was cut off from the outside by the cops, many of them in heavy riot gear, most of them without badge numbers, to avoid identification. Riot cops charged through the village and back greens chasing pickets. *"One of the lads pelted the [police] van and ran through my garden. Police thought he'd gone into my house...[there were in fact 4 pickets having tea with this 59-year old woman]...My son locked the front door and I went round the back...The back door was unlocked but they kicked it in. Police said, "send the bastards out". I said, "You're not getting in. Then he jammed the door in my face".* She received extensive bruising to the right side of her face and her right ear and 3 and a half months later was still suffering from recurrent headaches. She added, *"I was once in favour of the police but there's no way they will get any help from me now."* In another incident, a woman had just got up to feed her baby - *"I must have blinked because the next thing I knew, there were six riot officers in my kitchen. It was like the Keystone Cops. I was too frightened to do anything. I just stared. I then heard the window break. They caught up with one of the lads just outside my front hedge. There were six of them and the lad they were chasing was on the floor. They were knocking hell out of him...I had been watching the telly previous to this and I thought that the miners were at fault for starting the violence. I did not believe police in this country carried on like this."* She then went outside and demanded which of the 30 officers was going to pay for the damage that they had done to her window and kitchen. *"All 30 officers started swearing at me. They said things like, Get back into the effing house, you slag'. I could not believe it. They thought they could do anything they liked because they knew they could not be identified and nothing would happen to them."* From 9 in the morning till early afternoon, the whole village was under curfew: nobody could get in or out - not even ambulances (for the injured pickets) or fire engines. Cops told journalists that 20 *"paramilitary"* pickets wearing balaclavas, camouflage jackets and overalls had been involved in the barricade, *"a sinister new development"* and justified the sealing off of the village by claiming that pickets were stoning *any* vehicle passing through. Despite the cops ostensibly having the situation under control, loads of miners and supporters, went round the other side of the village, took the cops by surprise and attacked them.

At Bentley pit, 30 to 50 masked pickets wrecked NCB equipment - a coal board bus and a colliery van, which they overturned to build barricades. Edlington - a barricade at the colliery

gates was set on fire. 3 scabs at Kiveton were greeted with a hail of missiles. 14 scabs throughout Yorkshire, 2 less than the day before. After almost 5 months - effectively solid.

**24/8/84:**

At Easington colliery, Durham, 250 people gathered to stop a single scab from going in, as they'd managed to do for a week.. The cops take him in by a secret back door, breaking an agreement with the NUM. At once, people from neighbouring villages and pits arrive and attack the NCB buildings and vehicles. 71 windows are smashed, 2 cars are turned upside down and four more had their windows smashed. 3 cops hospitalised, one needing 3 stitches. A picket suffers a broken leg from being truncheoned.

Elsewhere, a South Yorkshire picketing group seized some bulldozers and used them to destroy several NCB offices.

2 cops are injured in Kiveton Park. At Ellerbeck open cast colliery near Chorley, Lancs, 3 cops are injured as pickets throw stones at private contractors' trucks.

Meanwhile a scab died because of the NCB's lack of safety - crushed to death by a hydraulic support he was using for roof repairs 2000 feet underground at Cotgrave Colliery. Scabs always have their own best interests at heart.

Dockers at Hunterstone (west coast of Scotland) refused to unload Polish coal from the coal ship Ostia destined to go to the Ravenscraig steel works where fights between pickets and cops were taking place every day. The management then called upon steel workers to unload the ships. The dockers then brought the entire port to a standstill. The TGWU national docks committee declared that they were in favour of a national strike, leaving each port free to decide through a ballot. As soon as the strike of the Hunterstone dockers was announced, dockers from Hull, London and Liverpool stopped working. By the 29th, the 12 Scottish ports were on strike.

**28/8/84:**

After 8 days withdrawal of safety cover at Polkemmet pit by the NUM when 6 strikers turned into scabs, the NCB declares that there's 13 million gallons of water in inaccessible shafts. Engineers say it'll take 6 months to remove the water and up to a year longer to return the pit to production. The pit is normally the main supplier for Ravenscraig steel plant, which has continued production with imported coal. Before the strike, Polkemmet supplied Ravenscraig with about 400,000 tonnes of coal a year.

**30/8/84:**

In Limehouse, E.London, during a circus, a kid with an air gun shoots cops who are standing around; when they try to arrest him, lots of people attack them, and they are forced to flee. Some people might say that to suggest this was part of the general mood/subversive current of the times is stretching speculation to the limit: however, you have to think about what would happen nowadays if such a thing happened - the most likely outcome is that the crowd would have pounced on the kid, or at the very least, let the cops do what they wanted.

**31/8/84:**

14 cops injured by flying pickets in Kiveton Park, S.Yorks. In Woolwich, S.E.London, 200 youths attack the cops and break shop windows following a dancing competition.

At the end of October, the head of the Met, Sir Kenneth Newman, declared that during this previous summer in London, "*there were many mini-riots which had the potential to escalate to Brixton 1981 proportions. But they were quickly and effectively extinguished....the prevention of public disorder is at the top of our list of priorities.*"

One could sense this volatile rumblings-under-the-surface type atmosphere at the time. And me and a group of friends and contacts wanted to contribute to this atmosphere. We had a project of occupying a disused church off Holloway Road, North London. The building needed a lot of cleaning - it was partly squatted by pigeons, and hadn't been used for over 30 years, but was an unusual place, being round with a round corridor around it and a few rooms, plus a stage We aimed to use this as a base for support for the miners and to somehow agitate to spread the struggle, as well as having free concerts which might have been used for collections for the miners. With this in mind, we hoped to go along to schools to distribute leaflets attacking education', to workplaces attacking work, to discos attacking the disco scene etc.etc. Plus we thought we might cover the area with interesting graffiti and maybe do a bit of appropriately-targetted vandalism. Plus use the place for mass meetings and discussions.



Unfortunately we were a bit slow to take it over, and the place got squatted by some rock band which used it as a studio. In part this delay was my fault, since, having suggested the idea I really wanted to be part of it from the word go, feeling somehow I was indispensable, but I decided to go off to France for a couple of weeks because my girlfriend, who was there seeing her family, was getting jealous about another relationship I was having (yawn)...All this personal stuff aside (fairly petty stuff which nevertheless can have an effect on events), it was a project that could, in very different circumstances, be adapted in almost any historical period - though the best situation to do such a thing, the least voluntaristic, is when people are starting to move (the pre-Iraqi war situation with the schoolkids strikes and mini-riots would have been such an opportunity, for example). Of course, everything depends on how much such agitational texts connect to such movements, how much they have to say about the immediate moment, how abreast with reality they are. And also today such an occupation is far more likely to receive the attention of the cops very quickly, so they probably wouldn't last very long - but enough people can do quite a lot, even in 24 hours.

## **Chapter 15:**

### **September - October 1984**

2nd dockers strike...TUC Brighton Conference...pathetic Leftism...  
...niceness and urgency...Contradictions of the NUM...  
...More attacks on NCB property and on cops...  
...Thatcher almost caves in...IRA bombs Thatcher...  
...unpublished leaflet...NACODS and the almost strike...  
...MI5's dirty tricks...Thatcher almost lost...almost almost...

September saw the second national dock strike, called in response to the BSC allowing a coal ship to dock at Hunterston in Ayrshire without TGWU boatmen to moor the ship - they used a local contract firm instead. The union had blacked the ship after talks broke down between them and the BSC over the level of iron and coal supplies to Ravenscraig. In Scotland, dockers responded immediately with solid strikes in all 12 DLS ports. None of the non-DLS ports in England joined at any stage and the situation in the English DLS ports was a complete mess, with dockers either unable to decide whether they were in or out, expressing and encouraging serious splits within ports. In Britson, a meeting broke up in confusion after shop stewards refused to allow a vote. At Tilbury, the shop stewards blatantly tried to rig the vote by means of a confusing resolution which led many dockers to believe they were voting to return to work when in fact they were voting to strike ( a couple of days previously 600 dockers had held an unofficial meeting and voted to return to work, but only 40 of the scabs actually dared to cross the picket line.

By the second week there were over half of the DLS dockers (almost 8,000 out of 13,000) out on strike and almost none of the non-DLS dockers. Then John Connolly said that although the

strike was over "scab labour", it could be resolved through lower coke quotas for Ravenscraig. In other words, the question of preserving the Dock Labour Scheme was being quietly shelved once again. During this second week, there were quite a few attempts to picket out the working ports, with Southampton dockers unsuccessfully picketing Felixstowe, Portsmouth and Poole, and by the third week some miners were joining in the picketing of Grimsby and Immingham (several hundred being turned back by the cops, as were 50 Hull dockers). In the middle of all this the TGWU leadership responded by saying that picketing must be stepped up providing, of course, that it is within TUC guidelines. The TUC picketing guidelines were drawn up between the TUC and the Callaghan Government after the Winter Of Discontent. Basically, the guidelines said that pickets should act in a "disciplined and peaceful manner", even when provoked and should obey the instructions of union officials at all times.

By the end of the third week a shabby deal was patched together involving collaboration between union bureaucrats and slimy Labour politicians like John Prescott and Neil Kinnock. At the end of it all, BSC gave nothing away over the employment of non-DLS labour and the union agreed to meet the BSC/ISTC quota of imported coal through Hunterston in Scotland within 2 months. Another great victory!

### **3/9/84:**

In Brighton there was a mass lobby of the TUC by miners and supporters. In different parts of the town there's graffiti saying **T**.hatcher's **U**.nofficial **C**.ops.

*"We arrived, about 12 of us, men and women, in Brighton after going a round about way to avoid the cops' possibly turning us back. It'd been an unusually long drive in the van, considering the normal short distance. We parked the Southwark Unemployed Centre van over half a mile from the beach, drank a bit of wine and headed off, mid-morning, towards the sea front for the demonstration, armed with spray cans and pamphlets. There's a statue of Queen Victoria in the park so two of us went down to the statue and one gets up high to shove a black flag in her hand, whilst the other one at the bottom spray-paints, "We are all abused". Cops come along and, without radioing for back-up, attempted to arrest him, holding him in an arm lock from the front round his neck and at the side. The others came along and one of them bit one cops hand, whilst others pushed the other cop out of the way, and the guy ran like fuck through the narrow streets and everybody else did likewise - everyone gets away. As soon as the spray-painter meets up with one of his mates, she gives him her jumper so he looks different, whilst the cops go round Brighton peering out of their cop car in vain all round the demo for the crowd who assaulted them. No one gets nicked, and we continue the day in good spirits, elated by this small victory, handing out subversive pamphlets and chatting and arguing and feeling good, whilst most other people felt pretty bored." At the time, this seemed to be the only incident of the day, the rest of the lobby being utterly peaceful, whilst the TUC leaders bent over backwards to praise the miners all the better to bury them - basically to avoid any conflict which would show up their utterly repressive function. Like bosses and leaders everywhere, they were full of*

promises - which meant zilch. But, it seemed like a successful method of pacifying the miners, who'd been threatening for days, weeks, months even, to get angry with the TUC: according to the papers, the whole day passed peacefully.

A letter was later sent to one of those involved in the incident mentioned above:

*"Dear G.,*

*I have been asked to write to you about the incident involving you, some of your friends and the police at Brighton on the TUC lobby on Sept.3rd.*

*Whilst it is obviously no concern of ours how individuals behave in their own time, a number of those attending the lobby and several Miners Support Group members who did not expressed their feelings that it was frankly out of order for people representing the MSG and therefore the NUM as a whole to behave in such a way that could bring the miners and their supporters into disrepute. We spoke to a number of Kent miners whom the MSG is supporting and they have echoed our sentiments.*

*At last Monday's meeting of the MSG (10/9/84) it was therefore suggested that we write to you expressing our concern over the matter and requesting you to inform your friends that, should they wish to attend future lobbies, demonstrations etc. organised by us they must refrain from acting in the way they did previously or else exempt themselves from the right to attend such events in our name and using our transport.*

*Yours fraternally,*

*N.Phillips,*

*for and on behalf of Soutwark Unemployed Centre Miners Support Group.*

Sheer poetry. Especially the bit about "*how individuals behave in their own time*" - if only we'd realised this was work-time, we could have demanded a wage for the day. Or perhaps we weren't meant to be wage-slaves at all, simply slaves.

But what a laughably pompous bureaucratic representation of outraged reasonableness! What's sadly sad behind this joke is that there was too much of this crass conservative desire to *represent*, and demand that everyone *represent*, a reasonable 'moral goody goody' image amongst the Left and the liberal supporters of the miners which miners failed to oppose.

There was a more interesting incident the day of the TUC lobby deserving of mention which would have shocked the above quoted N. Phillips into writing an even sterner letter and maybe wag his forefinger till it dropped off - if he'd *heard* about it: several union leaders cars had been attacked and smashed in the evening in a car park near the TUC conference - but it was mostly kept quiet to give the image of sweet harmony. People only heard about it some time after. This ability of the ruling world to keep secrets until their revelation has no practical use is something that any future movement will have to find ways of attacking - not just by creating informative information networks (like the regular monthly, sometimes, weekly, journal produced during the Wapping dispute - "Picket") but also finding ways of uncovering the seemingly invincible manipulations of the State's secret services - but more of this later.

Let's continue the point above where we said, "... *there was too much of this crass conservative desire to represent, and demand that everyone represent, a reasonable 'moral goody goody image amongst the Left and the liberal supporters of the miners which miners failed to oppose.*" This was probably because it would have seemed too much like ungratefully biting the hand that feeds them. They were grateful for any support they could get, and held back on any criticism of patronising attitudes or correct' line-pushing. The desire to just get on, to be nice', can often repress the most fundamental things, particularly in a struggle as vital as this. Too often those fighting this fight confined their criticisms to behind people's backs. A Fitzwilliam miner's wife said towards the end of the strike, "*I didn't mind the lefties at first. Then I realised they just wanted to manipulate us.*"

In fact, on both sides - miners and even their most radical supporters - there was a tendency to hold back what you really thought. Those supporters who were critical of the NUM and of Scargill voiced their critiques fairly mutedly - holding back on any sense of urgency in trying to find some way of going beyond and subverting the union. This was partly because they felt kind of grateful that they could come along and help out the struggle, grateful for the generous warmth and spirit, grateful that the miners were open to support as compared with a more corporatist mentality - "we'll fight and win our fight on our own - we don't need outsiders" - from the pre-Thatcher epoch (a mentality which, in its own terms, was true: workers often *did* win without connecting to outsiders' because there was already a general rising confidence to struggle and because the State hadn't yet found a way to divide and rule so well).

The path of least resistance is paved with good intentions and we know where that road leads to.

Nowadays people's sense of self and of each other is so fragile that niceness seems like the only essential thing in life and the slightest expressed frustration leads to an explosion of variations on "You're not being nice to me!!". Arguing having less and less connection to a social struggle against hierarchy, avoiding arguments seems like the only way to be.

But at that time arguing about what to do to extend the struggle for outsiders' should not have contradicted the desire to get on on a friendly basis. Which was why it was a shame we didn't express ourselves better. Perhaps this was just a fear of falling into the role of arrogantly trying to teach the workers lessons. Whilst everyone could agree about the media and Kinnock and the cops, arguments about the union were far too often avoided, or limited to light chat. This isn't a plea for the virtues of getting heavy, like some people play the challenger role - but over time, it was very important to do something about the union - not just chat...In part, however, this was due to the surprise that the union wasn't exactly like other unions...For some, this meant completely dropping their critique of unions (or at least of the NUM) - a cowardice justified with a Leninist-political mentality of trying to be popular above all, the place where niceness' and opportunism meet [\[11\]](#). Whilst others just didn't want to analyse the subtleties of the contradictions of the NUM, falling back on an oversimplified critique from a distance. They

condemned the NUM as being like other unions, looking mainly at unionism as a generality and in terms of its most well known full-time leaders but not at the daily life of the NUM in the villages. Unlike most unions and industries, its members were still living as a community in the locality of their workplace, a kind of “throwback” giving them an unusual cohesion and solidarity (the absence and/or disappearance of this in other industries has certainly affected and weakened work-based struggles). The hit squads were the living evidence of an autonomous self-organised struggle which also usually involved the local union leaders, and union equipment and local union financing - although it should be emphasised that union officials contributed no more than any other striker. In fact, the union was seen as being a lot less separate from the strikers and from the wider community than in other (non-miners) strikes. Ultra-leftists and others were right to point out the times when the NUM clearly did act as something against the strikers (e.g. when in Fitzwilliam, the NUM withdrew its mini-bus, enormously limiting locally controlled action) but tended to exaggerate them and ignore the aspects of how the NUM were also intertwined with independent struggle. At the top it was partly an old vanguardist project of developing a State capitalism tied to industrial capital, but at the bottom it was a hell of a lot more blurred. Without wishing to minimise some of the hierarchical aspects of the NUM at local level, there was a difference between the national NUM and the local NUM. Of course, NUM ideologists ignored the aspects of the NUM which contradicted their notion that there was no difference between the union and independent struggle, that it was nothing more than the autonomous power of its members, that the Union was its members. They see no critique, hear no critique, speak no critique. Simple. Fitzwilliam strikers were far more critical of the national leadership, which may have been one of the reasons why the NUM withdrew its minibus in the last couple of months of the strike. The reason for their dislike of Scargill was straightforward. Kinsley, the Fitzwilliam pit, was originally a deep mine, which closed, leaving all the Fitzwilliam miners having to get jobs in pits miles away. Then some years later, it re-opened as a drift mine Kinsley Drift. The miners from Fitzwilliam wanted their jobs back, but Scargill helped to stitch them up by getting the miners from his own pit jobs there. The fact that Fitzwilliam miners didn't work at Kinsley was significant during the strike because the miners at Kinsley (and therefore in the local NUM branch) were far less militant than the Fitzwilliamers, and they weren't part of the community, nor did they have any stake in it.

\* \* \* \* \*

**3/9/84:** 2 molotovs are chucked at the electrical substation near Kiveton Park colliery as 7 miners went back to work. Later on in the strike (no date, but well before Christmas) a TV programme showed the dispute between scabs and pickets in the area by reducing this to two personalities (the leading scab and the local NUM branch official). Up till Christmas there were something like 15 scabs in Kiveton out of a total workforce of almost a thousand, but the TV gave equal time to the leading scab and his wife and the branch official. The scab was portrayed as reasonable. This is known as 'balance'. Just how balanced the scab was is shown by the fact

that after the strike he went to his local bank and demanded to see his bank balance, his savings. When the manager showed him the credit print-out, he said he didn't want to see it on paper he wanted to see the actual amount of cash he had saved, in notes and coins to make sure the bank actually had his money.

**4/9/84:**

16 members of management and lower management of the Edinburgh Destroyer and of an off-shore platform near Cammell Laird shipyards, Birkenhead, try to get on board the ship which had been occupied for 11 weeks by just 50 boilermakers protesting against redundancies. Immediately, having been alerted by the unemployed centre in Birkenhead, 200 people, among them many miners, arrived quickly and chased them off.

12 unemployed members of Clydeside Anarchist Group stormed a multi-storey office block in Glasgow and occupied the 13th floor office h.q. of the Price Waterhouse millionaire accountancy firm responsible for sequestrating the South Wales ' miners funds. 2 60 foot banners were stretched around the outside of the block, reading, "Glasgow Backs The Miners" and "Unemployed Solidarity". 1000s of leaflets explaining the action were handed out at job centres and dole offices throughout the city. The 12 were arrested by the cops, strip-searched and charged with breach of the peace and malicious damage.

September saw the 2nd national dock strike, which was a defeat - it didn't even achieve the "promise" "won" by the first strike. It wasn't a sign of growing dockers' solidarity with the miners, even if there were positive moments such as joint dockers' and miners' pickets (as there were in the first strike) - it wasn't even the usual story of growing discontent forcing the union to make the strike official. In the end the TGWU virtually allowed the bosses to ship in any amount of imported coal they wanted through Hunterston in Scotland (which was the origin of the strike). Both unions and bosses claimed a victory, and that they had conceded nothing.

**6/9/84:**

9 cops and 4 pickets injured as 3000 pickets gather outside Kellingley colliery in North Yorks. The nearby A615 is closed for a time. An ITN crew's Volvo Estate, parked near the Nottinghamly miners' welfare centre, is turned over, partially set on fire and its tyres slashed. Film equipment worth more than £10,000 is taken from the car and strewn across the road. Council workers from the road department of S. Yorks. county council went on strike and joined the miners pickets after 3 of them had been threatened by cops when they were searched in a particularly rough way. In Kiveton Park, 3000 pickets gathered to prevent 7 scabs from entering: the village was under total occupation of the cops, with cops giving V signs to miners' kids as young as 8 for no particular reason, openly urinating in front of pickets and their families, charging through parts of the village on horseback and beating people up. Seizing the opportunity given by the concentration of police forces at Kiveton

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reason, openly urinating in front of pickets and their families, charging through parts of the village on horseback and beating people up. Seizing the opportunity given by the concentration of police forces at Kiveton, the people of Edlington attacked scabs' houses and the few cops remaining there were injured.

**24/9/84:**

Over 4000 pickets occupy Maltby where there are a couple of scabs and bombard the cops, several of whom are injured.

During August and September, every single local coal board had its reports of sabotage. The Sunday Times moaned, *"it is the thousands of cases of minor damage that may in the end prove more costly than the spectacular vandalism"*.

*Incomplete and unpublished leaflet written at this time:*

The fundamental lie of all the current false choices of submissive life is to scream out at you, 24-hours a day, from the billboards, the radio, the TV, the newspapers, from the teachers and social workers, from shop windows and from the city's architecture, from every nook and cranny of colonized space, that *your* anger, *your* desires, *your* point of view are all *nothing, unrealistic, impossible*. If you don't resign yourself to the realistic' inevitability of cops, schools, money, hypocrisy, mass starvation, wage labour, buying and selling, bureaucracy, boredom, despair and all the forms of external authority that organize this misery for you, you're obviously just an idle dreamer, well on the way to being locked up in a bin. Calm down, take some valium, switch on Channel 4, go down the club, find someone to screw with, score some speed, try roller-skating or take up gardening, invent a dance or turn your frustration into a song or a poem or something - just don't take life so seriously - after all, we've all gotta compromise - what makes you so different? Why do you have to remind me of the anger I've managed to repress?

As the ruling scum's servile guard-dogs, the cops, and the courts, get heavier so the rulers' lies aim closer & closer to Goebells' dream that *"The bigger the lie, the more it is believed."* In the miners' strike this is already a daily banality: everyday the BBC or ITV churn out lies with the cool calm assurance of bourgeois objective' truth (for example, on the day the strike became 6-months old, all channels published the lie that striking miners had lost £4000 in lost wages, as if the average miners wage was £160 a week, instead of the average £80 for 40 hours without overtime which was the true figure). It's no coincidence that the monologue of the radio was one of the fundamental means of manipulation used in Nazi Germany. Since the war, the box has supplanted the radio as the main form of manipulation. Everyday the Left and the Centre churn

out different lies and half-truths and the spectator is meant to join in on one side or the other, rather than make sides, rather than intervene to uncover the false choices of *all* hierarchies, of *all* wings of capital.

**28/9/84:**

Half a mile from Silverwood colliery, where just 2 scabs had returned to work, a convoy of cop vans are stopped by a 3 foot high barricade and are surrounded by pickets. The press and the cops refer to this as a “diabolical ambush”. “Striking Times”, a one-off radical paper set the following competition:

### **Striking Times Diabolical Competition**

All you have to do is decide what truly happened in the so-called Diabolical Ambush ' at Silverwood Colliery on 28th September. Was it:

- (a). 9 police dog vans and a cop Range Rover were attacked by 700 miners acting on the direct instructions of the NUM leadership? (Home Office version)
- (b). 2 dog vans were overturned and one dog handler was knocked over, his dog escaping to attack both pickets and cops (Guardian, 29th September).
- (c).500 pickets plus their cars were attacked by 1,500 police in riot gear? (Sheffield Police Watch version).
- (d).Up to 3000 pickets threw stones at police vehicles and at pickets' own cars by mistake? (Police version)
- (e).Miners had finally had enough of being continually on the receiving end of police violence and harassment. The miners acted on their own initiative, not the NUM leaderships, according to the old saying “Attack is the best form of defence” (Striking Times version)
- (f). Other journalistic lies and distortions?

Send your answers to Striking Times along with a cheque for £5. Please include a statement using not more than eight four-letter words on the role of the British Bobby in industrial disputes. The lucky winner of this competition will win a cheque for £2.50p.

The police weren't the only repressive arm of the State that the miners directly confronted. In Burnley, a 19 year old pregnant miner's wife was told by a Social Worker to “eat potato peelings”.

Round about this time, though it may have been earlier (no date) 2 striking miners (from South Wales, I think) in a car are driven at at full speed by cops and are forced off the road, their car crashing and they're killed. Nothing in the press about it. And the NUM could've made more about it....



**2/10/84:**

Village of Rossington completely occupied by anti-riot squads equipped with vicious dogs; against this provocation, people succeed in building a barricade.

Round about this time (no date), the people of Wooley, near Barnsley built barricades across roads and at the pit gate. The fight lasted two hours without any arrests. A group of cops under hot pursuit retreated into the colliery and were immediately locked in.

**4/10/84:**

Just after midnight, about 600 pickets blocked the entrance to Hartlepool nuclear power station. 2 patrol cars get stoned by the pickets and were forced to withdraw. The miners then barricaded the entrance, ripping up fencing and setting it on fire. Two British Oxygen tankers which were driven up to the site were pelted with stones and one of the windscreens was shattered although the driver wasn't hurt. John Lyons, general secretary of the Electrical Power Engineers Association condemned the pickets saying that the TUC had specifically excluded nuclear power stations from any action and the behaviour of the pickets breached TUC guidelines.

At Wooley colliery, hundreds of cops get pelted with stones for a short while.

**5/10/84:**

Once again, a scab, father of two, died - crushed by falling coal 3000 feet underground at Wolstanton Colliery whilst he was clearing a blockage. These kinds of facts could've been shouted at scabs on picket lines - and maybe sometimes they were.

In some of the most combatative mining areas, where the miners had been unable to pay their bills for 7 months, fuel workers refused to go in and cut off supplies, some out of solidarity, some out of fear of the reception they'd get. In Glasgow, a group of unemployed workers cut off the mains to the Electricity Board Office to give them a taste of their own medicine, and organised an "Instant Response Unit" to intercept employees going to cut off working class households.

This kind of exemplary act of solidarity was too rare throughout the strike; too often the support remained just that, rather than turning into any independent initiative to be acted upon. Supporters generally stood behind the miners struggle, rather than alongside them. The heroic, vanguard reputation of the miners worked against them - aided by years of Lefty mythologising, people saw their support as giving secondary backup activity to the strikers, rather than taking a lead from their own situation to initiate something. Just as the majority of miners ultimately abdicated initiative to the NUM leadership, so did supporters' abdicate initiative to the miners they supported.

Some time during the week 8th to 13th October (can't be bothered to find the date), the IRA bombed The Grand Hotel in Brighton where Thatcher was having a piss at the time of the explosion. The London radio station vetted all incoming phone calls to the programme to make

sure that only “outraged members of the public” would have their say about the Brighton Bomb. One woman slipped through the net and said that most of her friends saw “**the funny side**”. In fact, the bomb was a great show - the IRA's image shot up in the eyes of the miners, and no-one could understand it if you said they just aspired to be another government. This uncritical admiration for the IRA was helped by the anti-terrorist style of Thatcher's rousing speech to the faithful, implicitly comparing violent pickets with the IRA knee-capping nationalists. After that, a certain anti-terrorist revulsion-inciting amalgam technique on the part of the Tories and the TUC developed against the picket-line violence, as if a hierarchical elite force aiming to take over the State, often killing indiscriminately, brutally punishing soft-drug dealers because they intruded on their own dealing, knee-capping looters, partly financed by sections of the American bourgeoisie that this racket could compare with the direct autonomous actions of people fighting for some sense of community against State power. However, a helluvalot of miners had illusions in the IRA just on the basis of our enemy's (apparent) enemy is our friend'-type identification.

At this time, I suspected that the State would carry out some atrocity and blame the IRA or the miners or both, preferably. But the State was subtler than that, as we only discovered several years later.

#### **15/10/84 - 18/10/84:**

Grimethorpe, early morning of the 15th, lorries coming to load coal were bombarded with missiles; a worker left his excavator and it was set on fire. At midday, 200 young people, some wearing balaclavas, attacked the police station. A male and a female cop, who came to help put things in order, were chased off. The female cop, who had been known for her viciousness for some time, was caught, knocked to the ground, kicked and ended up in hospital. She said, “*I am going back to work as soon as the swelling on my head goes down enough for me to wear my hat.*” In the evening, people gather to attack the shops, while at the same time, several masked pickets ransacked the colliery control room and tried to set fire to the manager's office. On the 16th, about 200 youths stoned the police, the police withdrew and 50 - 60 men and women built a barricade across the road with a car which was then set on fire; 3 shops had their windows broken and £100 worth of spirits was taken. On 17th October a 13-year old boy was arrested by 4 cops in riot gear.

All this was a response to the arrest on the week-end before of 19 people for stealing' coal off a coal-tip (expropriating the expropriators, more like). Whereas before the strike there had always been an agreement with management that miners could take some coal from the slag heaps, from the summer of '84 onwards the NCB began prosecuting every miner caught helping himself. When a young teenager died on a slagheap collecting coal because part of the heap collapsed, papers like the *Daily Mail* blamed “Scargill's strike”. Such professional manipulators will, hopefully, one day end up like the Mussolini or Hitler they once admired - hanging from a

lampost or driven to suicide. The total value of the coal was £100.50p. - and miners were fined £375. A Grimethorpe miner, at a meeting on the 18th Oct., pointed out of the window at a cemetery and said that the coal morally belonged to the miners, *"There's men laid in them cemeteries that died through being gassed or explosions, having their legs blown off. They paid for that coal."*

At the meeting, the chairman of the South Yorkshire police authority, Mr. Moores, said the police joined the force as decent chaps and were then sent to training centres and came back *"like Nazi stormtroopers"*, adding that he *"would defend to the last any policeman who used his truncheon in defence but I abhor situations where policemen are dishing out punishment as judge and jury"*. A young miner got up at the meeting and said that no one condemned David when he stoned Goliath. Mr. Moores said that no one would get anywhere by throwing stones, to which miners responded *"David did"*. The Deputy Chief cop responded by quoting the Bible, saying *"blessed are the peacemakers."*, and then added, *"I have shuddered at many of the things said against police officers. For some of the things they have done wrong, I unreservedly apologise"*. One member of the police committee, Councillor Tom Williams said the community would only damage itself through violence - *"Just keep emotions down and give us a chance."* Here we have all the typical contradictions of British workers when dealing with the cops and their hypocrisy. That is, the police are seen only in specific circumstances as an arm of government policy - but the local copper is seen as somehow ok, and at least someone you can have a polite dialogue with, to whom workers feel they have to justify illegality in pursuit of basic needs. It's probably not since the First World War that there's been a working class culture that recognised cops as a *whole* as inherently part of the enemy. The intensification of ideological manipulation has something to do with it, but also it's because the State recuperates real needs arising out of the misery of the market: psychos and muggers, arising out of the suppression of community, have to be dealt with, so the State presents itself as the protector. So even in situations of mass class struggle the complaint is that the cops aren't doing their job - protecting workers from burglars, for instance. If a radical movement doesn't take on the task of both protecting people from the State and from the enemy within' - i.e. those who embrace this dog eat dog world and prey on the weakest of the working class - then obviously the State will fill the vacuum.

#### **17/10/84:**

Clashes between cops and 2000 pickets at Wooley colliery near Barnsley. A cop has his face punctured in 2 places by pickets with darts in their fists. 25 cops injured officially. At Tow Law, a private coal stocking site in Durham, 700 pickets attack the cops with bricks from a ripped down wall, and 3 cop vans are overturned whilst the cops abandoned the vehicles and retreated into the depot. At Rossington, 2000 pickets tried to prevent 5 scabs going in. *"This police horse box accelerated and swerved towards a group of pickets. Darrel got hit. I thought he was dead. Another two feet and he would have gone right under the wheels. Some lads went over to tell*

*the police he was seriously injured and all they did was laugh. They started chanting 'We hope he's dead'. They wouldn't call an ambulance". A wall was pulled down and used to stone the cops. 2 barricades were built, one set on fire. 2 cops were hospitalised*

In October NACODS, the union of safety workers and colliery overseers, a union a majority of whom were what in other industries would be called "foremen", was involved in a widely publicised dispute with the Coal Board over the conditions which its members were expected to have to face in order to get to work, and over closures. MacGregor had ordered them to cross picket lines at strike-bound collieries, provoking them into a major threat to go on strike, thus shutting down every pit, because it was illegal for a colliery to be in operation without safety workers. 9 years after the strike, Thatcher described on TV the crisis this provoked: *"We had got so far and we were in danger of losing everything because of a silly mistake. We had to make it quite clear that if that was not cured immediately, then the actual management of the Coal Board could indeed have brought down the government. The future of the government at that moment was in their hands and they had to remedy their terrible mistake"*. It turned out, however, that all those who thought that a traditionally moderate' union would do such a big favour for the miners already on strike were wrong. Despite an 83% vote for a strike, the NACODS bureaucrats agreed to a deal over "revised conciliation procedures" just 24 hours before the safety workers and overseers were supposed to come out on strike. Under Thatcher's instructions, MacGregor offered NACODS a sop - a mildly souped up closure review procedure, which, in the decade that followed, didn't save a single pit, surprise surprise. There were no condemnations of NACODS by Kinnock or by Thatcher for refusing to abide by the decisions of the majority (as always, ballots mean fuck-all - what matters is how people act).

There were a few reasons why this strike didn't happen:

-First of all, none of the moderate members of the moderate union had a tradition of going against their leaders, unlike in the NUM: despite the fact that the leaders acted undemocratically even in terms of bourgeois democracy, the overseers and safety workers had neither the will, the experience nor the audacity to go on a wildcat. Those most used to *giving* orders were also those most used to *following* them - so they submitted to the NACODS leaders.

-There were also external pressures not to show support for the miners at this moment. The media "revealed" that an NUM bureaucrat had met Gadafy, public enemy no. 1 after the killing of a policewoman supposedly by Libyan diplomats during a demonstration outside the Libyan Embassy, London, in April 1984 [\[12\]](#). The meeting between Gadafy and the Union bureaucrat - the NUM's top accountant, Roger Windsor - was very publicly broadcast on Libyan TV (so-much for the Sunday Times' stunning revelations!) under Windsor's insistence - he claimed that the NUM had nothing to hide in accepting this money. This put a lot of pressure on NACODS leaders and members not to side with the miners, who were rapidly being portrayed as terrorists - or , at least, in the pockets of terrorists [\[13\]](#). As revealed about 10 years later, by a

Lefty journalist - Seumas Milne - Windsor was working for Stella Rimington, later head of MI5, who won her spurs heading the MI5 section directly responsible for policing the dispute. Phones were tapped, the State surveillance apparatus of GCHQ deployed, buildings bugged, bundles of supposed Libyan cash faked. Windsor was at the time the highest ranking non-elected official in the NUM and was later revealed as a double-dealing security service agent positioned, almost a year *before* the strike, to destabilise the dispute. Later in 1990, he acted as chief witness in the prosecution of Arthur Scargill, when he claimed that money collected for the miners during the strike went to pay off Scargill's supposed mortgage, when he never even had one (in fact, there s plenty of evidence that much of this money went into Windsor's pocket).

-The attitude of the miners themselves didn't help: they were almost completely indifferent to whether NACODS went on strike because after all these were foremen' who'd humiliated them in the past and they rightly had complete contempt for their function (though not all of them were foremen). This was understandable given the fact that up till then they had been the bosses' toadies - but hardly strategic. A total strike at this point would have meant almost certainly that the miners would win, and any return to work would have weakened the authority role of these overseers (as it was, their authority role was strengthened). To assume that people are immutable on the basis of their past and their most conservative past, is to ignore the process of struggle and of what happens when people are challenged to change. An aggressive direct challenge to them, which needn't have involved challenging overseers personally known to the pickets, might have made them at least realise that their self-interest, their desire not to lose their jobs at least, lay with the miners. Pressure from strikers may have tipped them over into having a wildcat. Indeed, many NACODS members refused to go into work when confronted with a picket line they could very easily have crossed (invited to do so with the usual protection of the cops) as late as February 1985, when there were increasing amounts of strikers turning into scabs. Hardly the sign of people reluctant to strike. But the miners treated the whole situation impassively, as if it was something they couldn't affect, certainly something they were indifferent to affecting. One suspects that this attitude on the part of the miners was also part of a hangover of the 70s strikes - when the miners won on their own. They believed they could do so again. Partly stemming from this, many miners had a vanguardist notion of themselves, that they were the most radical section of the working class, even though, for instance, very very few identified with the 1981 riots at the time that they happened (by 1984 this had changed - retrospectively they understood these riots).

At this time, as later admitted by Government ministers and even Thatcher herself, the miners were close to winning. 10 years afterwards, Frank Ledger, the Central Electricity Generating Board 's (CEGB 's) operations director, recalled the situation as having been verging on the "*catastrophic*". Throughout the autumn months, there was a serious risk of power cuts. Secret internal forecasts predicted that - in the words of Lord Marshall, then CEGB chairman "*Scargill would win in the autumn or certainly before Christmas*". In a tense meeting,

a “wobbly” Thatcher told him she would have to send troops in to move the coal (see [this recent article](#) revealing her belief in using the army). If that had happened, Marshall believed the power workers “*would have gone out within a week*”. Thatcher was persuaded to hold off, while CEEB managers started to bribe certain groups of workers with vast wage hikes to move the vital coal supplies (mainly, lorry drivers, who 'd been particularly petit-bourgeoisified - encouraged to become self-employed - after their collective victory in the Winter Of Discontent, when most lorry drivers had worked for bosses). The miners' failure was to fail to communicate directly with electricity workers - not to try to overcome the separation imposed on them by the cops at picket lines keeping them from talking to power workers and lorry drivers - but of course, such a possible course of action would have been very difficult, though not impossible - it would have involved making connections away from the immediate power station gates, which the cops controlled. UK workers have often had a crippling tendency to rely on solidarity between workers in different industries to be negotiated through official union channels; if the solidarity is not forthcoming this is usually accepted as an immovable fact of nature. Yet situations where workers could talk face to face, unmediated by their official representatives - such as a simple visit by strikers to the workers' local pub - were rarely attempted as ways of forging links. The official political/union arena, with its tedious bureaucratic rituals of motions, meetings, negotiations etc were allowed to have their intended effect of dissipating energy, spontaneity and initiative.

## **Chapter 16:**

### **November 1984**

A divided ruling class...NCB bribe...more rage against the State...  
...Willis attacked...NCB figures for scabbing...death of scab driver  
...Kinnock...discussion on class violence...

*“Britain is fast becoming that most dangerous of societies, a nation in which Government and the governed speak different languages...The atmosphere is reminiscent of the countries on the eve of revolution in the past, where the ruling class never mingled with the people at large, did not know how they lived and seemed not to care what was to become of them...Beneath the glossy conventional surface of tolerated opinion and authorised vocabulary, the absence of real communication permits and encourages the growth of resentment...Resentment at the apparently wilful blindness and ignorance of those in authority, resentment at the apparently unrecognised destination towards which those living under authority are being inexorably borne...hope has become extinct, and where there is not hope, people will not hear.” - Enoch Powell, 10th November, 1984.*



1968 Private Eye cover

As a somewhat independent' member of the ruling class, detached at least from any party allegiance, after having been kicked out of the Tory Party for his racist demagoguery and after urging voters to support the Labour Party in 1974, Powell could occasionally express openly what other rulers dared only mutter in private. Of course, he had to pose things in terms of resentment', rather than class anger because for the ruling world there cannot be any reversal of perspective, any fundamental hatred of hierarchy - it's all just a matter of envy and spite. Nevertheless, substitute the word "hatred" for resentment and Powell's quote is a lucid insight into the atmosphere of Britain in 1984. And now? - there is far less real hope now than in 1984 because at that time practical hope was being developed in the *subversion* of the "destination towards which those living under authority [were] being inexorably borne"- but now people with plenty of false hope are "listening" much more to the dominant authority of the commodity economy, even if they bemoan all its results, precisely because the hope of some genuine

reversal of perspective, the hope of a revolution, seems to be becoming increasingly extinct.

It's a measure of how out of touch many revolutionaries' are that they have no idea or, even no interest in, how close to a revolutionary explosion Britain was at this time. If the miners had won, it would certainly have encouraged a far more widespread movement as well as a lot of repression, but also inspiring a lot of resistance globally, especially as the possible coming to power of a Left-nationalist-social democratic government under the likes of Tony Benn would very likely have caused a run on the pound and a realisation that reform or keeping things as they were was not an option and.....But this is only if only. And then again, fear, including the fear of revolutionary upheaval by a significant number of proletarians, was certainly a factor in why this chance was missed.

Powell's fears, and that of sections of the ruling class in general, are illustrated by the previous chronology of violence but this rage against the State continued into November and beyond, in part incited by the NCB offering a bribe of £600 - a hell of a lot in those days, and especially for those who'd not had an income for 8 months - to miners who returned to work before Christmas (in addition they were informed that their income would not be subject to tax):

#### **7/11/84:**

Barricades built across road to Whittle colliery, Northumberland, to stop 27 scabs, 12 having been persuaded to return home. A bus carrying the scabs was stoned, and the barricade set alight.

#### **9/11/84:**

Just 1 scab escorted to work by 1000 cops. Barricades burnt, 2 cop Range Rovers crashed as cops were hit by a fusillade of ball bearings fired from catapults, along with loads of milk bottles. An air gun was also used against them. 13 cops injured (as well as the usual injuries to miners) and a police horse visor was smashed. Miners rolled a disused workman's hut towards police lines, then moved a second hut nearby and set it alight.

#### **12/11/84:**

About 25 pits experience significant violence against scabs, cops and NCB property. We mention half. At **Dinnington**, barricades were set alight, stones hurled relentlessly at the cops and a steel rod speared through colliery windows. A concrete block and two petrol bombs, one failing to explode, were hurled at the cop shop. A 4 inch bolt was hurled through the cops window. 27 street lamps smashed to the ground. £1000 worth of electrical equipment stolen from looted shop. **Maltby**: 3 cop shop windows broken, street lamps pulled down as barricades and a garage and general store near the pit are looted. **Hickleton**: a steel wire was strung across the road aiming to severely injure cops on horseback, but it only tore off the aerial of an NCB management car. 2 NCB security guards attacked by a group of men wearing balaclava helmets, one ending up in hospital. 2 management cars were overturned, one set on fire. 33 cops were injured. **Brampton**: barricade set on fire near the co-op, whilst cops standing behind shields were repeatedly stoned. A huge turf roller was taken from the nearby cricket ground and



rolled through police lines. A molotov lands near a cop car. **Cortonwood**: stones, bottles, nuts and bolts used to pelt cops. Molotov hits cop Range Rover. **South Kirby**: colliery offices broken into and ignition keys removed so that earth-moving machines could be moved to block roads. Windows smashed in the NCB buildings and fires lit. **Dodsworth**: fires lit and 3 foot steel rod pitched through pit windows. **Darfield Main**: pit roads blocked and stores looted. **Dearne Valley**: NCB office windows smashed and a forklift truck and crane damaged. **Rossington**: pit control windows smashed and 3 cars and a motorbike overturned. **Barrow**: trees felled and hauled across the road as blockades. Oil poured all over the road. **Stainforth**: A Sunday Times cameraman was punched and had his camera snatched, with the film dropped in the mud. "Fortunately it's only my pride that was damaged", he said - as if anyone working as a cameraman for Murdoch has some pride left to be damaged. **St. Johns**, S.Wales: pit gates blocked by telegraph pole, so manager abandons car, which is then overturned. **Cwm**, S.Wales: bottles, stones and iron bars hurled at cops, as old railway sleepers were used as barricades. etc.etc.etc.

### **13/11/84:**

Norman Willis, head of the TUC and benign' bastard with the common' touch, denounced the violence at a meeting in Port Talbot, but his speech was barely audible as strikers chanted "Off off off!". He apologised for the lack of support from other unions, but stressed that the TUC was "backing the miners in the very best traditions of the trade union movement". This was undoubtedly true - traditions which went back to 1926, when the TUC also did its best to fuck over the miners, though we suspect that these were not the traditions Willis was talking about. In a famous incident, 3 Welsh miners clambered onto roof supports and lowered a rope with a noose on the end to loud cheers from the audience. Justified as the miners' criticism was, it still remained at the level of the leadership have failed us again' - with all the acceptance of the leader/follower relationship that this implies. Only a seizure of initiative by miners on the ground to *themselves* approach workers in other industries directly could have transcended this. 8 years later, in 1992, I saw Willis with his entourage of bureaucrats in the crowd of a miners demo against the decimation of the pits proposed by Major's government, and shouted "*This time we'll string you up properly*". Having had 8 years to work out some kind of clever pun, he retorted, "*Thank you for your support*", the kind of typical joke people tell at their own expense designed to take the wind out of the sails of an attacker. He's now a Lord, for services rendered to Thatcher and to capital in general.



Norman Willis: no noose is bad noose

Goldthorpe: a bus driver driving scabs to work had his bus attacked and broken into and he was beaten up. Frickley: 42 cops injured. Barrow: power line brought down. Celynen pit: cops bring out the riot shields for the first time against missiles, as 18 miners refused to accept the decision of a mass meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> to continue supporting the strike, and turned into scabs. Strikers occupied NCB premises, and were evicted by the cops, whilst tyres of a TV crews van were let down.

The NCB claimed that 56,000 miners were working, the vast majority having scabbed from the beginning, whilst 133,000 were on strike, a figure of 189,000, 7,000 more than the total number of miners accounted for in the boards accounts, a contradiction never pointed out by the media, which was generally becoming recognised by strikers as “an arm of the State”.

The fears amongst the ruling class of everything going pear-shaped were expressed not just by Powell, as in the quote above, but also by the former Tory Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, who, after praising Thatcher for her “*courage, determination and persistence which must surely be admired by all reasonable men and women*” then went on to bemoan the dangers of the strike, “*It breaks my heart to see what is happening in the country today. This terrible strike - and by the best men in the world. They beat the Kaiser's army. They beat Hitler's army. They never gave in... We cannot afford this kind of thing.*” (interestingly, he also attacked the growing submission of British capital to American capital, something that many of the anti-Iraq war movement today also bemoan, without seeing how conservative such a limited take on world politics this is).

#### **15/11/84:**

Savile pit: strikers stone the pithead baths where 17 men have supposedly returned to work. Windows are smashed. Goldthorpe: barricade built and set alight because of one scab returning. BBC cameraman has a stitch inserted in his chin after being pushed while filming.

Father Christmas arrested outside Hamleys in Regents Street - a member of Westminster Miners Support Group launching a Christmas toy appeal for miners' kids.

A striking miner, 47, father of 4, dies whilst digging for coal on a tip, trapped under tons of rock falling on him. Virtually no mention in media.

### **19/11/84:**

NCB geological exploration unit in S.Yorks abandoned by staff after being systematically wrecked. Computer terminals and keyboards smashed, 22 out of 24 offices vandalised and rooms flooded after a mains pipe was burst open. Windows smashed and typewriters and other equipment damaged. An IBM computer linked to the NCB's computer centre in Cannock was smashed. The 20 members of staff had to be placed elsewhere in Yorkshire until the building became operational again. The NCB said that the incident brought their whole planning procedure to a halt as they did not have access to records. How sad. Damage was estimated at £250,000. One of the better critiques of computers, which now dominate our daily lives in ways unthinkable 20 years ago.

Aberaman, South Wales: pickets smashed window of Land Rover taking a single scab to work, and a cop van windscreen was broken. At Merthyr, S.Wales barricades were built and oil poured on the road outside the pit. According to (dubious) NCB statistics, 85 men are scabbing in South Wales out of a total of nearly 20,000 miners - a bit over 0.4% .

### **24/11/84:**

Yorkshire scab's £40,000 house gutted by fire in arson attack. This was before the property boom - £40,000 for a house in this part of the country was a hell of a lot of money. The owner claimed that strikers had threatened to kill his 2-year old daughter and that the blaze had started in her bedroom. Not sure if this was the case, but a couple of arson attacks which at the time were attributed to strikers turned out to be self-inflicted, done for the insurance money. Certainly, to threaten and even try to kill the daughter of a scab was not the kind of thing 99.99% of strikers even remotely considered. Another scab was hospitalised with a broken shoulder, broken ankle, bruised ribs and other injuries when beaten up by masked men. In a well-publicised visit to the hospital of the latter, the former fire victim (?) urged the NUM to change its rules so that Scargill could be got rid of. The NUM, the NCB and the cops were all united on the attack on the scab: they condemned it. The media, of course, always gave full publicity to the attacks on scabs - attacks, including arson attacks, on strikers were never mentioned.

All emergency calls throughout most of Mid-Glamorgan were blacked out by the sabotage of a South Wales police telecommunications station - 20 inch-thick cables were severed with an axe. Merthyr Vale, S,Wales: 11 cops injured, one suffering a fractured cheekbone and a bruised eye. protecting 2 scabs.

By the end of the month, the NCB bribe had not worked. Even according to the grossly inflated figures of the NCB (which even a Tory recently admitted, because it was safe to do so, were absurdly inflated), the increase was only 8000, leaving 50,000 working - most of whom had never been on strike in the first place , and 140,000 on strike. Admittedly these figures didn't make sense - but even within their own terms, this meant, that in the areas most threatened by closures - Yorkshire, Kent, South Wales, Scotland and the North-East there were at this time

113,000 strikers out of a total workforce of 116,500. Pretty solid after almost 9 months on strike!

### **30/11/84:**

First and only death on the enemy's side during the strike, near Merthyr pit. A concrete block dropped on a mini-cab taking a scab to work killed the driver. This is an occasion for endless horror shock pronouncements by the media and the State, with the Sun, the paper that cheered the sinking of the Belgrano with "*Gotcha!*", leading the attack on "*anarchy and murder*", complete with photos of the scab-drivers' family, a classic hypocritical manipulation of the emotions. The families of the Belgrano sailors were never shown, any more than the families of Joe Green or of anybody else killed by scabs or cops were shown. Why mention the obvious? Because in these chronically ignorant times, the obvious is often the last thing most people think.

### **3/12/84:**

Kinnock denounced the killing of the mini-scab driver, as well as all picket line violence, during a speech on a platform shared with Scargill. "*You shame us all*", he said of the men who did it. Had Kinnock said anything about David Jones' murder? About Joe Green's? About the other deaths of miners or their kids scrabbling for coal during the strike? About the cops who drove at full speed at strikers in a car, forcing them off the road and killing them? About the oh so tragic deaths of scabs in pits due to unsafe work conditions during the strike? No - but he had had nothing but praise for Indira Gandhi, who, before being assassinated, had ordered the shooting down of up to 100 *blind* demonstrators. Kinnock, some time later, went on to support the Gulf War, which killed 200,000 Iraqi civilians. Those who attack anti-hierarchical violence from their position in the hierarchy attack it because they know that they could be the victim of it - they want this society to have the monopoly of violence.

Scargill himself denounced all violence "*away from the picket lines*", dissociating himself from what had happened in Merthyr. Sadly, no-one heckled him for this or for sharing a platform with Kinnock. Kinnock's speech, which was inaudible for the first 5 minutes, was permanently interrupted by shouts of "scab", "traitor" and "Judas". These insults weren't entirely accurate: Kinnock only visited one picket line during the whole of the strike, which he did for the cameras, and didn't cross it, so scab' made no sense. If he'd done that, he'd have had absolutely no credibility within the Labour Party (or even for the rest of the pro-strike supporters) who needed him to play up to his down-to-earth image so as to represent the working class in a period when the class struggle could've gone either way, all the better to fuck us over. "Traitor" is hardly appropriate either - those whose career is part of the State (either as an M.P., or in his capacity as President of the European Union, and now as a member of the House of Lords) cannot betray the class struggle since it implies they are on the side of the struggle; in fact they would only betray *themselves*, or, at least, their well-paid complicity with this society which their role implies, if they sided with the class struggle. As for "Judas" - you usually apply this to friends who betray you, and Kinnock was never a friend: he himself declared he was "the policeman's friend" and said, at one time, that he'd wanted to be a cop. Some time after she was forced to

retire, Thatcher praised Kinnock for his gentlemanly conduct. That's as much as can be expected from "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition". Those who have always looked to the Labour Party, strangely use the same kinds of words (such as traitor') to attack Blair, when, as part of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, he'd always shown his true colours - e.g. by refusing to support the signalman's strike of '96, despite 95% of the population supporting it. So much so that Thatcher herself recommended, in 1997, that Murdoch plump for him, since a further continuation of Tory rule might backfire against the ruling class. As a piece of graffiti painted on a wall outside a public meeting where Kinnock was speaking just a few days after the end of the strike said, "*Kinnock, like the rest of the Filth, like all leaders, is only doing his job - policing autonomous class struggle.*"<sup>[14]</sup>

In the days that followed the killing, many strikers showed none of the remorse that was demanded of them by the NUM, the media, the Labour Party and the rest of the power of this society - "*Go get a mini-cab*" was constantly shouted at scabs going into work. And just 4 days after the death, a 3 foot metal spike was dropped from a Derbyshire railway bridge onto an NCB van carrying 100lb of explosives, the blunt end penetrating the metal and lining of the cab roof. Cops said that those who did it, if found, could face a charge of attempted murder. And this violence was "*away from picket lines*" - so not something approved of by Scargill. And a cab from the same firm that had hired the killed scab driver had its window broken, the driver being hit in the back by an 8lb stone, on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1985.

It's maybe hard to comprehend in today's atmosphere of depressed indifference why strikers could be so violent towards scabs. When class conflict is intense, when it really matters, the conflict between those who are actively resigned to the violent stupidities of this world and those taking the risk of opposing it is fundamental - there can be no reason for "tolerance": such "tolerance" is tolerance for a complicity with a very brutal enemy, an enemy which kills with the swipe of a pen or a bid on the stock exchange and which is prepared to destroy this world to insure the victory of the economy. As I said in "Miner Conflicts...":

The working miner has all the reasonable lies of the commodity economy on his side: he knows that £1,000 for every year worked isn't bad compensation for having slaved his guts out to be able to consume the videos and three-piece suites of his choice. The cynical dreariness and hierarchical security' ... seems almost natural' to those who see their own narrow immediate interest as separate from their class interest. It is not merely the cops and ruling ideology which break up the possibilities of class solidarity: the Notts miners are not victims - they have consciously chosen to accept all the hypocrisies of the State. They know all the media crap about the cops protecting their "Right To Work" (read: Right To Be Exploited) is bullshit, even in it's own terms: it's a "right" their continuing to work is going to take away from thousands of others. They know that all the media crap about "Democracy" (read: the right of each isolated intimidated individual to choose who is going to isolate and intimidate him) is bullshit: when - in 1977 - all the miners voted overwhelmingly against productivity deals, Nottingham area voted

separately, and undemocratically, for their own bonus scheme. They know that they too will be the victims of pit closures.....Those who choose, with the support of the whole weight of the commodity-spectacle, to reduce their lives to a narrow survivalist notion of their immediate interest obviously regard history , both past and possible future, with equal indifference.

Undoubtedly in periods such as this, almost all of us, from very different levels in the hierarchy (and it's these levels that are vital), support, in practice, this brutal world - for example, the poor in the UK buy cheap goods often made from death-inducing conditions in countries such as China. We cannot avoid participating in violence. Which is why, when people risk attacking the system violently all those who denounce them become very definite friends of the violent system that crushes people daily, even if they claim to be pacifists. The economy kills - whether it be the thousands of old people who die from hyperthermia each winter because they can't afford to pay gas bills or nurses avoiding treating dangerously ill patients in casualty so that they don't get the sack for prolonging, beyond the target times, the waiting time of less threatened patients or...the list is endless and anyone reading this far will know how violently crazy the commodity economy is.

Work accidents and other disasters caused by the need for profit are only the more visible aspects of this violence. The enormous levels of stress and psycho-socio-somatic illnesses, even in kids and teenagers oppressed by the increasing pressures of an education system geared to intensified exploitation at work, are probably a more significant part of this violence.

We cannot renounce our share of violence - directed at the right people at the right time. However, if people seem wary of riotous violence it's partly because riots ain't what they used to be. A riot against the cops in Bradford in 2001 also involved crazy psychotic behaviour such as the parking of a car right across the entrance of the Labour club and setting fire to it, preventing those inside from fleeing. Though they managed to get out through windows, if this tactic had succeeded it would have been a massacre. The increasingly mad behaviour of some young people is a sign of how defeated all sense of community has been since the strike. Fewer and fewer people have any idea who their real enemies are.

If there was a big riot now in an urban working class area it *might* be really depressing, scary and horrific - the number of gangsters and anti-social vicious youth around nowadays would possibly see it as indiscriminate open season and easy pickings on the general public. So if such riots were to maintain some clear anti-hierarchical perspective, it'd be necessary to create some way of dealing with these psychotic elements - by organising some kind of healthy (as opposed to crazy) vigilantism. However, it'd be a mistake to think of riots as automatically outmoded in the present epoch: a break with the normal violence of capitalist daily life involves violence as the physical expression of this break, and though such violence might not conform to a theoretical ideal of what should happen, proletarians are going to have to deal with such contradictions when they arise, not condemn them but to find some practical way of overcoming their miserable side. Maybe this would involve occupying public or empty buildings so as to at

least create an area in which people can work out such practical questions in some form of mutual dialogue. Just because something like a riot or a strike doesn't nowadays develop into something new and different in a positive way doesn't mean we should say such methods of struggle are automatically outmoded.

Most people think of violence as individuals or gangs attacking you for money or for perverse excitement and somehow think that an attack on a scab is like that, because violence is violence is violence, making no distinction. Whilst in times of intense class struggle verbal or theoretical violence might be more appropriate towards the more passive spectators, physical violence towards those who are actively supporting the brutality of hierarchical power, like scabs, is essential. However, given the enormous retreats and defeats suffered by the masses of individuals, it's hard to know whether violence towards scabs today in fact advances the struggle. But one day such violence will be both appropriate and strategic.

During the strike, various professional feminists condemned the violence of the pickets towards the cops as typical macho posturing, making an equivalent between the cops and the picket's violence. This was not echoed by the women directly involved in the struggle - the miners' wives etc., who knew well the cops' brutality and generally supported the violence. The logic of this crass feminism would be to condemn the actions of a woman who hit out at a rapist as mere macho posturing. In other words, to effectively say you can and should do nothing against hierarchical violence if you want to maintain some feminist purity/political correctness/moral superiority.

The nauseating 20th anniversary programme "*When Britain Went To War*" showed the Battle of Orgreave with the song "*When two tribes go to war money's all you can score.*" Sending the subliminal message that this was a tribal conflict, both equally violent and equally to blame and equally having a narrow tribal mentality. For those who see things utterly superficially, this kind of rubbish might work. But it's kind of obvious that it was the cops who were scoring big bucks (two and a half times their normal already inflated wage<sup>[15]</sup>) whilst the miners were deprived of any income other than the pittance given them by the NUM for picketing and Social Security and anything they could get through collections.

## **Chapter 17:**

### **The Last Three Months**

Collections, charity and the Band Aid spectacle...strikers Christmas...

...Snow fun.....Power cuts...the subtle sell-out...

...contradictions of low level NUM officials...increasing scabbing...

...Tony Benn...indifference towards the strike...Paul Foot...

...the bitter end...

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Father Christmas, a collector for the striking miners, was arrested mid-November. Collections up down the country were subject to police harassment, collectors often having the money confiscated - but then the working class have always been robbed.



Recent picture of Slob Geldof and his mate: for the most interesting account of the Gleneagles conference see [“Aufheben” #14](#) (October 2005).

At the same time as thousands of people were giving money and gifts to the strikers, Band Aid was launched by Slob Geldof [16]. In *Apocalypse Now*, the main character says after an accidentally shot Vietnamese woman, bleeding profusely and half-dead, is given a plaster “*First we shoot them half to death then we give them a band aid.*” - the kind of one-off insight one occasionally hears amongst the pile of dross coming from the movie industry. That more or less says it all about Band Aid and all the subsequent guilt-quenching spectacles brought to you courtesy of the same society that starves millions. The condition of aid is that the recipients produce cash crops, which makes them utterly dependent on the world market, and destroys the margin of self-sufficiency they had. In this way Aid - dependent also on compliant governments - kills as much as Third World debt (incidentally in 1985, for example, - the year that Band Aid supplied the money it collected to Ethiopia - Africa's debt was 3 times the amount given by all the nicey nicey charities to the starving). Moreover, in presenting illusions that one can somehow save lives through the charity business it props up the system ideologically and reinforces resignation and illusions, making people believe that something less than global revolution can assure that the unnecessarily starving can survive. Is there any coincidence that Band Aid was launched at this time - when the possibility of challenging the system of mass slaughter, the world market, was a genuine concrete threat? Though for Geldof himself, the concern for the world's poor was merely a career move, for the rest of the dominant society it served a very useful function as a distraction from the essential. Some journalists even made direct comparisons between giving to the deserving poor - the starving Ethiopians - and giving to the undeserving poor - the striking miners (the obnoxious Julie Burchall, whose career was and is based on an ugly aestheticisation of petty, shallow, arbitrary shock' provocation without point,



was one).

The collections for the miners, whilst also having some of the defects of charity insofar as they were often seen as substitutes for solidarity action and were extremely unevenly distributed, were also self-organised expressions of identification with a real movement of opposition. Loads of people throughout the country used the collections as a point of contact, a place where they could talk about the news, about what was happening in the strike and about themselves. Before this intensified spectacularisation of Giving epitomised by Band Aid, Comic Relief, etc.etc., the tendency was for people to give money - but not to make a song and dance about it. Few made much about giving to the miners, for instance - it was just something that had to be done [17]. But since then, the tendency has been to make a big moral thing about how much or often you give, people more and more feeling the need to wear their pure hearts on their designer sleeves. For most, charity is simply an instant cleansing of the soul, a redemption for the sin' of being better off than someone lower down the international hierarchy, who are seen as merely victims to be pitied, not fellow proletarians in struggle with whom one can express practical solidarity. "There 's always someone worse off than yourself" just keeps the international division of labour going: on the one hand it provides solace' for those who remain passive before their own misery, on the other hand, it substitutes mutual recognition and a sense of responsibility for changing the world with mere guilt.

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*"In anticipation of Christmas, at the end of September me and a couple of others decided to go round toy shops on a regular basis and accumulate loads of toys, using large coat pockets and bags, to be given to miners' kids at the end of the year. This has been recounted in Jenny's Tale in a slightly embellished form: "He had asked smart London shops for donations to the miners' strike and those that didn't cough up he and his mates would rip-off blind. Mind you, even those shops that agreed also were shoplifted, but it didn't really matter as they had more than enough in this society of raging inequality." We certainly never asked them, as most of them were in wealthy areas and wouldn't have given us any toys if we'd asked, and asking would have certainly made it very difficult for us to shoplift since they would have been suspicious. No - we just simply shoplifted them, helped, on occasion, by others. It might have been that someone else elaborated on the story to Jenny, because, as it is, it's fairly banal, though we helped save the Christmases of 2 pits - Kiveton and Monkwearmouth. The latter seemed largely indifferent, even when we put two nicked battery-operated fluffy rabbits that moved onto a table and set them up in a fucking position - a somewhat dour lot dominated by the Communist Party".*

Despite the image perpetuated by the media of misery for striking miners' families at Christmas, and in particular by the well-known film Billy Elliott which presented the father and Billy as alone, cold, presentless and almost foodless, many if not most strikers had a good communal Christmas - and for many it was better than the usual nuclear family-round-the table watching telly, having a traditional Christmas row, with the kids complaining that they haven't got what

they wanted or wanting more...Though undoubtedly there were far less presents for the kids, the excited collective atmosphere and sense of support from others made it, for some at least *"The best Christmas I had", "Everyone banded together", "Lots of cheap wine flying about - brilliant - really good atmosphere"*as various miners put it on the BBC's 20th anniversary programme. Sure, there were always hardships, but community in struggle, even with poverty, is infinitely more enriching than the impoverishment of conspicuous consumption. And many miners stole to make up for their poverty, to make sure their kids had enough - theft as part of struggle is always simply one method amongst many of stealing back the life that's been stolen from us. Another miner, who'd had a fight with the cops, been arrested and beaten up, said, *I got more women that Christmas than I've had since. Unbelievable.*" At this time it wasn't hierarchical power and money that (supposedly) was an aphrodisiac but the passion of revolt: one became attractive by asserting oneself against everything that repressed oneself. Although at that time there was a common practice of middle-class lefty women trying a bit of rough' during the strike by getting off with a miner, as they came into closer than normal contact with them through miners support groups etc., it's hard to know whether this was the case with that guy, as it seemed the Christmas festivities at Hatfield mainly involved the locals. However we shouldn't ignore the fact that there was added prestige at this time on the lefty scene to be seen to be shagging a striker (or a miner's wife) - a kind of donate your body to a miner' attitude. Patronising but true.

Christmas also saw one of the few collective attacks on the NUM by striking miners. A few days before Christmas, hundreds of Durham miners (can't remember what pit), promised £40 Christmas money by the relatively cosy officials, when given just £10 each, ransacked the whole of the Union building, looting everything that hadn't been nailed down, including furniture.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the lighter incidents of the strike happened about this time, though perhaps a bit later - in January: in the snow at Kiveton Park, a Chief Superintendent - Nesbit - drives up to the picket line and sees a snowman with a cop's helmet on it. This is clearly an affront to the dignity of policemen everywhere, so he orders the other cops to get rid of it, but they can't be persuaded - it's too silly. So he gets in his cop car and drives full speed at it. Little does he know that the snowcop is built round a concrete post - with the obvious result of a smashed up cop car, a very undignified Mr.Nesbitt and a very happy picket line, a story that spreads, despite the snow, like wildfire and keeps strikers warm for weeks to come, and picket lines reverberate with the following song, sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body": *"The pickets built a snowman Around a concrete post. The pickets built a snowman Around a concrete post. The pickets built a snowman Around a concrete post...But Mr.Nesbit mowed it down. Silly bugger Mr Nesbit. Silly bugger Mr Nesbit. Silly bugger Mr Nesbit...And he needs a new Range Rover Now!"*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The year ended with one of the most significantly stupid statements from Peter Heathfield (NUM general secretary) and from Arthur Scargill that there would be no power cuts this winter, and that they'd never said there would be power cuts. *"I accept that if this Government, regardless of cost, is prepared to use substitute fuels in power stations, then with the current level of economic activity, and with a mild winter, it is probable that there will be no cuts. The Central Electricity Generating Board will survive on a wing and a prayer."* , said Heathfield, adding *"I never anticipated power cuts"*. This was a double lie:

1. They'd both repeatedly said there *would* be power cuts, as did the NUM paper *The Miner*.
2. More importantly, there *had* been power cuts and there *continued* to be power cuts in January. Not many and not nearly enough, but significant ones nevertheless. And if the strike had continued there certainly would have been more, particularly with the blacking of international coal distribution to the UK on the cards.

At a time when, as never before or since, the pound almost reached parity with the dollar - and this solely because of capital's fears about being defeated by the miners, one has to assume that these statements amounted to a sell-out. The point was not to be superficially upbeat about power cuts, but being so downbeat as this was deliberately demoralising. On January 15th, Edward Heath, former Tory PM, was more encouraging of the strike than Scargill and Heathfield had been two weeks previously. Referring to the collapse of sterling, he said, *«People abroad are worried about a prolonged miners' strike which is very damaging indeed.»* Certainly the NUM leaders had a more demoralising effect. One wonders whether this was to give a nod to the NCB that they were worth negotiating with because they could help to deflate things or if this was just plain stupidity. But the national negotiations did start up again at this time (in 1981, the most exemplary action in Poland was the use of public loudspeakers to broadcast the negotiations going on between Solidarnosc and The State, a way of reducing the chance of a sellout, which has rarely been used as far as I know, and sadly was never used in the miners strike).

Take a look at these unpublished notes - January - February 1985 (includes repetition because they were never organised):

## **POWER CUTS**

Those radical striking miners who find Scargill vapid and hollow have also avoided making their disgust public. This is particularly self-defeating now that Scargill has made an idiot of himself by stating that there'll probably be no blackouts this winter and that he'd never said that there would be. Given the fact that there *have* been blackouts, euphemistically defined by the CEGB as "maintenance problems", in several areas (including 2-hour blackouts in Blackpool, Sheffield, Birmingham and Bradford) and which led to Peter Walker giving express instructions to the

media not to mention them - given these facts, this demoralising claim of Scargill's amounts to doing the Government's dirty work for it, i.e. a subtle form of "sell-out" (the only form Scargill is capable of, since if he did what the NGA did in 1983 or what Ray Buckton did in 1982 he'd immediately be forced to ask for round-the-clock police protection to save him from being strung up by the militant radical section of the miners).

Scargillites have so consistently said "Arthur's not put a foot wrong in this dispute" - and not been answered back - that even when Scargill says such a demoralising load of bullshit like there'll probably be no power cuts, everyone keeps quiet [18]. Up until the beginning of January, up until Scargill and Heathfield made these crass statements, the strike was virtually solid in those areas that had been on strike since the start: the drift back before Christmas was just a trickle back compared to since the New Year.[Phoenix note: this light seem like simplistic reasoning, but though undoubtedly there were other factors,the blatant contradictions of Scargill and Heathfield were definitely one of the more important ones.]

"The bigger the lie, the more it is believed" - Goebells. It's a banality that all news of the class struggle is heavily censored. Recently Peter Walker, Energy Minister, issued instructions to the press not to report any of the CEGB's "maintenance problems", as euphemism for power cuts. The only one-off report was in the Guardian of Jan.8th Outside London, places where there have been 1½ - 2½ hour power cuts include Sheffield, Bradford, Blackpool and Birmingham. Elsewhere there have been significant voltage reductions. Also reported in neither the national press nor *The Miner* has been a few days of rioting in Lincolnshire, including Lincoln, Boston and Grantham (the Maggot's birthplace)...Wood Green (Class War 's 2nd front), Paddington White City...Newman 's 52 riots. All the time - silence, no news. In the information society: no information. Censorship - mass censorship. The ruling show has to present - to the miners as well as to other people who have no control over their own lives - the image of being in control, of the fatality and lack of effectiveness of all resistance to the inevitable 1000 year reign of Market Forces.

One of the most obvious, yet least talked about, of the reasons for the post-New Year mass scabbing is Scargill and Heathfields ' statements after Christmas that there would be no blackouts. In view of the fact that there had been 2-hour blackouts in Birmingham, Bradford, Sheffield, Blackpool and lots of other places *before* Christmas, and given that since then there have been 2-hour blackouts in several parts of North and East London (notably on January 7th), several blackouts between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. in other parts of the country, and vast voltage reductions everywhere, including fog-ridden motorways - given all this and more these statements by the bureaucrats seem, at first glance, utterly stupid. Particularly when one discovers that about 10 days before Christmas Peter Walker instructed the media not to mention any of the CEGB's euphemistically labelled "maintenance problems", a silence from the rulers' media which seems to have also inflicted the NUM paper *The Miner*. In their January 17th

issue, they attacked the media for being silent about the relation between the falling pound and the miner's strike, but nowhere do they attack it for silence on the power cuts, nor for Peter Walker's demand for this silence. This puts the NUM in the position of being more defeatist, if it is possible, than even The Guardian (of ruling mediocrity), which at least prints the occasional letter mentioning power cuts (probably because of pressure from radical printers). Power cuts would clearly have been one of the most vital morale boosts to the strike: yet Scargill & Heathfield have done the opposite - done the government's dirty work for it. Certainly a subtle sell-out: it passes the buck for the strike's failure to the base, who have been starved and demoralised back to work, which, of course cannot be blamed on the bureaucrats, who, after all, just take their marching orders from the rank and file. But why this demoralisation? What are the ulterior motives?

Although these particular notes end there, the only satisfactory answer is that the NUM leadership, despite needing the continuation of a large coal industry to maintain their own organisation and their roles and, amongst those higher up, their *careers*, had had enough of the strike which was becoming increasingly difficult to control. Sure, they didn't want to *overtly* sell it out. But they probably felt it would be a Pyrrhic victory for Thatcher (given the plunging pound & the government's forced re-organisation of its vastly over-spent budget) and that the Labour Party was bound to come back to power and slow the coal industry's decline. At the same time we shouldn't forget that incompetence and personal fears are oft-ignored reasons for the acts of those in power and were probably a factor in Heathfield's and Scargill's attitudes. Towards the end of November '84 I was at some miners' benefit where a guy from South Wales, a Communist Party member, got up and said something like "*If we don't get some good power cuts soon, if we don't win this strike over the next couple of months, then we're going to have to give up...*" As we shall see, this is basically what happened, and with the manipulations of the C.P. at the centre of the bitter end.

On 'When Britain Went To War,' Peter Walker claimed that enough coal stocks had been hoarded to last two years. But according to the Guardian at the time of the strike (18/1/85) "*some power stations are nearly out of fuel, although imports of coal during 1984 were double what they were in previous years.*" Now one might think that this could have been just disinformation by some Lefty journalist, but if that's the case, why did Walker see the need to instruct the press not to mention maintenance problems? In today's atmosphere, the most outright lies about the present go pretty much uncontested: one about the past wasn't even noticed. The aim is to present the State and the Economy as immutable, an all-powerful system that has never been threatened and therefore never can be in the future and that such ideas as a social movement to undermine this power are purely pathetic utopian dreaming.

At the beginning of '85 I wrote to an NUM branch secretary in Derbyshire (Peter Elliott of Warsop Main) I was in touch with, about what seemed to me the beginnings of a subtle sell-out

. I have no copy of this letter, but I do have the reply:

*"I agree with your analysis of the subtle sell-out: other events (full executive on the negotiations) seem to confirm that fact.*

*I am at this moment organising in N. Derbyshire, and hoping to broaden the base, a challenge to the Stalinist bureaucratic approach now more openly being pursued by the NUM not only at national but at regional level. Our objectives are simple.*

1. Which is fundamental - *give the running of the dispute where it should be, with the rank and file*

2. *Intensify our activities in seeking support by more physical approaches to other rank & file trade unionists, by-passing the leadership.*

3. *Incorporate into our struggle unemployed workers, who until now we have largely ignored.*

*I am having tremendous pressure put on me by our local leaders and there is the beginning of a character assassination programme being levelled against me, so I don't know how far we will get - however, the fight goes on...."* - letter from a Derby branch official, Jan 1985.

One can see here a bit of one of the contradictions of low level NUM officials: he wanted to "the running of the dispute where it should be, with the rank and file". If this meant giving the access to files of contacts, the use of money, use of phones, vans and all the union equipment to all those who wanted it to advance the struggle - fine. But the idea of "giving" still implies a certain paternalism - it was really up to the rank and file 'to take it, maybe by means of mass assemblies... Someone who is in an authority role, however minor such a role is, can only refuse such a role if he is to help develop a social movement. But this didn't happen. The guy was an ok decent guy - he had none of the pretensions of some of the more heavily political' branch secretaries - the CP fellow travellers, or those in lefty organisations, and was rather contemptuous of those who sought media attention or those who'd developed their "*rhetoric at Ruskin College*". But, after the strike, when I mentioned I'd liked the attack on Mick McGahey, he came to the old Stalinist's defence, saying he'd always admired him. Branch delegates and secretaries like this guy have played a dual role of leader-representative and initiator equal to the rest of the strikers - but because the strikers looked up to them and looked to them, as specialists, to provide the means for the struggle, the inevitable consequences were confusion

and demoralisation, regardless of their radical intentions, regardless of their integrity. So in the end, this branch secretary was, as a representative, reduced to justifying the scabs (the February ones) - whilst his wife, out of a fury that came from not being trapped in having to represent (though also she knew she wouldn't have to work with these scabs), had refused to share the same bed as him, and he had to sleep on the couch. It was a measure of his honesty that, despite having only seen him twice before, he told me that. Whilst nowadays, people are often so closed that they hardly ever reveal anything personal, in those days, this was fairly common. On the other hand, in a struggle against this world, the central question is not that this or that person is nice or not, is endearingly honest' about their lives or not, but whether they are able to honestly confront their petrified ideas and the hierarchical roles that maintain them so as to advance the struggle, so as to break through the contradictions that stop the advancement of this struggle. But that would also require some confrontation coming from those lower in the hierarchy, those who looked up to these officials.

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On 17<sup>th</sup> January there was a one-day national rail strike against the intimidatory policies of British Rail against train drivers blacking coal trains. Ray Buckton, ASLEF leader, said, "*If it hadn't been official, there would have been chaos because there's a tremendous amount of feeling about this.*" Which says everything that needs to be said about official strikes: for the unions, chaos is when workers are not controlled by them. Thatcher was well known for saying, "We are not going to intervene in the coal dispute." (Thatcher, Scottish Tory Conference, 11/5/84.) But "documents leaked to the Daily Mirror show that the Government had intervened - by persuading British Rail to settle with its workers, then in dispute, in order to prevent the two unions joining forces." (Thatcher's Reign - A Bad Case of the Blues, McFadyean & Renn, 1984).]

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On the same day as the national train strike Paul Foot of the SWP carried a short article about the miners strike in the Daily Mirror, recounting an interesting story where a miner had been beaten up, his kids intimidated and his car attacked, and that the media had descended on him, assuming he was a working miner' (euphemism for scab'), but, as soon as they heard he was a striker, a victim of the scabs' violence, they retreated and ignored the whole event. But the main part of his column was a long article about how cleaners in the House of Commons were giving fake names to avoid tax and national insurance, whilst he complained that the DHSS and Inland Revenue knew all about it but did nothing about it, moaning that nobody was prosecuted. Normally these middle class investigative journalists who claim to be the vanguard of the working class at least *feign* sympathy for the poor but clearly here Paul Foot, the epitome of this tendency, let his guard slip: he always led such a respectable life that for him cheating the State, even one run by the Tories he claimed to oppose, was considered an outrage. But this was typical of most of the two-faced utterly out-of-touch Left (and even a few on the ultra-Left), and

this disconnectedness from basic class instincts made them express all their moralistic qualms about attacks on scabs. Foot always maintained good relations with his ex-public school chums at **Private Eye** till the end of his days. In the Daily Mirror article, Foot showed in a crude form the aim of *all* investigative left-wing journalistic revelations: to get the State to rationalise the anomalies and incongruities in the organisation of the market economy which the State manages, and in so doing, putting even greater constraints on the dispossessed (often as the pay-off for a few reforms). Recently (March 2005) Foot was uncritically praised in a memorial service in Sheffield by Arthur Scargill and Bridget Bell of Women Against Pit Closures. During his lifetime, workers in struggle were a little less enthusiastic about this professional wordsmith. In the early 70s, after a big confrontation with the cops at the Fine Tubes factory in Plymouth, where workers had been on strike for sometime, Foot, introduced as the NUJ journalist-of-the-year, got up at a meeting and described how “*we fought and beat the police this morning*”. He was greeted with jeers and catcalls because everyone knew that this *we*’ was a lie - the lame Foot had remained on the other side of the road observing the fight from a safe distance.



Foot, of course, was part of the popular front of the miners strike which included the Bishop of Durham, Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Beatrix Campbell, etc.etc. - who always banalised and ideologised the struggle. Using their hierarchical roles (through which they tried to repress class violence against the rape of our lives) they publicly denounced the Police State; yet they only showed what a good liberal country we live in. Britain's so tolerant: anything can be said about anything - and just as long as this “freedom” of speech without consequences *practically* submits to all the logic of hierarchical power, of the market economy, it can flourish as an example of how democratic” our misery is, how *unlike* a Police State it is.

\* \* \*

In the last two months of the strike, in the face of increasing scabbing, initially exaggerated by the NCB, there were constant schizophrenic swings amongst the most active section of the strikers and those who supported them, between a terrible desperate demoralisation (encouraged even by some of those who apparently supported the miners [19]) and loads of



plans to kick-start the strike up again. Everywhere the most active strikers were saying “*I hope it never ends*”. These desires, however, were overwhelmed by the forces of the old world, and our hesitations won out in the end. For example, Peter Elliott's plans never came to anything - and nor did mine. Read once again, my notes written at the time:

It is true that the miners' strike has not collapsed into the apathy, impotent depression and demoralising despair (at least not with any consistency), which has been so persistently predicted over the last year or so. But unless this vital battle attempts some *further* qualitative leaps, it will. It's not enough for the hit squads to continue doing what they're doing, however audacious and exciting such activity is.

For the past year, the miners strike has been manic-depressive: sometimes it has almost collapsed into clichéd predictability, apathy, impotent depression, humiliating demoralisation and unarmed despair; at other times, it has violently exploded into unpredictable qualitative leaps on all fronts of daily life! Of course, from the start, the pundits - and many who thought of themselves as revolutionaries - were predicting the strike's imminent collapse. But the fact that it's lasted so long - and has revealed so much about class society in Britain and the world - isn't enough to keep it going. There is a steady return to scabbing, however much the NUM has to maintain a front that everything's ok. And the next few weeks could see over 50% of the strike scabbing. Certainly, whilst those who are wholeheartedly involved in the strike and support it practically only see things in terms of what they're going to do “when the strike's over” (e.g. complete our text on the strike; get into permanent sabotage of the pits; produce the best video on the strike) there will be no way to stop a massive uncontested humiliation which the end of the strike would imply. Indeed, the most practical of the post-strike hypotheses (e.g. consistent sabotage of the pits) the State has also anticipated and will already be working out ways of getting information in order to fill the massive extra prison space which by 1986 they will have generously provided for. As for those hoping to produce their particular view of the strike - in text or video form -*after* the strike, even if their aim is to push the class struggle further by drawing out some of the less banal aspects of their experience of the strike, this reflective task is as necessary *now* to deepen the movement as it will be when and if the strike ends. *If* the strike ends? Well, it's still a bit of far-fetched optimism to hope that a significant minority of class conscious proletarians here and throughout the world could provoke a revolution within 2 years, which would see the “end” of the strike: realistically, even if the strike officially ends, there will still be vast numbers who will be signing themselves off sick, which miners can do themselves, without a doctors' certificate, for up to 8 weeks (in Shirebrook, 50% of the scabs are doing this, and the figures must be pretty high elsewhere also).

## **Scabs**

“*A scab is still a scab*” - Kiveton miner, late Jan. 85

Another vital change in the battleground has been the change in attitude from the early “super-scabs” to the present plain “scabs”. Even after dozens of pits throughout the country exploded against the rats who grabbed at the NCB bribe last November, and against their guard-dogs in the police force and the media, Scargill was condemning violence “away from the picket lines” and saying that these scabs would be forgiven if they came out again after Christmas (some have been stop-go on strike and scabbing from November to today).

Leftists like the SWP were already excusing those who returned to work at the start of December, and even came out saying that maybe the attacks on the scabs had been a bad tactic and really shouldn't have happened.

Whilst some Leftists complained that attacks on scabs were contrary to trade unionist tradition, the sub-Leninist pseudo-revolutionary ideologues of the ICC went one better than the Left - this clique displayed its uniquely delirious sectarianism by condemning the attacks on scabs for being *within* the ideological traditions of trade unionism (by which abstract criteria, one could condemn all *strikes!*). What all these groups have in common is the verbiage of struggle (and of a definition of struggle that supports their own notion of themselves) but when some real concrete violent necessities and realities about this struggle are expressed and exposed they run away shitting in their pants. It's always been a violent minority that initiates struggle, that has gone through the pain/fear barrier and acted concretely to extend their struggle. No innocent bystanders! The attacks on scabs, on or away from the picket lines, might have horrified the spectators whom these self-proclaimed vanguards hoped to win over - but they also certainly *did* put off many miners who had remained spectators of the strike from returning to work. That the majority of striking miners had remained largely spectators of the strike was/is both *their* fault, the active strikers' fault and the NUM's.

In the 1983 NGA Warrington battle, or with Ray Buckton and the 1982 ASLEF strike, or NUPE in the '82 health strike, the bureaucrats consistently passed the buck to the TUC - a convenient scapegoat for the sell-out. This time, however, the miners haven't let Scargill pass the buck to the bureaucrats - for too large a minority this con would be shown to be too obviously convenient for him and clearly unnecessary - so Scargill has had to subtly undermine the resistance of the strikers from within, to scapegoat the drift-back to work he in the first place had helped to encourage. Why did he say nothing to condemn GMBATU's withdrawal of its daily £1000 donation to the miners, which, significantly, was also made right after Christmas?

Before Christmas, giving to the miners strike was Today's Good Deed. Since Christmas it's more like “Let's get the nuisances back to work as quick as possible: the longer this thing continues, the more my position is in the balance”.

Nevertheless, the State and its servile guard-dogs in the media, with the help of the pseudo-opposition in the NUM hierarchy & the Labour Party etc., will do their best to make sure that this defeat' goes out with a whimper, not with a bang, that this defeat' is made to seem like not just a partial defeat of one battle, but a permanent defeat. The mass depression and demoralisation the State will do their best to inflict on you and me here - & even in other countries - can only be avenged by the sort of explosion of anger that spread through the mining villages from July onwards - and this time not just against scabs & cops, but also the Union scabs, the NUM cops. Of course, this rage won't come from thin air, but, above all, from an understanding of the subtle compromises & lies perpetuated by Scargill, Heathfield, Jack Taylor & co; it'll come from all those striking miners & sympathisers who, up till now, have been relatively private about their critiques of the NUM hierarchy.

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However, instead of producing these notes in publishable form (I've transcribed them above into a more coherent form from almost illegible - even to myself - scrawls on different scraps of paper), which would have been more useful, I produced the following, still interesting, leaflet for a miners' demo, January '85, in Islington, North London, where Tony Benn was the main speaker:

## **TONY BENN - ANOTHER LEFT-WING CAPITALIST PIG**

*"It is the Government's policy to phase out subsidies to the nationalised industries. In line with this the Government hope that the coal industry will be able to operate without the need for assistance, apart from the social grants"*

(27/11/75, Hansard, Vol.901, Col.1062) **(Tony Benn)**

*"What is needed is a viable industry to get the coal out of the ground. And to get it out at competitive prices."*

(Colliery Guardian, May 1976) **(Tony Benn)**

*"I am reluctant to engage in the House in discussion of individual pits, for the reason that I have given, namely, that there is a proper procedure and that where necessary, the NUM can come to me and I can raise the matter with the NCB... I have never found the NUM in any way unreasonable where closures are necessary because of exhaustion or because pits are out of line in economic terms." (Hansard, Vol 959, Col. 1015.) (Tony Benn)*

Like most social movements that concretely contest symptoms of the misery of capitalist development the miners' strike is an amalgamation of contradictory aspirations, a popular front which contains within it both counter-revolutionary and revolutionary perspectives. One of the more evident aspects of this contradiction is the way in which miners, and their supporters, have remained silent about what they know of some of the hypocrisies of the bureaucrats who claim to support them. Under the illusion that they have to present an *image* of unity in order to win, striking miners have swallowed their pride and allowed 2-faced leaders to speak "on their behalf with hardly a hint of opposition. Tony Benn is merely one of the most well-known of these scum whose aim is to get back into positions of power over the backs of the miners.

In 1977, that benignly patronising grey-faced ponce, Tony Benn, as Minister of Energy, collaborated with Joe Gormley, former NUM boss, in manipulating the notoriously divisive bonus scheme for the Notts, South Derbyshire and other areas, a scheme that had been decisively rejected by a majority of the miners in a ballot.

Also in 1977, Benn did his best to crush the unofficial power workers' strike, which had courageously risked one of the few attacks on the Labour Government's Social Contract (otherwise known as the Social Con-trick), and which was even organised, by some of the workers at the end of the strike, against the divide and rule tactics of the militant' shop stewards. Benn had even made contingency plans to call the army in to do the work of the power workers, but he'd found this unnecessary when the so-called militant' stewards accepted a deal worked out with Benn and the CEGB bosses which created a skill hierarchy (status, responsibility' and small differentials) as the reward' for weakened solidarity.

Another one of Benn's achievements as Energy Minister was the closure of more pits than Thatcher has managed, and all justified with the same monetarist logic that he now denounces the Tories for. Moreover, despite the Left's attack on the development of nuclear power, the brutality of the cops and the threatened use of the army to put down strikes, when Benn was part of the Cabinet, he armed the Atomic Energy Authority, participated in the government's brutal use of cops to put down the Notting Hill carnival riots of 1976 and 1977 and never raised a squeak in protest against the use of troops in the firemen's strike of '77 - '78.

Leftists say "Aaaah - but Tony's criticised a lot of his past ...he *is* capable of change, you know." Though it might well be that he's conveniently changed his image now that he's not part of a government (i.e. not directly helping to organise the commodity economy and the crushing of resistance to it), a minimal (very minimal) basis for accepting a person has changed is that they criticize precise past behaviour and resolve not to put themselves in a position where they could repeat this behaviour (even then, it would be stupid to judge them on their intentions, rather than

their concrete acts). But even by these insufficient criteria Benn has not changed: he still aspires to a position of hierarchical power, still seeks the limelight of the TV studios, and hasn't even criticized any of these precise previous acts. Far from it: in his present criticism of monetarism, he has stated, "*The BBC, the police and the army are uneconomic. But we all need these. The same goes for coal.*" Who is this "we" that needs the BBC (Bourgeois Brainwashing Creeps) and the rabid guard-dogs of wage slavery and the market economy (the filth and the army)? Certainly not the masses of dispossessed individuals! The "we" he is referring to, of course, are politicians and other organizers of our misery, whether in right-wing or left-wing guises. It's about time we gave *them* despair and paranoia! The anti-hierarchical violence of some of the miners, and the rioters of 1981 before them, have shown us the way. Bosses left, right and centre must disappear *forever*.

**P.S. Scargill constantly claims that the agreed Plan for Coal' makes no mention of closing uneconomic pits. This is bollocks. In fact, in '74 the NUM and its Labour allies committed themselves to the "inevitable" closure of pits "as their useful economic reserves of coal are depleted".**

January

19

**Produced by: B.M.Combustion, London WC1N 3XX**



Sir Anthony Wedgwood-Benn

For some reason, this leaflet was not particularly liked by Benn's admirers. I was profoundly upset when one nice middle class lady politely handed the leaflet back. Some said it must be a fascist leaflet - the B.M. obviously stood for British Movement (for those who don't know, it stands for British Monomarks, a company that works like an anonymous post box, receiving mail that you then pick up from them for a small fee). Stalin and his supporters likewise

characterised any opposition from the left of Stalinism as “fascist”.

\* \* \* \* \*

One can see in the initially absurd exaggerations of the amount of miners scabbing and the eventual result this encouraged of a genuine flood of scabbing the way lies and ideology function in the ruling world. What starts off as an aim is presented as a fact and thus creates the conditions for its own realisation - that is, unless more forcefully contested. The crude manipulation of lies by the Hungarian Stalinist ruling class in the early 50s, for example, didn't prevent these lies being contested by an explosion of social contestation in '56. But modern capitalism is far more subtle in its demoralisation, functioning more on the basis of utter isolation, making you think you're the only one who sees through the lies, when usually there are a considerable minority who do but who haven't yet found the means to make their doubts count.

The following were amongst my notes for this period:

**When bully-girl Thatcher challenged Scargill to condemn the violent “bully-boys” amongst the striking miners she knew perfectly well that, despite the fact that Scargill would have to remain silent, in the past Scargill has condemned the necessary violence of miners against the hierarchical violence of the State. With this ploy she could present the Union bureaucracy as responsible for the most autonomous aspects of this strike, the violent initiatives outside Union control. The rulers' show - the ruling spectacle - needs to determine the image of what constitutes an opposition to it in order to confuse the more radical opposition to the system. At the same time it's a way of getting the bureaucrats, ever-anxious about their image, to police the violence of their members (after all, in the past, such violence has been turned against the Leftist manipulators as well as the ruling ones). This confusion of the Union with class violence mirrors the confusion of the mass of the miners - and other proletarians also - a confusion maintained by the fear of the more rebellious miners to explicitly go against the hypocrisy of the unions, and the misery of union ideology. That Dave Douglass, an NUM official, can distribute Class War' (journal of that gang of anarcho-social democrats who seek, by violent means, a society based on equality of bullshit: self-styled opportunists who aim to “win people over” to their gang and use writing as a way of presenting a public image - much like a record is for a rock star - conveniently forgetting that analysis is as vital a weapon as a Molotov, that the class war won't be won without it) is illustrative of how schizophrenic the proletariat is at the moment - on the one hand desperately angry, on the other hand, having no perspective outside of reforming what is, even if such reforms require violence. Going beyond such a limit requires not only going beyond**

**the limitations imposed by the Unions, which also means recognising that solidarity from other sectors of the working class will best be developed from an attack on the bureaucrats, but also going beyond the humiliating defence of jobs which is how the Union officials can dominate the argument.**

The following unpublished notes were written by the author of this text during the period January and February:

Notes written in the last two months of the strike

(there's no precise chronological order to these notes - all of them were undated - but I've put them roughly in the order they were probably written, written often in a scrawl which was almost incomprehensible to even me)

*“There've been so many ways that the NUM hasn't helped during the strike - like when they took the minibus away and had nothing to do with our communal kitchens - that it's made me see that we shouldn't ever look to the unions for help. We should organise ourselves outside them, without them, against them...”* - Fitzwilliam miner's wife.

What can be done during the strike: blackouts/2nd front/ picketing of police stations. Different meetings: form and content. Demos over collections. Graffiti and damage. Involvement of striker-spectators (what objective and subjective/inter-subjective obstacles to involvement?). Limitations on transport to London for collections. Lack of permanently revocable strike committees.

The striker as spectator - what they miss out on.

Getting their picket-line money.

Few texts have helped theoretically prepare the rebellious minority of miners and sympathiser for “making the best of a bad situation - the compromise necessitated by circumstances out of our control” - i.e. the sell-out (as far as I know, the following English language pamphlets are the only lucid undogmatic support over the last 9 months for the most radical aspects of the strike which have also tried to prepare, with any consistency and honesty, the rebellious miners for the cop-out to come: Workers Playtime, June 1984; Miner Conflicts July 1984; The Positive and the Negative Sept. '84; A Communist Effort December '84; and, to a certain extent, Wildcat Jan/Feb 1985).

*“Don't follow leaders”* - son of Scottish striking miner.

“They're all just in it for themselves” - Yorkshire miner.

“Scargill would make a better boss than MacGregor” - another Yorkshire miner.

“If he sells us out - we'll kill him” - miners everywhere.

Dear Hack Arselickers,

Thanks for everything!

Even the most oppositional' of you are essential for the perpetuation of our rule. Once again we thank you! If it wasn't for your excellent job of presenting the ordinary-slave-in-the-street with the false choices necessary to maintain his passivity our skins wouldn't even be worth the paper their printed on. Once again we thank you! Though we shit on you like all the rest, even the most crusading' of you only complain about the exorbitant price of the turds. Most of you - resigned cynics, alcoholics, moralists - are happily content to churn out yet another tear-jerking photo of the sewer we protect. Once again - we thank you!

Like us, you have learnt the only lesson the World Market teaches: contempt and the apparent success ' of contempt. Once again we thank you! All your scandals', exposes' and insights' into bad' authorities and bad' commodities reveal nothing more than your need to perpetuate a self-image of your benevolence and indispensability - defended with implicit ideologies of the good' authority and the good' commodity. That's just what we need. Once again let us thank you for all your services rendered in the maintenance of submissive conditions. With a sincerity that us full-time liars can only muster for their fellow professionals, once again we thank you.

You remain, sirs, our obedient servants ~  
The Capitalist Class.

“After the strike's over most of us'll probably just collapse exhausted - until one day we'll just have to start up and get organizing again...We've had support from everyone - people from right across the world - and if there's any people in the world, *anywhere*, who need our help in the future, we'll try, through our action groups, to do our best to help them.”

**Striking miner's wife, S.Yorks.**

**Chapter 18:**

## **The End of the Strike - March 1985**



“It was the saddest day of my life. I cried openly...”

- Notts striker, the day he returned to work, March 5th.

The end of the strike was narrowly voted for at a delegate conference at the TUC 's HQ Congress House' in London, most of the Communist Party delegates pushing for this end - a vote of 98 to 91. Their decision to end the strike by this time if there was no victory in sight was probably already taken in November '84. There was talk amongst miners of CP manipulations amongst the delegates at a South Wales pit (Maerdy, I think) and at Easington, where the vote to return was narrow, and tipped the balance in favour of going back (sadly, I've forgotten the precise content of these manipulations). Many miners, a sizeable minority including most of the Kent and Scottish pits, wanted to continue - but it clearly would have meant an intensification in the level of violence and a development away from and against the NUM. In Kent the idea of continuing for a year longer was often voiced, though this might have been because they were suffering the least financial hardship - being close to the rich pickings of London gave them an edge over other areas.

The decision to call off the strike was announced by Scargill outside Congress House, after which the crowd shouted *“We're not going back! We're not going back!”* several times as Scargill was abused by some of his former worshippers as a “sell-out”. As the delegates left the building, they were jostled and pushed and insulted with the words *“Scum, scabs, traitors”*. Scargill himself said *“I feel great”* whilst thousands of striking miners fell into a deep depression. The NUM demanded an orderly return to work with marching bands and “heads held up high”, which one miner called *“about the most stupid thing in the strike”* considering everybody felt defeated. The NUM rag *“The Miner”* even openly denied it had been a defeat, whilst many sacked miners were, for several months after the strike, denied the most basic State benefit because officially the dispute had not been settled. Immediately following the return to work, Kent miners picketed out the Yorkshire pits, but this didn't last.

In the days following the end of the strike, Kinnock was pelted with tomatoes, Willis was pelted with sticks and bottles and Mick McGahey, Scotland's Stalinist manipulator, got badly beaten up. Meanwhile, scabs were attacked and there were lots of little disputes, including one by ex-scabs because one of them had been sacked for insulting a scab whilst he was on strike (pathetic!).

All the following were written by me at the end of the strike:

Last draft but one (don't have a copy of the final draft) to John and Jenny Dennis - my first ever letter to them:

*Dear John, Dear Jenny,*

*I felt awkward about phoning you back after Monday night - facts, details, information about precisely how you'd been humiliated wasn't what I wanted to hear - and not able to offer any practical help made feel as impotent as you must have felt and I 'm not very good at dealing with such a bitter, or anyhighly-charged, situation over the phone. What could I say after such a sickening let-down - the "Putting-A-Brave-Face-On-Defeat" Show reproduced for the cameras in pits up and down the country (the "tactical withdrawal" lies pushed by sections of the Union designed to console you and to let them off the hook with their "good intentions"). After your carefully controlled telephone voice, Jenny, and your disgusted "It's sick" brief comment, John, what could I say? (Sunday afternoon at Congress House was agony - but at least I could insult the cops and journalists and shove, push and stamp on the toes of the bureaucrats to release some of my bitterness). What could I say when I knew you - like almost all the most active strikers and supporters - must feel bitterly let down - let down by those you thought were closest to you, and maybe even - like me - feeling useless yourselves, let down by your own failures..? The NUM wants to treat defeat in the battle like a good sportsman in a cricket match who hates to be thought of as a bad loser. Really useful. "I feel terrific" said Arthur Scargill on Sunday night. I phoned a Nottingham striker I'd been arrested with in London in summer and he said that Tuesday was the saddest day of his life. The best comment I heard was from a Kent miner on the Monday, who said "First day back I'll bop the foreman, get sent to the manager's office for my cards, bop him one and tell him, I never wanted to work in your fucking industry in the first place." - easier said than done for most, but it's a desire which probably many striking miners share, no? But defiance has got to be more strategic than this - it offers nothing more than a personally satisfying - and very short-lived - "solution".*

*What could I say? Since I felt battered and dragged along by something out of my control for 4 days, I knew it must have been immeasurably more demoralizing for you - and I felt useless, that anything I could say would just be platitudes to cheer you up, empty encouragement. Even now, having reached my 7<sup>th</sup> draft of writing to you, and feeling self-conscious, I end up feeling clumsy, not knowing...*

*After that Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, it's felt like a cold wall has descended - though the NUM and the Left are trying to do their best to deny it. They hope that in despair everyone will seek an image of unity to hide this despair rather than confront this despair openly, autonomously. Sure, it 's not a 1926, not the definitive demoralisation the rulers hoped it to be - but it's been a big kick in the balls, and it ll need something more than the rhetoric of struggle and wishful-thinking to turn bitter tears to sweet revenge (helping to bring about a situation where the likes of Jack Taylor need the same degree of police protection as those scabs in Aberdare are getting might be a good starting point - but I doubt if you'd get the idea passed at a delegate conference).*

*On the Wednesday rate-capping march it was as if nothing had happened - unaffected by reality the WRP were still chanting "Organise the General Strike!" and all the rest of the Left were happy to see how many people had turned up - but it was as shallow as the Fun Fair - light years from Sunday February 24<sup>th</sup>. They even stopped a miners' banner leading the march because "the strike's over". The only good bit was the attack on Willis (which I missed).*

*Anyway, I feel like I've already pushed my gloomy "line" too much when all I wanted to do was say "hi" and to send this video and "The Fraud's Prayer" for what they're worth and say I'll see you soon.*

*My love to Matthew & Sarah -*

*Nick*

I wrote the following disorganised series of disjointed and somewhat repetitive reflections after the strike but never organised or published them:

It would be miserable if the miner's strike became reduced simply to a series of jokes to cheer up our friends or anecdotes and paper clippings stored up to impress our radioactive grandchildren. Or worse - reduced to a series of Channel 4 programmes. The question "What did you do in the miners' strike?" must pass on to the more important question "What didn't you do in the miner's strike? What could you have done better?". This is not some sado-masochistic game aimed to get you whip yourself for your failures - rather an incitement to each person reading this to reflect on and practically subvert their own complacency in a struggle which has been both excitingly daring and predictably demoralizing. Of course, those who remained spectators of the strike must firstly subvert their *own* passivity before they could even begin to undertake this task of self-reflection and decision: they have no concrete experience of their own

to reflect on, no unrealized projects to test out, no hesitations to be corrected, no critiques to be expressed because for them the strike, like the whole of this alien world, was something to be merely commented on. Having given up their point of view, and the risk involved in acting on it, their comments are about as significant as a Catholic priest's ideas on cunnilingus. What distinguishes the daring initiatives of the fighting minority of miners and their supporters from the majority who mostly relied on the wishful thinking of "We shall win" and simply watched the strike with peaceful picketing and collecting, is that the former have, at least, concrete contradictions - successes and failures - to reflect on and correct, whilst those who mostly remained spectators can only attribute the defeat of the strike to *external* factors.

Most of those spectators submissive to the dominant ideas of the Tories or right-wing Labour were those who felt most threatened by the actions of people prepared to fight, those resentful miseries who complained that collections were illegal or said "Get back to work, you lazy sods": it'll take a world revolution to shake these moralists and cynics out of their sneers and smirks, and even then they'll probably end up as willing cannon-fodder for some tyrant or other.

The defeat of the miners has been a massive kick in the balls. Most people with any sense and sensitivity feel pretty depressed, partly demoralised -*almost* defeated...but not quite. There's no easy way to pick ourselves up - none of the half-true platitudes (list) or practical attitudes that go with them (list) get us one step closer to actually trying to make sure we can correct our mistakes next time a mass revolutionary movement shakes up our despondent lives.

It's easy to say "We've lost the battle but the war goes on" but unless fundamentals are ruthlessly faced up to and attacked practically, demoralisation and cynicism will fester...

On Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March in Hatfield a big majority voted to continue striking until the withdrawal of sackings (to call it an "amnesty" implies acceptance that "insubordination and insurrection" - even when they have been pursued by some of the sacked miners - are something to be forgiven...)

From the point of view of the ruling show the end of the strike has meant that the half-open cell door of capitalist misery has been shut tight and been locked: a cold wall of impossibility has descended on the struggle to abolish humiliation, hierarchy and classes. The "inevitable" fate we all have to accept - the relentless progress of the mad logic of market forces - has meant a big persistent kick in the balls for the miners - a warning to all those who resist, all those who struggle for their dignity and self-respect and the solidarity and the recognition they discover in each other in struggle.

**So many words have been spilt on the miners strike, yet very few have tried to grapple honestly with its contradictions and few have, ultimately, been very useful in extending the struggle nor, in any way, clear. This is largely because the people writing the texts have generally just wanted to confirm points of view they'd had for a long time rather than make more daring breaks with the past: most of these writers don't want to critically reflect on their own participation, and that of their friends', in the movement of the last**

year and its relation to the whole movement. They don't want to begin by recognising their successes and sense of discovery over the last year - and correcting their own failures, hesitations, weaknesses and dogmatic presuppositions, as a necessary step in recommencing the struggle against this sick world, this nest of complex and often subtle lies and insults. Many of the non-miners run to the security of "I was right all along" and "I told you so", whilst patronisingly adding that the miners were magnificent ' and an example to us all. Whilst what the miners inspired - the contacts, the solidarity and the concrete community in struggle - over the last year, was and could still be truly exciting, the bitter and not entirely predictable end to the strike demands something more than banalities if the dispossessed are to avoid the horrors of :

1. Taking the desperation out on those who could be our best friends;
2. Taking it out on ourselves (alcoholism, heroin addiction, religion, obsessions with hobbies and sports)
3. Finding some "hope ' in the Labour Party or some other political organisation which will supposedly save us (all of which are recognised as false exits from facing the immensity of our tasks by a significantly angry minority of workers and unemployed.)
4. Impotent cynicism - "*It's all pointless*", "*We're all doomed!*", "*Just filling in time until death*".
5. Violent anti-State fantasies without any risky practical consequence.
6. Ideological platitudes - "In revolution you lose every battle but the last" or "We'll be back" or "They're going to wish we were back on strike" or "... " (fill in your own consolation)...Uselessly defiant ' half-truths. All this is just pointless hope ' - abstract, impotent wishful-thinking, subtle ways of not reflecting, *in the present*, on the strengths and weakness, the successes and failures,, of the past year, as part of renewing our only practical hope - the creative violence of the masses against different bars of the cage. Hope is like a barred window: no matter how large it is, you still remain caged up...

One of the things the miners strike has shown is the arrogantly simplistic and political nature of all those who judge individuals - and themselves - purely according to their ideas: those who really - concretely - revolt and want the world to make a revolution have at least not tried to make pedagogical interventionist-type critiques based on easy "analyses" suitable for all forms of revolt ("ready-made theory") and have not judged others on their failure to appreciate this so-called "theory". To attack the Unions is necessary, but it can only begin by concretely questioning and doubting first of all ones own complicity with more diffuse and subtle forms of social relations of which Unions are first and foremost an institutionalised legal form. The first and foremost alienation to be attacked is the extent to which your own point of view is colonised

by your submission to the point of view of a collectivity which may merely be in your head, but more usually exists in the unwritten rules of behaviour which maintain the petrification of your circle of friends.

**If the dispossessed are to get beyond consolations that numb the pain whilst enabling us to adapt to it, precise questions are going to have to be examined and answered. If writing has any use, the writer must first of all reject the teacher mentality that wants to preach the class the correct pat analysis which could have been churned out, with minor adaptations, over a year or over 10 years ago. Facing the facts means clarifying the confusion that has been the inevitable result of the various organisations competing for the adherence, hearts, minds, souls - but above all, the readership (and possible membership) of the miners and other proletarians; those who justify these sects, big and small, inevitably develop interests above and independent of practical solidarity.**

One of the most likely, but least useful, effects of a demoralised movement now would be to compensate for the desolate sense of despondency the ruling world wishes to drain people with, to compensate for this with hopeful wishful-thinking, steeped in impotently abstract half-truths:

“In revolution we lose every battle but the last” **or** “Well, we can't expect miracles of ourselves, anymore than of the rest of the working class” **or** “We'll be back!”

**- all of which are half-true ways of not reflecting, in the present, on the strengths & weaknesses, the successes and failures, of the past year, as part of renewing the creative violence of the masses against differing bars of the cage. Hope is the leash of submission, which is why so many workers are thinking of joining the Labour Party, which is already devising patronising lessons of the strike, which basically come down to criticising any aspect of the strike that may have limited its appeal to the masses of spectators/voters. Inspired by such political organisations, hope springs eternally external: it always consoles you with an abstract wish for some solution outside of your own, and other people's, organised initiatives. Rejecting autonomy for hope stops the rebels from asking themselves some basic concrete questions. Like, what can be learnt now about the strike since Christmas, & since November? Why, since the New Year, did the drift-back start to become a flood?**

There are four essential, and very general, reasons:

**1. The weight of the old world (survival miseries inflicted by the class enemy; dominant ideology in the media; intimidation by the courts and the cops; resigned indifference on the part of the majority of the mass of spectators, etc.) all of which, despite appearances, have been supported by:**

**2. The pseudo-opposition of the Left and the Union hierarchies, including the NUM hierarchy, all of which, despite appearances, have both encouraged & been encouraged by:**

3. The inertia and passivity of the majority of striking miners, most of whom have depended on the initiatives of the active minority, and who now are betraying the minority who have supported them in the past<sup>[20]</sup>.

**4. The limitations of the real movement itself, limitations which can certainly be partly corrected, and immediately. It is now vital for the active minority (and all those who support them) - the miners and supporters who have made the most audacious initiatives in this strike by by-passing some of the controls of the various Union bureaucrats - to be explicit about their opposition to the ambiguities of the leaders and hierarchs, however “radical” their rhetoric.**

In the above I mentioned Hatfield, where Dave Douglass was branch secretary:

The entrenchment of the NUM's equivalent of a shop steward role has led this guy to do quite a few TV appearances and snippets on the radio. Doubtless it feeds his ego even to mention him so much in this text. But he is a significant actor in the spectacle of trade unionism and the contradictions between expressing, representing and repressing the class struggle inherent in trade unionism which his (and other people's) history expresses<sup>[21]</sup>. It's not just personal <sup>[22]</sup>. At the end of the strike, during a radio programme with Peter Walker, the Tory Energy Minister, DD phoned up, giving his name, and saying something like “*When we go back down the pits we'll cause so much trouble the gaffers'll wish we were back out on strike.*”, though it was probably with a bit of swearing and more oomph to it than that - DD's a good performer. The practice of this guy at the end of the strike was a little bit different. When Tony Clegg, the one sacked miner at Hatfield, sacked for attacking a scab, mounted a one-man picket line after the strike was officially over, no-one crossed it. But the majority, apparently, wanted to go to work. DD took Tony Clegg aside, had a little private word with him, and said his picket was embarrassing the members, that they felt awkward about him and could he see his way to stopping picketting...Despite his resentment about this moral pressure, and the fact that it was all private, he stopped picketting so his fellow former strikers could return to work. He had lost everything - his work, his wife, his house and his mates...DD relished the role, probably wanting a nice orderly return to work but then so did a majority by this time: again it would have taken the (fairly sizeable) minority to re-gain the initiative at a moment when there were stirrings to re-start the strike. DD is certainly just one factor in this equation - the majority of miners had no desire to wholeheartedly support Tony Clegg and preferred to hide behind DD in conveying the general consensus to him. DD, like many branch officials and shop stewards, clearly participated in some of the radical aspects of the strike - especially the hit squads. His participation was neither more nor less than the rest of this active section of strikers. But because of his greater access to contacts, phones, equipment, etc. he came to be seen by many as an indispensable leader. As with many shop stewards when there's a downturn in any particular struggle, DD's privileged position (in terms of his access to stuff) helped repress any possibility of the strike starting up again: in Yorkshire, Kent and Scotland, there were moves to try to get the strike to continue,

though it really would have taken a lot of risks, violence and innovative activity to kick-start it back to life again. DD preferred the rhetoric of struggle to helping to do anything. This is not to blame him: the initiative always remains with those who have no professional leadership status. But it does show how far he had retreated from his position in 1972 when his affirmation of the role of branch official was pretty muted - "[A miner] *prefers the open direct representation of we are all leaders*'. *Even in the case of a working miner who is a branch official, yes - they can see he is a worker, but that would be no call to get excited...the branch officer can be regarded as distant, even after a year in office... the worker can trust the man who works next to him, even if he is wary of giving him too much power*". But then, in his uncritical respect for Scargill, he'd retreated far further than what he'd had to say about full-time officials in '72: little leaders require bigger leaders to justify themselves and hope that they too can command hierarchical respect (and so on up and down the ladder). You never know where you are with a branch official - they have such contradictory aspirations, wanting to struggle yet wanting their role in the struggle to be indispensable and therefore unable to distance themselves from the union and see what is needed to advance the struggle.

The fact that many Hatfield miners would mouth off to DD doesn't mean that such a hierarchical respect wasn't maintained: the respect was there in the lack of open access to all the resources a democracy of "Complain all you want but for the moment / control"

Basically, branch officials, regardless of their own personal integrity, are trapped within the representative role of their authority position: they will swim with the tide, generally going where the majority goes, showing about as much consistency and coherence as an alcoholic on speed. The main thing that holds them together is a certain more or less crass leftism, which at this time was linked to a shallow manoeuvring image of the combative working class role utterly compatible with anarcho-roles. When it comes to practical initiatives, rare is the branch official so unconcerned about maintaining their status as to step out of line with what the - mostly passive - majority want of them. And if they do - it's not because of their position as branch official. In the end *doing something* is started by a minority, whether that includes branch officials or not (and it rarely does). If a branch official is looked to as a benevolent authority, someone who can protect workers against vicious management fingering, it's also indicative of the extent to which workers become dependant on them, even up to the point of coming to them with all their problems, treating them like a social worker, when, likely as not, these officials will also have a fucked-up daily life they're desperate to talk about, but which their specialist position forces them to bottle up.

It is vital to analyse:

Trade Unionism's image and practice and trade union ideology as a whole.

How the NUM has functioned in the miners strike - e.g. how the branch delegates and secretaries have played a dual role of leader-representative and initiator equal to the rest of the lads, whose inevitable consequences have been confusion and demoralisation, regardless of



their radical intentions.

How Scargill, despite the disgust and repressed anger of a minority of miners and supporters, has remained with his "pure" image in tact (despite innumerable, largely unspoken, retreats).

The leadership con.

History of Trade Unionism here.

How defending an organisation disorganises real solidarity.

How the NUM - like all organisations - is an entity greater than the individuals which comprise it, like the Labour Party or the Nation or the Economy.

Looking for fixed causes' fixating a pre-defined perspective vis a vis the union....

Most people have changed - one way or the other - through this strike...

You never know where you are with a branch official...contradictory aspirations

Brave face on failure? Or a lying cover-up of surrender.

Guilt-money: not real solidarity.

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1979: THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT (2nd highest year for days lost to capital through strikes this century).....

1981: MASSIVE RIOTS IN OVER 30 CITIES IN THE U.K.....

1984-5: THE LONGEST RUNNING MASS STRIKE IN BRITISH HISTORY.....



*"I hope it never ends" - Sunderland miner.*

*"I'll never go back. What'll I be going back to?" - Yorkshire miner.*

*"Of course, none of this'll be settled without a revolution" - Durham miner.*

*"There's gotta be a revolution. There's just got to be." - Kent miner.*

**FOR THE END OF WAGE SLAVERY & DOLE SLAVERY.....**

Small A3 size poster - with far too grandiose wishful thinking - which I put out shortly after the strike

## **Chapter 19:**

### **The period up to the Present**

**29/4/85:** Strike begins at South Kirby:

Counter-Information wrote:

South Kirby miners walked out immediately when management victimised and sacked yet another miner on 29<sup>th</sup> April. The strike soon spread to other pits in the Barnsley area.

But the Yorkshire NUM leaders went all out to sabotage the struggle, and the miners returned to work on May 9<sup>th</sup> with the men still sacked.

A local miner sent us the following information:

“At the time of writing South Kirby pit walked out on strike after yet another man was sacked for alleged intimidation of a scab. This now brings the total number of men sacked to 5 all for alleged offences of this nature. The word SCAB is now good enough to get any man sacked. Combine this with a manager who thinks he's God Almighty and we have now reached the stage of true “Capitalist democracy”. To use the manager's own words when one of the sacked men said he could produce 20 people to say he had not done anything, “Bring them and I'll sack them as well.”

This action is due directly to the hard line attitude of the management, under strict guidelines from “Mack the knife”. Well, they are in for a fucking shock if they think we are going to tolerate the bastard much longer and it is about time other people started to take the same stand. All conscious elements should now stand up and say fuck off you bastards, we want every sacked man back in this pit or you won't get another cobble of coal cut”.

Another local miner described how the strike started with a spontaneous walkout. At the beginning the action came completely from the rank and file'. There were no union officials involved.

But then the NUM moved in, saying they didn't want too much disruption. Holding back the struggle as usual, the union officials issued orders restricting picketing. They said that miners could only picket pits that had already pledged support, that pickets should be limited to 6, that the sacked men shouldn't picket. Nevertheless, the SKirby and Ferrymoor Ridding's pickets met with success - solidarity action was taken at Royston, Dodsworth and Haughton Main collieries and at the Shafton workshops miners were ringing up all round Yorkshire asking for pickets to come to their pits.

A S.Kirby miner told us that he and many other strikers believed that the strike shouldn't only be for reinstatement for the sacked men but that the aims of the year-long struggle should be taken up again.

However, on 7<sup>th</sup> May the Yorkshire area executive of the NUM refused to make the strike official

and urged that everyone return to work, and ordered the withdrawal of flying pickets. Though South Kirby and Ferrymoor Ridding's strikers stayed out for another day, there wasn't the confidence to defy the union and continue the strike until victory.

It's no good relying on support from the Trades Union structure. They're now part of the whole system of exploitation. We must expect that they will try and stop struggles, or contain them. From the start, struggles much be controlled directly by those involved. Union official should be treated with the same contempt as management or any other boss." DD reacted furiously against Counter-Information for this article, attacking especially the idea that the NUM was somehow separate from the miners themselves, a theme he has constantly reiterated for the past 20 years or more. One assumes his ability to intimidate many anarchists into inarticulate silence is not just due to the hangover of an anarcho-syndicalist ideology amongst anarchos but also due to his ability to mouth an aggressive rhetorical working class *style* which, like dust in the eyes, stops people looking the facts in the face. The following extracts from a letter written by a South Kirby miner published in **Wildcat**, June/July '85 shows, as if it needed to be illustrated yet again, that indeed the NUM was not simply a reflection of the miners:

**"The strike started at South Kirkby colliery where the night shift walked out in support of 2 lads that were sacked that morning. What was inspiring...was that it was totally spontaneous...We stood up for the first time since we crawled back...We organised the picket of the day shift against the wishes of the branch officials, with great success; the scabs didn't cross our picket line. We have 26 at S.Kirkby and only 1 of them scabbed this time. Even the scab who was allegedly intimidated by the 2 lads who were sacked didn't cross. This amazing achievement can only be put down to the spontaneity in which it began. Ignoring bad advice from the officials and going for the throat while anger is rife and siezing support. An emergency branch meeting was called by the officials which only reaffirmed strike action making it official. From here on in it was doomed. The officials had no zest for the insurrection that had taken place. We were told after voting unanimously to strike -**

a) There would be no pickets sent out until the next executive meeting took place. This was to make our official strike "OFFICIAL".

b) Any pickets that were dispatched would need an officially stamped letter signed by the secretary.

c) Any picketting that may take place will be by "INVITATION ONLY" meaning that any pit would have had to have a meeting stating that they wanted pickets and would respect our line. ...

We argued our right to seek support immediately and deploy pickets but were beaten by the bureaucrats. We stayed grounded for the rest of the week . You may be asking why we did not continue in the manner that we had been so successful at before. And the answer is simply this

-

a) our official strike was not officially "OFFICIAL".

b) That without our officially stamped letter stating that we were official we were not official pickets.

c) We had to be officially invited (HA!).

**Without the letter from the secretary we were rendered harmless, and wide open for the “troops in blue” to seize our liberty. We were not able to go out picketing until after our next branch meeting. Where after a very lukewarm speech by our president we were made to vote again on whether to strike...This was Sunday (5 May) following Monday's magnificent walkout. We reaffirmed strike action - 290 to strike, 150 against. We were then told our officials had been to 6 branches and got official invitations for pickets. They stressed only these 6 branches would be picketed and only 6 letters would be endorsed. There was a sizeable rush to sign up for picketing and get off the subs bench. Letters would be given out on Bank Holiday Monday at our HQ after teams of 6 had been targetted for each shift. When we arrived for our letters we were told we didn't need them and that we should go only where we were sent. We did, and we had success in picketing out our targets. Whilst we were out picketing we tuned to the car radio for news of disruption at the other pits.**

To our utter amazement three branches that had pledged support had not been mentioned. After picketing out our target we returned to HQ to see what had gone wrong. I asked our secretary why the pits had not been affected. He told me that they had not been picketed. I asked why and he said, “I do not apologise for the lack of organisation. We have achieved what was necessary - the NCB knows we are here”

I told him it was a fucking utter crime to slap support in the face in this manner. That was deliberate sabotage right from the word “official”!...

That night Tuesday, as we made ready to go and picket out our target's night shift, a news flash (5.45) informed us that the strike had been called off. The executive had put paid to our hopes of fighting for our sacked miners all over this country. All our mates in jail. And all our futures.”

But the defeat of these miners was not as definitive as this guy felt at the time, although in terms of resistance at work, it may well have been a virtually definitive defeat for that period at least. However, few months later, on the 24<sup>th</sup> October '85, over 60 youths attacked cops in Mill Lane, South Kirkby. Mr. Clarke, S. Kirby NUM secretary played the usual role of soft cop, as to be expected from any official. *“I succeeded in getting the lads off the street and asked the police to keep a low profile...For some reason, police are out in large numbers and if we are going to get back to normal, this is not the method. I do not condone violence at any time...there could be a riot and some innocent people could get hurt...I want trouble on the streets to stop. I don't want to see an us and them' situation...”* he said revealingly. In the next couple of months, S. Kirby became a no-go area for the cops, with any cop vehicles travelling around getting stoned and

being forced to retreat.

This was part of the post-strike atmosphere at the time - for example, 13<sup>th</sup> July '85 cops were attacked by a large crowd at a fairground in the mining village of Knottingley, Yorkshire. And on 27<sup>th</sup> July '85 over 200 people battled with cops in Wombwell, S.Yorks, after an attempted arrest following the bricking of a police car. And on 4<sup>th</sup> November '85 crowds of teenagers rampaged through the streets of the Yorkshire pit village of Askern, near Doncaster, laying siege to the police station and hurling stones, milk bottles and fireworks, breaking many cop shop windows.

The autumn of 1985 saw the renewal of a whole range of riots throughout Britain, most notably in Handsworth (Birmingham), Brixton (S.London) and Tottenham. These were not as friendly as the riots of '81 in part because of the sense of despair following the defeated miners - they included a couple of rapes and other anti-social acts, but they expressed also a sense of rising community far more so than in recent riots, which have often had racist, and even psychotic, aspects.

The class struggle in the 80s continued with a degree of autonomy in the form of riots, strikes, prison riots etc. such that the defeat of the miners was not seen as especially important, as a defining moment which, up till now at least, was the moment that the balance of class forces tipped significantly towards the ruling class. It was more during the Major years, when the pits were decimated, and the advent of Blair that retrospectively the miners strike could be seen this way. The apparent enormity of the Poll Tax movement, for example, made it seem that it was possible for people to get together and seriously subvert the State on as profound a scale as any previous social movement- after all, it had played a significant part in getting rid of Thatcher. But what was ignored was how incredibly easy it was to refuse to pay your poll tax. It didn't really involve much of a struggle at all (the riots, outside the town halls and in the West End of London, were something else) - it just involved you giving a false name or fiddling in some way. What was not noticed was that, despite this apparent ease of not paying, amongst miners who had been very militant and subversive up to and beyond the Great Strike, the fight had often gone out of them: many of the best paid their poll tax, fearful of the consequences of not paying.

When the pit closure programme was announced by Heseltine in autumn 1992 there were spontaneous walk-outs in virtually all the coalfields, and a few sympathy strikes by other workers (e.g. a wildcat by some nuclear power workers) and a big mid-week demonstration, brought together at very short notice, which sadly had none of the rage of the Poll Tax demos of two years previously (there had been three Major events in the intervening years: Thatcher, sacked partly over Poll Tax, had been replaced by Major; there'd been the brutal manipulation of the masses by the mass murder of the Gulf War; and the Tories had won - against all expectations - their fourth electoral victory in a row) . The decimation of the pits was opposed' by a majority of the media (this time playing the friend all the better to hammer them with silence later) and even many Tories - including Winston Churchill, the grandson of the bastard who shot down Welsh miners before the First World War. But the pits were closed not with a

bang but a whimper: each individual pit was subject to a review procedure, there was a media blackout and each pit was closed one by one in isolation. The film *Brass Tacks* illustrates this defeat: oh how the culture industry love tragedies - a real victory of proletarians in struggle would be beyond them, partly because it would have to take on the culture industry. And of course, the content of the film reveals the circular tautological nature of culture: in the form of a musically exquisite brass band, culture is seen as the consolation for, the one redeeming result of, tragic defeat (with a very different - partly feminist, partly gay liberationist - content, there's a similar underlying thread in the film *Billy Elliott*, most of which takes place during the miners strike; and also one could mention *The Full Monty*, with its backdrop of the decimation of the steel industry, in this vein - the culture in this instance involving humiliating yourself as a male stripper).

The atmosphere over last fifteen years since Poll Tax has been one of progressive defeat. For example, the Liverpool dockers, despite, for example, the innovation of their connecting with Reclaim the Streets, were predictably defeated under Major and Blair - the chickens of the limitations of their insufficiently independent actions during the miners strike having come home to roost. And since then we've had the fuel protests and the kids movement during the Iraqi war, none of which got out of their marginality, despite the excellence of much of their spirit and initiative. There has been no geographical proliferation or extension over time of any of the struggles that have taken place since Poll Tax, and there's a suffocating stench of utter submission involving, amongst other things, taking it out on those closest to you rather than the development of a struggle to confront our *real* enemies.

## **Chapter 20:**

### **Now & The Future**

...Atmosphere in pit villages...media images of strike...

...gang psychosis of daily life...suicide...comparisons with France...

*"And then 20 years later gazing at all the things around me just seemed to redouble my anguish and crying. Such great hopes and 20 years later still experiencing everywhere the desolation of what the state did to us. All around the scars of defeat: the near elimination of the mining community and here I was driving through a landscape - my landscape - where no pit winding gear was anywhere to be seen, except as a half wheel, sculpture-like marker, on the cross roads through Kiveton Park or a few buildings left, like the clockhouse or the pit head baths, because English Heritage had deemed*

them significant architectural monuments and far more important than discarded miners. Alas, our small community pit villages had become opened up, not to friends, but to new Barrett type estates appearing everywhere, unveiled as "executive suites" where strangers, mostly middle income personnel from all the UK, with no feel for our area's past history moved in. These new dormitory estates and towns redefined the area . The point is: once I knew everybody I passed on the way to the local shop, their family history, their parents, grand parents and relatives, now - almost it seemed overnight - you no longer know a lot of the people you pass in the street and it's getting to the point you feel a total alien on your own stomping ground. And then to cap it all now the whole of the ...pit site is in the process of redevelopment and the amazing wildlife that flourished on the spoil heaps and which we all delighted in, has been engulfed by an umbrella group under the dubious name of Yorkshire Forward. Grimly turning my head away I cannot look at the small army of dumper trucks smoothing everything out for some Design and Build business park. Sure, Yorkshire Forward proclaim their bogus ecological sensitivity when all they are doing is sending nature backwards!...

As I thought of the human consequences of this brutal defeat for all of us who had the temerity to take on the state and very nearly win, it was obvious the end result of the strike would be a far more total devastation. And what an aftermath: I personally know of many families that fell apart and disintegrated. And then all the agonies, the alcoholism, heroin, anti-depressants, the many suicides, and the increasing illness both psychological and physical - often at one and the same time - this defeat entailed. Reviving memories of post strike hardship as money dried up as jobs became scarcer, I thought of a family I knew who only a week previously in late February 2004 had finally managed to pay off the debts incurred during the year long uprising. I also knew their particular case was no exception. I thought of the countless, untold sufferings that rained down on the vast majority of miners, fine people who fighting for their community also spoke for others, reaching out to those who wanted the same, faced with the horrible world now beginning to take shape, a world of isolation, loss and pathological behaviour then making its debut on the world stage....Here am I daily confronting wrecked lives and an often suicidal unhappiness and yet called a misery guts because I am unable to believe in a media/designer mythology of progress and nicey, nicey, lives I am now supposedly sufficiently programmed to want and proclaim. Here I am full of a dark disposition and forebodings yet also full of a yearning for a real joyous, passionate



life!"

- Jenny

's

Tale

(<http://www.revoltagainstplenty.com/index.php/archive-local/116-the-miners-jenny-tells-her-tale.html>

)

### Media images 20 years after: mining the history of a Strike

The last two years have seen several TV dramas dealing with the Miners Strike. Twenty years after its existence, the media now feels able to play a more impartial role, giving a fairer, more truthful and sympathetic view of the strike, the real political motives behind it and the dirty tricks used to win it. The media was inevitably a blatantly biased tool of the State throughout the strike, but, as there is so little struggle of a similar nature at present, the ruling class and its media now feel it sufficiently quiet on the social and industrial front to deal with this decisive struggle more truthfully. Such truthfulness doesn't, however, extend to showing the lies and manipulations of the media in helping defeat the miners. As an essential part of this omission, no significant informative lessons or reflections of a useful practical nature are taken from the defeat and applied in the present. Well, what else can be expected of the media?

The presentation is obviously a shallow one - little more than historical nostalgia. The miners' story is portrayed almost as an anthropology lesson; the sad (but perhaps necessary in the course of evolution) story of the destruction of a tribe or species (or were they more self-destructive, like lemmings?). As dead as the dodo. The event is ripe for scriptwriters' milking of its human drama; the passion of the mining community's commitment and solidarity, the tragedy of defeat, but the retaining of dignity and defiance etc. Even when presented in a semi-soap opera form, one can still be moved and angered by the reminder of these qualities twenty miserable years on, when the significance of the defeat is clear in the consequences we suffer today. The wider class struggle never recovered from the miners defeat and declined from then on - the level of strikes has only in recent years revived a little and riots of any significance or quality are rare.

This decline and the lessons to be learned for the present are not even the questions being asked by these productions. But perhaps this recognition is, even in its tepid media form, an attempt, consciously or not, to note the significance of an event that asked the most fundamental questions of how this society would function, how the wealth created would be divided. Even a reformist' victory for the miners would have been a serious defeat for the whole Thatcherite restructuring project. The rest of Europe, having avoided such a decisive class conflict, is only now catching up in an accelerating way with the UK. Major changes to industrial relations, job security and conditions, big cuts in the benefit system with a more disciplinarian approach to unemployment, cruder stratification of education factories, etc.

For some it is seen as a sign of the weakness of the class struggle in the UK that there was little

visible practical commemoration of the anniversary of the Strike apart from, maybe, the blowing up of a police van with a huge firework in Goldthorpe, near Barnsley, the former Yorkshire pit village on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2004. Certainly, the defeat it ushered in is still being lived and, certainly, only a social movement of a similar scale could begin to avenge that defeat. But anniversaries are fairly artificial events. The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the strike, so close to the brutal shut-down of the pits in 1992/3 received virtually no media attention for fear that it might cause trouble - but the 20<sup>th</sup> has been an occasion to churn out loads of programmes and articles because it is safely *past*. However, we shouldn't be too simplistic about anniversaries: we must distinguish between the dominant spectacularisation of anniversaries of uprisings and genuine self organised events of real movements. For example, annual anniversaries of the Paris Commune etc. were, in the 1980s and before, real popular celebrations in Iran and Kurdish areas. Despite their leftist associations, they are probably symptoms of a living culture of struggle in many places - even if not in the, in many ways exceptional, UK. In the 19th century there were many meetings, lectures and demos to commemorate anniversaries of past struggles - this was part of the culture of the international workers movement.

Historically the most significant anniversary' of a mass social movement was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Paris Commune which was celebrated' by an even more significant uprising in Kronstadt against the Bolsheviks - but this uprising had nothing to do with evoking the memory of the Paris Commune - it was just a coincidence. But then, is your birthday a moment where you decide to renew your struggle against alienation? This society evokes anniversaries in a seemingly arbitrary fashion: the 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II weren't celebrated at all by the media or by the military - but the 40<sup>th</sup> - just after the miners strike - became such a useful method of evoking an ideology of progress from the savage ravages of fascism, and of repressing class antagonism, that the 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> have also been celebrated. But real communities of real struggle rarely have much to do with anniversaries, though occasionally anniversaries have been an excuse for them.

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### The fascism of everyday life

One thing that stops people even thinking of beginning again is the extent to which daily life is overwhelmed by crazy behaviour on an unprecedented scale, a result of the implosion following the repression of the explosions against this society. The most obvious symptom of this is what might be called the "fascism of everyday life", which is very far from classical fascism.

For example, nowadays there are an increasingly significant number of 15 year olds (mainly male) whose idea of rebellion is to scare the shit out of their elders by playing around with handguns or other ways of being psychotic. There have always been psychos in the working class, but in situations of some margin of independent community psychosis was more tamed, and often evaporated pretty quick in times of mass struggle. Known paedophiles (though not those in the family circle) would get a thumping and that would be the end of it: none of these

crazy murders of kids to cover up their sick sexuality' or these crazy vigilante groups attacking some crazy guy who just touched a kid (when often worse abuses of kids are quite legal). Highly tense blokes, over-jumpy explosive minefields of stress, would direct their aggression towards the right enemy - the cops etc.- in situations of class conflict, their generous human side also bursting through to those on their side. But nowadays madness manifests itself in switches from power-mad notions of individualist dignity to a vicious identification with a gang, a nation, a family, an ethnic grouping or whatever.

There have always been gangs, scenes, cliques, milieus, Organisations, but in the past, in the 60s, 70s, 80s, these scenes had a far greater openness and fluidity between them. After all, there was a margin of freedom that had been won by 150 years or more of class struggle. In that margin separate from the immediate exigencies of work and money you could at least breathe a bit. You could find some ways to experiment independent of external authority. And you could recognise others because you and they were fighting for yourselves against the forces of external authority. The miners strike, for example, embraced people from all over - it was a crossroad of connections from squatting scenes, blacks, politicians, suspicions having been broken down in the practice of solidarity. But in the last ten years there's been an atmosphere of being mopped up after a rout. The full implications of this rout have only sunk in, like a rock to the bottom of your soul, in the past 5 years or so: the mad world of the commodity is driving everyone mad.

Traditionally the gang leader is whoever impresses their peers with an ability to strike terror indiscriminately, indiscriminate apart from giving "rewards" to the loyal gang members. But nowadays, this hierarchical loyalty, which didn't only assume a crude economic form, but had a harking back to a more moral, feudal, economy, and provided some, admittedly submissive, desire for community, nowadays even this is increasingly temporary. For example, along with an increase in scabbing there has been an increase in people grassing. This is not just due to an increasingly narrow petty malicious vindictiveness. But also to other factors: crack and money-madness destroying everything.

In this epoch individualism manifests itself as a pointless and self-destructive battle of egos. But most young individuals don't see this search for some dream of immediate dignity in putting down others, as *self-destructive*. Having been so pushed into an "everyone for themselves alone" mentality which cannot see that being for yourself also means being for others, a mentality utterly determined by the economy which divides as it rules, the young proletarian has no margin of experiment outside of hierarchical power relations: pushed into being trapped in the family unit (nowadays, the economy has virtually forbidden leaving home at 21, let alone 16, for increasing amounts of proletarians, unlike in the 70s), a cage without a movement that would begin to make sense of the whole thing and which would seem like an exit from these separate cages, it's hardly surprising that young people walk around either in an utterly

depressed, jumpy, touchy, semi-suicidal state wracked with murderous fantasies. The psychotic gang mentality provides them with a false exit from the suicidal feelings and a realisation of the murderous ones. "Where are the parents?", cry the State and the neighbours. Highly stressed by over-work (unprecedented at least since the 1920s), arguments, stuck in soothing seductive consumption suitable for all tastes, stuck in the all-pervasive fog of indifference, no time for the kids and no community to share the burden of looking after them. Not the same as it was in the 30s - because then there was some street life. Even with the domination of the streets by cars which developed in the 60s, 70s and 80s, there was working class street life, especially with the mass unemployment of the 80s. But now everyone is indoors, with virtual space provided by computers and TV. The invasion of our lives by a very sinister spectacle of contempt for everything and everyone nurtures the fascistic individualist authoritarian mentality so so far from classical fascism. It's a fascism without unity - everyone their own Hitler. This is the real victory of Thatcherism: a daily life in which the false choices of ignorant liberalism not understanding why people resort to Asbos and reactionary slap-an-Asbo-on-anything-that-moves mentality dominate the argument in such a way as to make things constantly worse, to reinforce the very madness that stops people organising against crackheads as well as the State.

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### Suicide is painless

Not surprisingly, there's mass depression, a semi-suicidal gripping onto the edge of life that is driving millions, probably billions, to bad restless nights and tired tiring days. Everywhere people feel defeated - often at the simplest level (in their friendships, for example). Admitting defeat is not necessarily the same as resignation. Admitting defeat is not necessarily the same as accepting defeat as an inevitability. Accepting defeat doesn't help: in fact, it can only help intensify suicidal and/or psychotically murderous feelings. Admitting defeat, however, should mean a recognition of what has happened, a recognition of reality which is a necessary basis for any consideration of a future attack on this brutal money terrorist reality.

We waver between the semi-suicidal exhaustion that defeat brings and the dream of some future total revolt. Hasn't it always been the case for the survivors (the vast majority)? - after Spartacus, after the Paris Commune, after Kronstadt.? Probably not, for the most part, in the case of the Commune and Spartacus: the will to self-destruction is borne not just out of the impotence but out of a profound sense of *isolation* following defeat, a sense arising not merely from the feeling that destroying hierarchical power is an impossibility but above all from the lack of a communal consciousness that alienation is social (the rise of Stalin, however, was accompanied by a big increase in suicides, particularly amongst those who had placed their faith in the Bolsheviks).

Why be so morbid? Surely one cannot hope to inspire revolt if one talks about these desperate

feelings. And yet not acknowledging them, and trying to uncover their material bases in the all-pervasive alienation of the Economy and its images makes people even more isolated in these feelings. These feelings are everywhere not admitted in the rulers' overwhelming show of the possibility of happiness *exclusively* within the production and consumption of *this* society; these feelings are everywhere considered to be solely *your* fault, an aberration.

In the mid-1960s a revolutionary of that time said, "*The will to live is a political decision*". We can see now that the project of destroying political social relations, the only political decision ever worth making, was effectively defeated - at least in the immediate epoch - in the mid-to-late 80s. Which is why the victory of political decisions over the will to live has never been so great - just look at the whole post-9/11 world. The intensification of political-economic power and of hierarchy at every level of life (in your relationships also, dear reader), in every part of the world has reduced the will to live to the will to survival. And mere survival makes death seem like a release, the freedom ' of nothingness, the end to pain. In the end, the will to mere survival makes suicide seem a possibility.

Nowadays the etiquette is not to admit defeat and to sneer at those who readily admit to being defeated (for the moment). Isn't this a bit like the way Christianity, after Spartacus, turned the crucifix, and the reality of defeat, into a *symbol* of defiance, but not the *reality*. The American comedian Lenny Bruce said that if Christ had existed today, everyone would be walking around with little electric chairs round their neck. Nowadays almost everyone hides their defeat beneath an ideology of defiance every bit as perverse as wearing an electric chair round your neck. This basic self-pride undoubtedly expresses a real desire to subvert daily life in some way but unless people recognise how far defeated they are, and the history of this defeat, this real desire can only be symbolic, as symbolic as an electric chair round your neck. Or an @narchist T-shirt.

What are we getting at here? It's no use pretending we're taking charge of even a little bit of our lives, or at least of the struggle to transform our lives, if all we're doing is hiding from ourselves how much we have been forced to repress and how much insanity we are having to put up with. This goes as much for those who consider themselves revolutionary as for anyone else. The inability to attack *the present*, the only time revolt and revolutions are ever made, makes some people, whose significance is mainly in their heads, adopt a timeless theory borrowed from the specialists of the past which they hope one day the working class will realise the eternal truth of. But all the clichés about creating a global human community beyond the economy etc. can't hide an essential retreat into an almost transcendental abstraction as cosily safe, and as dogmatic, as hope in its religious forms. To really re-discover the revolutionary energy of the past one must first *despair* of this world. One must face the enormity of the results of defeat and the history of why past struggles were defeated. The path to the end of alienation follows the straight and narrow path of alienation itself.

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## A Tale Of Two Countries

So what now? The UK seems like a hopeless case and many are looking for some social salvation from movements in other parts of the world - frighteningly though, it's other parts of the world which look like they're in the process of becoming as much a hopeless case as the UK. In France, for instance, the rush to Thatcherite/Blairite social policies is assumed to be something which will be contested satisfactorily, that the French spirit of revolt, having lasted over 200 years, can never be extinguished. But what this displays is not only a kind of French nationalism in a radical guise, but also an ignorance of the history of the UK, a country many French radicals assume was always pretty acquiescent, when in fact 200 years of history have been wiped out, or are in the process of being wiped out, on an unprecedented scale and to such an extent that nobody knows how to begin again.

France has one advantage over the UK in terms of comparing consciousness between the two countries when being confronted with a brutal enemy. Trade Unionism as an ideology amongst the working class is far weaker there than it is in the UK . Sadly, though, there are an increasing amount of young people who seem to have illusions in the younger Trade Unions with a more radical history, such as *Sud*, which was involved in the co-ordinations, and even in the more modernised versions of the old unions, the CGT and the CFDT, which have also been involved in co-ordinations.

This was less so in 1986-7. In "*France Goes Off The Rails*"(1987) me and some other people wrote - in relation to a strike wave on the railways initiated by a train driver distributing a petition committing workers to a strike if their demands weren't met:

*"On a more general level, there are, of course, many differences between the movement in the U.K. and that in France. One of the main reasons French railway workers could write and talk so well about what they were doing was because they were making a breakthrough the likes of which hasn't been seen in the U.K. Put simply - they no longer gave a fuck about the union and weren't worried about being frank about it. The ideology of trade unionism is much stronger in the U.K. than in France. Now only about 1 in 6 French workers are unionised, but in the U.K., it's still the overwhelming majority (although it's declining numerically) and, indeed, it tends to be the more rebellious proletarians who see Trade Unions as some support for their struggles - though this too is changing. But although there is an elemental movement in the U.K. - one that is almost without a name, and hardly even considers itself as a movement at*

*all, but which appears in brilliant flashes like some Northern Aurora - it also, in off periods, falls uneasily back into the semblance of a tradition. Thus, in response to the stark facts that non-unionists in the French railway workers strike played a big part, the response of an independantly-minded U.K. worker, glad to see it happening across the Channel, was glibly, "How can they strike if they're not in the union?" . An opened mouth, jaw-dropping reply quickly changed the initial reflex comment into a ready acceptance that non-unionists were able to initiate strike action as much as those in a union. Nevertheless, this incident does point to a major obstacle in the U.K. now: how to clearly break from the trade union form of struggle and not just endlessly criticise it in fascinating detail, ringing the changes on changing the union! From changing the personnel at the top ( election of leftist bureaucrats, etc.) to changing the rule book or the union structure to trying to make the officials be paid no more than the average wage of those they represent to more control by delegate conferences or particular mandated committees and so on and so on. In fact it's been the unions - and trade unionist ideology in the practice of the working class - that have kept Thatcher in power. For example, NUPE playing off COHSE and vice versa in the health workers' strike. Or ASLEF telling its ' members to cross NUR picket lines, and vice versa, in the '82 post-Falklands rail strikes. The miners strike is more complicated - but, without going deeper into details, it's clear that trade unionism was a vital limitation & weakness of that remarkable explosive struggle. Undoubtedly, in the heat of practice, the union baggage is often pushed aside and ignored, but only to be slipped in sideways when it seems pragmatic to do so. Thus, even in wildcat actions, the smokescreen of unionism ("This strike is official" when it very much isn't, etc.) keeps making an appearance and it squeezes perception of struggle (which matters, too) into an outmoded shell which stops others connecting and catching on. Oh for the day when employed proles in the U.K. will be as forthright as the French railway workers in the long and difficult task of emancipating themselves from the trade union form."*

This is *still* one of the essential problems facing working class struggle in the UK today.

20:

The miners strike of 1972 managed to get 40,000 strikers picketing for every day of the 6 week strike. In part it was because this strike almost completely ignored the NUM leadership, whereas the Left that had won its spurs during the '72 strike was now in power and did everything it could to keep control, which meant, amongst other things, completely ignoring the passive majority of strikers. Sure, we don't complain that they didn't act like good leaders - it should have been up to the more active miners and their supporters to get these passive

spectators of the strike off their couches stuck in front of the telly - but it is a significant difference which can't simply be explained by the enormity of arrests on the picket lines compared with 72. Wildcat Jan/Feb 1985 quotes an interesting passage in Socialist Worker, 15th September 84: *"In our pit, we pulled a few of the lads who'd been arrested together. I managed to pull 3 lads round me and we started to go round knocking on doors and had some success with getting people out. Then we put a resolution to the branch. It said that we should get a list of everyone's name and address who has been arrested and can't go out picketing and form them into recruiting teams. We should also get a list of everyone who's been passive and decorating or doing the gardening, and then the recruiting teams could visit them. Unfortunately, this was not passed by a branch committee - you have to put a resolution through the branch committee and this had got knocked back - but it still had to go through the correspondence. So the week before it was due to come up we went round the soup kitchen asking lads to come to the meeting. We got !% ) to the branch meeting where we usually get 35. The branch president refused to admit the correspondence so I got up and asked what had happened to it. He said he didn't know anything about a letter and threatened to put me through a window. But the lads who had come along to the meeting spoke up for me, so the branch president asked them if they wanted to hear the letter. Much to his surprise they all shouted yes. It just showed what an advantage we have got over the officials. We work with the rank and file day in and day out, while our branch president is up there at the area office in Barnsley and is so out of touch it's unbelievable. So I explained the case, how we must step up picketing if we are to win the strike and moved a resolution condemning the branch committee for not supporting such a necessary step. I got a big cheer for this, but they had a fall-back and ruled it out of order. I think that shows you we've got to know the rule book and how we've got to intervene."* Wildcat rightly added: "What is actually shown is that militant workers need to tear up the union rule book. Instead of waiting weeks for proposed actions to be passed through union branches, these miners should have organised the recruiting teams themselves and ignored whatever the NUM tried to do to stop them." Although no-one likes to be told what they should have done, how else do you learn from the past - doesn't progress always come down to doing what you didn't do in the past.

21:

As we say elsewhere on this site, in our text [Now is the Winter Of Our Discontent](#), the history of the seventies "shows many of the historical reasons why Trade Unionism is so embedded in what remains of the rebellious sections of the British working class. In fact, the very success of the strike wave [of the winter of discontent '78-'79], and of the whole decade of discontent before it, a success which never broke with Trade Unionist ideology (even though it very often subverted the capitalist function of Trade Unions as a tool for integrating workers into the structures of exploitation) is one of the most important reasons for the subsequent failure of the struggles of the employed working class in the Thatcher epoch. What, at that time, was a



sufficient - if limited - framework for workers to express themselves autonomously, rapidly became an obstacle to autonomy.”

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In July 1984 I sent DD the text he wrote which we've published here in Chapter 4 - saying “This was written by someone you once knew.” A provocation like that incited his hatred of anything connected with situationists'. I met' Ian Bone in a pub after a miners strike meeting during July and he said DD had sent a 13 page reply to my “Miners Conflicts...” text. I never got this letter, and I said so to Bone, adding “Maybe it's been taken by Special Branch”. He turned to his mates and said, “That's what everybody says when they don't want to reply to something.” But if his text on “Miner Conflicts...” 8 years after it was written is anything to go by, the letter was full of deceitful out-of-context quoting. In Pit Sense versus the State he virtually says I supported scabs!! -, which is part of the typical bullshit politicking which this guy needs to do to defend his deeply entrenched petrified role. The deliberate dishonesty of the creep. See footnotes to Miner Conflicts for comments on his comments. Anyway, I'm just mentioning all this petty stuff as a tedious way of “declaring an interest”. It's up to you to decide if this has clouded my judgement or led to me over-emphasising the guy. But it's clear that DD received an the inordinate respect during the strike from the national anarchist milieu in the UK - probably because of their common taste for demagogic rhetoric - which made a small but significant contribution for the failure to confront the NUM which was part of the failure of the strike. It should be pointed out that more local anarchist groups, such as Sheffield Anarchist, which were well aware of how the NUM acted, were generally far more critical of the union, as were many individual miners.

## FOOTNOTES

### [v1a](#):

Before him, the leader was Frank Hodges, who became Lord of the Admiralty in the first Labour government of 1924, a career path to the ruling class followed by many a Trade Union leader since then.

### [v1b](#):

As against those sad long-term members of the Labour Party bemoaning the fact that their precious socialist Party has been hijacked by Thatcherites, it's clear that, even in its infancy, the Labour Party was always a capitalist party. Admittedly it was a capitalist party concerned, at least until the late 1940s, with reforms ameliorating the condition of the working class, but only in order to tame its moments of revolutionary fury, and to extend hierarchical social control.

### [v2a](#).

Interestingly, Peregrine Worsthorne, a disgusting right-wing journalist who often called himself 'class conscious' - but on the side of the ruling class, said after the defeat of the miners in 1985,

"If the coal mines had still been in private hands, Arthur Scargill might not now be facing defeat. As it is, his opponent has been the State rather than capital, the national interest rather than a "selfish" sectional interest. In theory, nationalisation was always bound to strengthen the side of management against labour, since a strike against a concern owned by all the people was plainly much less easy to excuse...than one against a concern owned by a few "rich" shareholders." Coming out of the mouth of a right-wing ideologue, this does show the holes in that aspect of socialism which argues that the nation State is above sectional interest, that nationalisation equals the general interest. This despite the fact that he probably wrote it just to wind up those Leftists who had supposedly supported the strike, turning their own arguments against them, showing up their contradictions in terms of their own ideology. Of course, in its own terms, Worsthorne's arguments don't stand a second's reflection; for one thing, it's not a question of moral 'excuses', for another the miners won under nationalisation in '72, but lost under privatisation in '26... We're certainly not saying that nationalisation was as bad as privatisation - mainly because it brought in better safety conditions. But then in the Keynesian political atmosphere of post WWII Britain, safety conditions tended to be slowly improved even in private industries, whereas in the neo-liberal cut-throat competitive atmosphere today, even in the relatively few nationalised industries that exist worldwide safety conditions are worsening.

2b

The Communist Party, since the 30s, had an influence in the miners, dockers and seamen's unions quite out of proportion to their national membership

3.

The contradiction between industrial and finance capital is far too often seen as the fundamental conflict. This support for industrial capital - and for some aspects of a peasant economy as well , defined within the present organisation of production - is the dominant ideology of the anti-globalisation movements. This conflict was the basis of socialism's ability to co-opt past revolutionary movements. It was the main idea behind the movie Wall Street. In rightly attacking finance capital as money producing money, as fictitious capital (though even finance capital needs some productive base), it tends to assert the notion that industrial capital, or at least capital that produces things, including cultural commodities like the film Wall Street, is rational, and isn't even 'capital' at all. It even tends to support some idea of the Nation as against globalised finance. Such 'rationality' ignores history: National Socialism also based its ideology on this idea. The Jews were represented as the epitome of finance capital, even though the vast majority had nothing in common with the Rothschilds of this world. Hence the Jews had to be physically exterminated in order to believe that they were concretely eradicating what the Jews were made to represent - the irrationality of finance capital. Whilst the vast majority of those in the anti-globalisation movement have nothing in common with Nazism, most of them share, in their simplistic reductionism and opportunism, this in common with Nazi demagoguery: they both refuse to oppose commodity and hierarchical relations as such, conveniently reducing the enemy to a particular aspect of capital exclusively. And it wouldn't be surprising if, long term, quite a few anti-globalisation militants were to be so blinded by their hatred of specifically US capital as to support wars against this current dominant multinational power - some even by China.

4:

Samotnaf note: We've published this as it was written. The Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, which John refers to, was signed at the end of August 1939, just before the invasion of Poland, which

the pact was intended to allow. Since we don't know the year John's dad left the C.P., we've kept the date as in the original text.

5:

In Place of Strife was an attempt by the Labour government to suppress wildcat strikes, which accounted for almost 90% of all strikes during this epoch. It was published as a White Paper by the Minister of Employment and Productivity, Barbara Castle, ex-heroine of the Left. It proposed the imposition of a 28 day conciliation pause in the event of 'unconstitutional' strikes - basically, wildcats. If the strike went ahead then financial penalties could be imposed by an Industrial Board on the unions or on the individual striker, to be collected by 'attachment of earnings' orders. Secret ballots could also be ordered by the secretary of state where a major official strike was threatened. After a couple of unofficial one-day strikes, with possibly as many as 200,000 coming out on the second one on May 1st 1969, the Unions were scared of creating too much conflict between them and their members and so pressurised the Wilson government to back down, and In Place of Strife was dropped on 18th June 1969, when the TUC entered into a 'Solemn and Binding Undertaking' to try to control strikes. It was this failure to control the working class that cost Labour the election exactly a year later. Barbara Castle, the architect of In Place of Strife had been born in 1912 in Yorkshire, her father being an Independent Labour Party member who never tired of criticising the conciliatory attitude of the Labour Party towards the bosses. As a child, she listened to the talk of the corruption of the bosses in the manner of English puritans chastising evil. As a young girl she had gravitated towards the left of the traditional workers movement, and this made her well-prepared for playing the ordinary worker all the better to crush real 'ordinary' workers, a bit like Prescott today.

6:

One particularly embarrassing TV moment about 6 years ago was him on some crass reality TV type show, where he goes to live with some toff for a week armed with a bunch of various editions of Class War and performs martial arts to the camera whilst ending up admitting that he quite liked the old super-rich pratt - he was a "nice guy". Now almost everyone looks silly on telly, which is why you should avoid it like the plague, but this should have won an Oscar for Silliness.

7:

A mostly excellent text available in English on the internet at the [revolt against an age of plenty site](#) or in French as part of a book from Insomniaque ("Un peu de l'âme des mineurs du Yorkshire": 63, rue de Saint-Mandé, 93100 Montreuil). It is clear that this text was not exclusively written by Jenny but by someone else as well, even though both English and French versions say that the text was written by her alone. (2013 note: recently, the joint authorship of this text has been acknowledged on this site)

8:

Amongst this aloof lot, we can find a so-called autonomist marxist mag Radical Chins anxious to win a place for itself amongst the ultra-left of academia. In an article devoted to praising Class War (the paper) for its humour and criticising it for its lack of 'theory', the author shows us what he means by 'theory' by dismissing, in virtually one sentence, one of the most important proletarian assaults on class society in the past 25 years - the miners strike. I don't have the

quote in front of me but it says it was almost inevitable that it would be lost because the Tories carefully prepared the battle beforehand, with its massive coal stocks etc. But, it adds, "even if they had won - so what? It would merely have affirmed the power of nationalist social democracy" (rough quote). Doubtless, after the Paris Commune, we would have heard such arrogant ignorance in the form of "even if they had won - so what? It would merely have affirmed the power of French nationalism" or after the Hungarian uprising, "even if they had won so what? It would merely have affirmed the power of Hungarian nationalism". For intellectual spectators of revolt, who somehow think movements are only as good as their apparent ideology, rubbishing such movements becomes a substitute pretension for a critique of their contradictions and limitations. It's also a symptom of a certain type of 'revolutionary' intellectual who fears participating in situations where their insights and apparently radical sentiments would be judged according to their practical-historical consequences, the best possible attack on the normal spectator. It is also a particular example of the general pretension of all intellectuals: they think they are different from the ordinary spectator because they can't bear to simply stand and watch the world with their hands in their pockets - they just have to write something down.

19:

David Jones' death was particularly taken up by the WRP and its newspaper Newline, which opportunisticly used his death to publicise their particularly hack organisation and its crass vanguardism ("TUC - get off your knees" or "Get the TUC to call a General Strike!"). Nevertheless, despite some ridiculous Leftisms (e.g. "the miners have got to win to save the TUC and to save trade unions in this country..."), and despite the fact that it's used to advertise the WRP, the slim volume by David Jones' dad published by them is very moving in a straight-forward sort of way. Moreover, it shows up the political manoueverings around his death. Despite the pathologist saying he'd died from an injury over the hour before his death (he died at 11 past midnight) the cops insisted on looking only at what had happened during the hour *before* he'd been hit by the brick (which had occurred at 11.30 p.m.), quite clearly to avoid looking at the fact that it had been a scab who'd killed him, pretending he'd died from something that had happened before he was hit by a brick. A police enquiry refused to call any witnesses who'd been with David Jones after 11 p.m., despite the pathologist having said the injury that killed him had occurred between 11.11 p.m. and 12.11 a.m. The whole thing stinks of a crude cover-up. Moreover, his funeral, after it had all been arranged, was delayed just 3 days before it was due because the coroner's office refused to release the body, insisting, without giving any reason, on a 2-3 week delay, undoubtedly an additional trauma for the family. This, despite the fact that neither the pathologist, the police nor the NUM solicitor had any objection to his body being released for burial. In the light of the fact that the Notts miners had come out on strike for a day in respect, this delay was very clearly a political decision to repress immediate passions. In 1982 the funeral of an 18 year old in Teddington who'd thrown a couple of molotovs into a

police station during the Falklands War, been arrested and committed suicide after a few weeks in custody (through "lack of care", according to the inquest jury) was the occasion for a riot against the cops. Did the State fear something similar? When one considers how much the ruling world has toyed with trying to punish the still unpunished murders of Stephen Lawrence and yet how little has ever gone into the murder of a young miner who, well before the strike, had said hopefully, "there'll be a revolution!" we see the difference in two epochs. In both cases nothing happens - nobody is punished and the cops continue to be (in the Stephen Lawrence case, racist) bastards. But in the second, the Stephen Lawrence case, the State holds out the hope of future punishment so as to change the law on double jeopardy - it serves a political purpose absent in the David Jones murder, which in this "We're all (supposedly) Thatcherites nowadays" epoch can be confined to a permanent silence.

[\9b](#)

Maybe some of the attitudes expressed in the following sequel to this little story contributed a bit to the defeat (undoubtedly, many will find the following a bit petty and pointless - to most people it will read like some politico squabble dramatised as something more important; a lot of people would say the history of the strike is important - a history of these squabbles isn't). However I've included it here as a footnote because it concretely shows up some of the absurdities of populism and of pacifism):

*"After what happened at Grays Inn Rd., I headed for the South Bank and went into the cafe of the National Film Theatre, where various miners had gathered and started to hand out the mini-leaflets. There I bumped into Ian Bone, who'd started his group "Class War" the previous year. He immediately sneered at the leaflet - "'Striking miners do it with telegraph poles' - that's sexist!", a humourless politically correct comment he presumably said to impress his girlfriend who was with him. A Welsh miner came up and said, in relation to the leaflet, "We don't want no violence - we'll not win that way." Bone immediately, and in complicity with this miner, denounced me to the rest of the cafe - "The guy's a rich bastard." I had no property but I did have £7,000 in savings which I'd inherited, a fair amount of money for someone in their mid-30s and a hell of a lot more than any of my friends at that time; still, this demagogic put-down had no point in it but to try to make himself popular with this miner...My weakness was not to immediately confront Bone with this crappy attitude, but I just scurried away in the face of general opposition from him, the Welsh miner and others, a sad let-down after the uplifting experience of what had happened less than an hour previously. Later that day, Bone was in Parliament Square and chucked something at the cops. An NUM official grabbed him in order to hand him over to the cops, but a cop thought the official was picking a fight for no reason and rushed in to arrest him, dragging him away violently, and Bone got away. A kind of poetic justice, though it would have been nice if the cop too had got his comeuppance. In a sense this shows some of the ridiculous contradictions of Class War and of its leader in particular - at one*

*moment supporting a pacifist miner, because he was so into his role of being popular, then later being a victim of this same pacifism, though, happily, the 'pacifist' NUM official was the final victim of his own ideology. At this stage of the strike there was a lot of opposition to class violence, but as the cops' brutality at Orgreave intensified, and especially as soon as the cops invaded the pit villages a bit later on, this ideology receded - but there were always a fair amount of pretty passive miners who continued to condemn the pickets' violence, though their voices got more and more muted.*

*Obviously all this is, in a sense, far too personal, but then history is always partly made up of personal nuances which effect overall events. All pretension to a history which is not personal inevitably lies. There are always personal reasons for all critique, if only the personal reason to incite some practical confrontation with this world which would be personally satisfying. The claim to objectivity is just a hierarchical role to say "I'm right - I've got the dialectic - I've read the right books", a claim to not being an individual but a carrier of historical necessity. "Nothing personal" is the ideology of business; in the 80s a Chelsea gang beat up, even cut up, opposing fans and left them with a business card saying "Nothing personal..." The 'personal' in this case was my own failure to get angry with these manipulative attitudes when it would've meant something."*

10:

To a certain extent attitudes have changed since the strike towards shops and the petty bourgeoisie. At this time, who could really give a toss about the small shops whose main fear for the defeat of the strike was that there'd be a big increase in shoplifters. With distance we might see them a bit more sympathetically - they seriously didn't want to lose even the good side of community. And historically, the non-employing petit-bourgeoisie has not always been on the side of the ruling class by any means. But at the time - well, the last few pages on the looting of the riots of 1981 - ["Summer Sales"](#)- in ["Miner Conflicts..."](#) is expressive of the disgust for the safe shop keepers at this time. And we were contemptuous of Black Flag criticising people for smashing shops that were giving credit to the miners. But anti-moralism is no answer to moralism. And times change - more and more people are forced into petit-bourgeois work by the system - many ex-miners included. But at the same time, it's inevitable that they became a target for the poor - they always have been and always will until the abolition of poverty and of shops.

10b:

If it seems excessive to talk of Jack Taylor as a Stalinist, it might seem utterly dishonest to talk of DD as one. But it's only stylistically stretching the truth a tiny bit. Taylor agreed with Scargill's support for the Polish State's crackdown on the class struggle in Poland at the end of 1981 in

the name of opposition to Solidarity' and the Catholic Church, as if Solidarity' was in total control of the movement (to name just one example, at a prison riot in Bydgoszcz in Poland, before the crackdown, Communist Party hacks, State Police, and *Solidarity union officials* joined together in defence of the walls of the prison against the townspeople who were helping prisoners escape). In 'Pit Sense versus the State' DD virtually does the same as Taylor and Scargill; though he rightly attacks Solidarity for not blacking the export of coal to Britain, he conveniently fails to mention that it was Jaruzelski's government, which Scargill supported, that was doing the exporting, and attacks me for attacking Scargill's support for the Polish State. In the crackdown on the movement in Poland in 1981 - which was not merely a crackdown on Solidarity but on the whole of the class struggle, 6 miners were killed by the State when they occupied their pit - but we have heard nothing about this from DD - all we have heard is support for Scargill's support for Jaruzelski. Of course, strictly speaking Jaruzelski too was not a Stalinist, since the whole of the East European Stalinist bureaucracy were officially not Stalinist from 1956 onwards, since Stalin had been denounced by Khrushchev. But let's not get over-semantic. DD, whilst still a supporter of the old Class War group, *still* writes for such papers as *The Leninist* or *The Weekly Worker*, the official organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain - and criticised nothing of their politics in either paper. An anarcho-Stalinist chameleon might be a better definition of him.

[\11:](#)

For example, Class War openly declared itself 'opportunistic', re-writing the definition of the word to mean "We use every opportunity to communicate our ideas", which even in its own terms is bullshit.

[\12:](#)

Whilst conspiracy theories are often just a way for some journalist-cum-writer to produce a kind of real-life whodunnit mystery as part of their career, and full of endless facts leading to something that demands even more endless facts to be revealed on a final page not yet written, there is some evidence that the shot that killed Yvonne Fletcher, the cop killed, was not fired from the Libyan embassy at all, but from a window in a building next door... Funnily enough, a recent leader in *The Guardian* on the 20th anniversary of the end of the Great Strike (March 5th 2005) was followed, on the internet, by a list of links to relevant articles on the strike. Top of the list - no.1 - was a link to the report in April 1984 of the killing of Yvonne Fletcher. The report doesn't mention the strike. Was the webmaster trying to tell us something? - was this a subliminal message? Or maybe MI5 want to be thought of as invincible and have connived with the *Guardian* to create this conspiratorial myth. See next week's thrilling episode. Conspiracy revelations are anyway, almost always five years or more too late. Whereas unveiling what's going on now - particularly at work/in your street/neighbourhood/ region/ bedroom may be a dangerous risk, conspiracy theories are almost always very safe...

13:

Scabs sometimes cited the acceptance of money from Libya as a pretext for breaking the strike “Taking money from someone like that was really scraping the bottom of the barrel as far as I'm concerned” (Mel Hunt, Newsweek, November 26, 1984), about as silly as attacking someone starving in the Third World for taking money from the United Nations, because it was responsible for genocide in Iraq. Scabs, like everyone who makes unnecessary compromises with this sick world, will use anything and everything to justify their sickness.

14:

Kinnock must have been a little annoyed by this bit of graffiti because he mentioned it during his speech at the meeting-cum-opening of an Islington Housing Advice Centre, opposite which the graffiti had been painted - “This council are doing something practical, unlike some theory on a wall”. Someone else said that the only “practical” building that Islington Council had done was to build 6 Housing Advice Centres.

15

The first thing Thatcher did when she came to power was to increase the wages of cops. Like Stalin's, her withering away of the State began with its intensification.

16:

By the end of 1984, Geldof was desperate for his pop group career to lift off - “It was coming to the end of 1984 and I could see no prospect for the release of the album In the Long Grass'...I went home in a state of blank resignation and switched on the television”, he wrote in his autobiography Is that it?', adding that, watching the news of the Ethiopian famine, he almost immediately saw the opportunity of the charity-business bringing big publicity. Later he did a major UK tour whose success he openly admits was entirely due to Band Aid and its dire song “Don't they know it's Christmas?”. Having become an honorary knight (charity begins at home, after all) he obviously had nothing but praise for the biggest mob family in the UK - the Windsors, saying how vital it was to uphold the monarchy, one of the essential ways a fundamentally brutal system gives itself an image of harmlessness .

17:

An anarchist journal “Insurrection” had a charmingly original take on the collections - they condemned them as pure charity. “Today even anarchist groups are quite happily busying themselves collecting funds to help the starving workers...If the workers don't eat there will be two positive results: the clash will quickly come to a head, and it will immediately become obvious which side the trade union leaders are on”. Strangely , this delirious idea was not something they applied to themselves - they didn't need the threat of starvation to, apparently, fight the system and understand which side the trade union leaders were on (rumour has it that whilst they had this crap distributed in the UK they themselves were languishing on an Italian beach feeding their cocaine habit). Ideology is, above all, for others. In this case, the ideology comes from the idea that the masses are not individuals capable of determining the conditions



of their existence by conscious choice, but have to be supplied by the enlightened radicals' with an external motivation - in this case, starvation - they can't resist. By "Insurrection" s logic, the starving throughout the world were constantly threatening the class system.

18:

The Armthorpe Tannoy', a local rank and file newsletter for the Hatfield/Armthorpe area, attacked Walker's announcement that there would be no power cuts without mentioning a single thing about Scargill and Heathfield saying the same thing. The submission to the collectivity, in this case the NUM, invariably produces contradictions like this: in this case the ideology is unity' against an external enemy, but such false unity is the real enemy within.

19:

Some, supposedly radical, people thought they were being ever so clever and provocative to say "I'm bored with the miners strike".

20:

The miners strike of 1972 managed to get 40,000 strikers picketing for every day of the 6 week strike. In part it was because this strike almost completely ignored the NUM leadership, whereas the Left that had won its spurs during the '72 strike was now in power and did everything it could to keep control, which meant, amongst other things, completely ignoring the passive majority of strikers. Sure, we don't complain that they didn't act like good leaders - it should have been up to the more active miners and their supporters to get these passive spectators of the strike off their couches stuck in front of the telly - but it is a significant difference which can't simply be explained by the enormity of arrests on the picket lines compared with 72. Wildcat Jan/Feb 1985 quotes an interesting passage in Socialist Worker, 15th September 84: *"In our pit, we pulled a few of the lads who'd been arrested together. I managed to pul 3 lads round me and we started to go round knocking on doors and had some success with hgetting people out. Then we put a resolution to the branch. It said that we should get a list of everyone's name and address who has been arrested and can't go out picketing and form them into recruiting teams. We should also get a list of everyone who's been passive and decorating or doing the gardening, and then the recruiting teams could visit them. Unfortunately, this was not passed by a branch committee - you have to put a resolution through the branch committtee and this had got knocked back - but it still had to go through the correspondance. So the week before it was due to come up we went round the soup kitchen asking lads to come to the meeting. We got !% ) to the branch meeting where we usually get 35. The branch president refused to admit the correspondance so I got up and asked what had happened to it. He siad he didn't know anything about a letter and threatened to put me through a window. But the lads who had come along to the meeting spoke up for me, so the branch president asked them if they wanted to hear the letter. Much to his surprise they all shouted yes. It just showed what an advantage we have got over the officials. We work with the rank and file day in and day out, while our branch president is up there at the area office in Barnsley and is so out of touch it's*

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For those who really want to be bored by my petty pedantic compulsion to reveal all, read on. In July 1984 I sent DD the text he wrote which we've published here in Chapter 4 - saying "This was written by someone you once knew." A provocation like that incited his hatred of anything connected with situationists'. I met' Ian Bone in a pub after a miners strike meeting during July and he said DD had sent a 13 page reply to my "Miners Conflicts..." text. I never got this letter, and I said so to Bone, adding "Maybe it's been taken by Special Branch". He turned to his mates and said, "That's what everybody says when they don't want to reply to something." But if his text on "Miner Conflicts..." 8 years after it was written is anything to go by, the letter was full of deceitful out-of-context quoting. In Pit Sense versus the State he virtually says I supported scabs!! -, which is part of the typical bullshit politicking which this guy needs to do to defend his deeply entrenched petrified role. The deliberate dishonesty of the creep. See footnotes to Miner Conflicts for comments on his comments. Anyway, I'm just mentioning all this petty stuff as a tedious way of "declaring an interest". It's up to you to decide if this has clouded my judgement or led to me over-emphasising the guy. But it's clear that DD received an the inordinate respect during the strike from the national anarchist milieu in the UK - probably because of their common taste for demagogic rhetoric - which made a small but significant contribution for the

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