RED MINER

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AFTER THE ELECTION —

where now for the NUM?



Flying picket from Bentley Colliery at Frickley last year

Debate: Dave Douglass and Red Miner on the party and the unions

workers power

Bulletin for miners and their families

RED MINER

EDITORIAL

WHERE NEXT FOR THE NUM?

The re-election, albeit narrowly, of Arthur Scargill was a victory for all NUM militants. However, any hopes that Arthur's victory could lead quickly to a change in the direction of the NUM leadership were quickly dashed at the February delegate conference. Although talking to the UDM scabs was thrown out, the decision not to extend the overime ban was an indication of how far the "new realists" amongst the area leaders are growing in influence within the NUM. Faced with the Tory/Board drive towards privatisation in the coming months, militants need urgently to tackle the question of leadership in the NUM.

In the period ahead either the tories will succeed in smashing the NUM as a fighting force, or the miners will rebuild their strength. That Arthur Scargill has been re-elected does not resolve things either way.

While the bosses have not broken the NUM, they do have the whip hand at present. And usually they are getting their way. They are spoiling for a fight with the most militant sections. That is why they have targetted South Yorkshire for a series of disciplinary crackdowns.

Their plan is to break the NUM's bargaining power by enforcing "flexible" working arrangements. These range from the re-introduction of the brown envelope butty payments common in South Yorkshire, to attempts to railroad four shift working in South wales. Obviously at the end of this path lies the goal of six day working, privatised super pits with not an NUM membership card in sight. Anticipated increases in world coal prices and the reality of breaking the NUM, would make the British coal industry a profitable enough prospect for the privateers. That is why they are anxious to stamp down hard to impose what they call "management's right to manage". This they have not been able to achieve.

Despite the tenacity of the miners the union leadership is in retreat and disarray. The area leaderships are pulling in their separate directions to undermine national unity. In their various ways, they are raising the white flag in the face of British Coal's offensive. South Wales and Scottish officials opened the door to Walsh by refusing to support Scargill. Hiding behind the union's federal constitution they will seek to negotiate their own terms in the areas. The South Yorkshire leadership stabbed Bentley in the back and are now trying to stifle the potential for an instant response to provocation by ruling that no pickets can be sent out without the prior consent of the panel.

The Board have not only their publicised plans for flexible working super pits - Margam, Frances, Thorne, Asfordby and Hawkhurst Moor - they have also the scab-herders who would be willing to provide the labour force for six day working. The UDM would do it.

Worst of all they have the yellow bellies like South Wales leader Dutfield, who have told the Board that the NUM has given up any prospect of organising at Margam and of ensuring that it works on the NUM's terms. Both through insisting on flexible shift working arrangements in individual pits, and through driving in the wedges between the areas, the Board aim to get their way eventually.

Scargill's election campaign had to be judged against the tasks facing militant miners. The first task is to hold the line against management attack and against the treacherous area leaders. Linked to this is the job of rebuilding the unity of the NUM within and, crucially, across the coalfields. It is testimony to the limits of Scargillism that his victory advanced this cause only negatively. That is, it protected the morale of the militants by not letting Walsh get in.

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oughout the campaign Scargill failed to gue for a platform around which the NUM can regroup its forces and fight the Board. There was ample rhetoriuc against pit closures. A vote for Arthur was a vote against them. But the tide of closures continues while the national leadership keeps quiet. There was lots of talk about reinstatement of the sacked lads. However, the national leaders and Scargill have no plans for action to win back their jobs. The hated code was repeatedly denounced. But what did Arthur commit himself to do in leading a fight against it? In truth the thousands of miners who went to Scargill's meetings will have heard all the things they hate roundly denounced. But no means of fighting them was advanced, beyond voting Scargill.

Similarly, the campaign advanced no platform around which to organise against those officials who are on their knees before the Board. It gave the South Wales and Scottish miners the chance to show what they think of their leaders. It showed that these leaders are out of touch with the rank and file. But it offered the rank and file no call to boot out Dutfield and Bolton, and their time serving henchmen. But at the time of the election even in South Yorkshire Bentley were being stabbed in the back. And Scargill did not intervene.

The election shows that in all ways, and by choice, Scargill remains a prisoner of the NUM official bureaucracy. He plays by their rules and will not break them by organising the rank and file against the regional officials. He fought to keep his presidential seat and won. His left-talking constantly inspired the miners when they were locked in mortal conflict with the **Board, the police and the government. And that was important. But now, when the miners are more divided and more on the defensive against management, his left talking, trade union bureaucratic politics have less to offer. The danger is that miners who realise this will sink into demoralisation, and the ex-worshippers will take the fact that Arthur has not delivered as a reason for capitulation.**

The key battle front in the war between British Coal and the miners is the question of who controls the work processes in the pit. Management are out to stamp their authority on every aspect of the pit's workings. They are saying that they will decide who works, where, and how. They are saying they will decide who gets bonus payments and how big they will be. They want to say which special conditions will receive special payments.

They face most resistance at pit level. At area level the officials are caving in. The national leadership is paralysed. What is needed is to unify the pit level resistance and mobilise it to oust the misleaders. This Scargill will not do. His rhetoric about the national issues of pay and the code are not linked by him to the local disputes that are flaring up everywhere. The danger is that militants themselves will not make the link. As the Board go for a pit by pit strategy of imposing their conditions, a real danger will be an exhausting round of pit by pit battles exploding, remaining isolated and being defeated.

Overtime bans are not enough. We need to win area and national policies on all the vital issues to ensure area and national responses to local attacks. Step one is organising the militants. Informal networks exist. We know who to phone when the pickets are to go out. These networks must be kept alive. These elements could become the key links in a permanent national rank and file organisation.

Against all forms of flexible working, the NUM must organise in every pit to control the speed of work, the rate and distribution of bonuses, and who works where. That organisation must be linked across the pits with guarantees of national solidarity action against victimisations and provocations. Forged together with a clear resolve to hold the line against attacks,miners can rekindle their confidence and begin to go on the offensive.

NACODS DISPUTE

How far the Board is prepared to go in its drive towards privatisation is shown by the current attacks on NACODS. The NACODS leadership, responsible for saving the Board and the tories during the Great Strike have been given their reward - a kick in the teeth. Not content with holding down the deputies' pay levels, the Board have also removed the NACODS monopoly over safety work and are welcoming UDM offers to do the job. The Board are also seeking to impose new seven day rosters on the deputies.

If past record is anything to go on, the NACODS leadership will move at breakneck speed to end the dispute by selling out their members. But if the dispute does escalate it is important that the Board isn't allowed to use divide-and-rule tactics to set NUM members against the deputies. Victroy over NACODS will only add to the Board's resolve to take on the NUM.

Regional round up

SOUTH WALES

Miners in South Wales gave Arthur Scargill a 61% vote in the election: one of his best results. Only one of the Area's pits didn't give him a majority, and 8 lodges officially nominated him, including Tower, which voted by over 80% for him. Such a clear victory for Scargill was a real blow for the South Wales executive, who (with a few exceptions) stand directly opposed to the his principled stand - in particular over the issue of 6 day working and talks with the UDM. Although Dutfield was able to win a ballot on not escalating the overtime ban (what ban?), the majority of men voted for Scargill only a week later. At least Arthur is seen as representing a fight against British Coal, as opposed to Dutfield and Co, who support the "new realism" of the Kinnockite variety, i.e. capitulation.

Ian Isaac (former secretary at St. Johns) summed up the position when he commented after the result, "the massive support for Arthur Scargill from South Wales miners has given a clear indication that the leadership are totally out of touch with the membership in the coalfield, and they should put themselves up for re-election." This would not be before time for the likes of George Rees, who was elected General Secretary back in 1976 and hasn't stood since.

SCARGILL

During the election Scargill spoke to packed meetings in Pontllanfraith, Trecynon and Pontyberem. These meetings were held without the support of the Area leadership, who even tried to prevent Scargill from coming into the coalfield at all. Rees, for example, complained that Scargill shouldn't visit Cynheidre Colliery because the correct channels hadn't been used. This despite even the management at the pit giving the go-ahead!

The first of the election meetings, sponsored by Marine Lodge, was attended by around 400 miners and wives. After running through his election platform, including some useful figures on the continuing decline of the UDM, Scargill was questioned from the floor as to how he intended to fight British Coal's attacks on the industry and the NUM. He had no real answer oher than to repeat his record versus that of Walsh. He made no mention of those pits that are taking action against the introduction of "flexible" working and the disciplinary code, and there was no call to link up all the isolated disputes currently taking place in virually every coalfield. He also seemed unwilling to give public support to Tyrone O'Sullivan (Lodge Secretary at Tower) against the attacks on him from the area executive for organising the meeting. (Apparently it would have been OK with Ponty if he had been a Gwent official!) Scargill explained that he couldn't "interfere" in the internal affairs of the area and refused to answer the question of how to smash the code. Those miners looking to Scargill to give a lead, both against the Board and the sell-out merchants of the NEC, heard little cause for comfort.

Rank and File Organise

The high vote for Scargill was gained in no small part by the work of the "South Wales Committee to re-elect Scargill", a group of militants disgusted at the area executive's decision not to nominate a candidate in the election (the first time ever in the history of the South Wales NUM). Apart from helping to organise the three election meetings, they visited every colliery at least three times, giving out leaflets and trying to win the support of rank and file miners for Scargill. As a result, some Lodge officials, in particular at Merthyr Vale, attacked them for "interfering" in the affairs of other Lodges. The complaints have been taken up by the area leaders and two of the Committee's leading members - Tyrone O'Sullivan of Tower and Phil Curren of Cynheidre - are due to appear before the executive. The most likely form of discipline would be banning them for five years from standing for official positions. In addition, forty two men at Tower were threatened with disciplinary action by British Coal for spending too much time campaigning for Scargill. However, this has been dropped now the election is over. It's amazing how quickly the independent organising of rank and file miners can produce so many shock waves through the coalfield!



The miners Broad Left also played a part in Scargill's campaign in South Wales. The fact that they had an impact can be seen from the reaction of Phil Bowen, the right wing Lodge Secretary at Blaenant: "I believe that the Broad Left is determined to infiltrate the NUM's structures. They are trying to gain a hold at all levels". Bowen had been angered by the challenge of Militant and Broad Left supporter, Tudor Parsons, for his position as Lodge Secretary. In the end Bowen was re-elected by 287 votes to 130. Another Militant supporter, Ian Isaac, is due for possible disciplinary acion from the area executive for his role in the Broad Left during the election campaign.

More Closures

After more than a year with no pits closing, February 3rd was another gloomy day for the coalfield. British Coal announced the closure of Abernant and Lady Windsor/Abercynon, with the loss of 1500 jobs. In addition, another 97 jobs are to be lost with the closure of Wernos Washery. Lady Windsor have voted not to fight but the Washery have voted unanimously to fight. This announcement followed the recent closure of Tredomen workshops, the last workshops in South Wales. The next day British Coal announced that Six Bells Colliery would be fully merged with Marine, and the surface workings would close with the loss of 400 jobs.

If these 2000 jobs go the workforce will be reduced to only 8000 - a loss of over 10,000 jobs since the Great Strike, with the number of pits falling to ten.

Blaenant has been given a reprieve this month, and Deep Navigation and Merthyr Vale face meetings with British Coal to discuss targets they were given last year.

All Dutfield could say was that these closures would be "catastrophic for South Wales". The men at Abernant have voted to put their pit through the review procedure with hopes that with large anthracite reserves it can be saved.

In addition, the men at Oakdale are opposing attempts to close one of three faces at the pit, with the potential loss of 200 jobs. They voted five to one to oppose the cut. Oakdale is one of the most profitable pits in the coalfield, making over £5 million profit last year. Yet it is still threatened with partial closure.

These job cuts have given the area leaders serious cause for concern, as the membership falls below 10,000 (even including opencast miners) and South Wales is set to lose one of its places on the NEC - Dutfield and Rees will have to battle it out for the one remaining seat! Under the present system this would mean South Wales having the same representation at national level as North Wales, with only 450 members. Surely it's time to introduce a card vote system at NEC meetings, based on area membership.

Against pit closures and job cuts, Dutfield's "reasonable" approach of consultation talks has proved worse than useless. The British Coal bosses are free to trample all over him whenever they choose, as the last month has shown all too clearly. Now is the time to link up those fights that are taking place against job cuts - at Abernant and Oakdale in particular - with the struggles at many other pits against new "flexible" working practices. Only in this way can British Coal be stopped from picking off pits one by one, as it has done so far.

Margam

The proposed new mine at Margam seems as far away as ever, at least for the NUM. British Coal have now stated that there is no guarantee that development will go ahead even if six day working is agreed ("falling energy prices"). It seems that British Coal were never serious about the NUM working Margam; they just used it as a way of introducing a longer working week into the industry. Dutfield has called Margam a "dead issue". Whilst formally abiding by national conference policy, he has in practice given up any fight for the pit on the NUM's terms, and says that any other union has the right to secure the jobs. While the likely frontrunner is the TGWU, British Coal could be tempted by the prospect of allowing the UDM a foothold in the coalfield. There are strong rumours that British Steel, once it is privatised, will be the ones to finally begin construction of the mine.

6

DAYS

NO THANKS!

N.U.M.

YORKSHIRE

ELECTION

Yorkshire polled 61% for Scargill, a poor result in his power base. It is rumoured that previously militant pits actually showed a majority for Walsh. This is hardly surprising. While Scargill did the round of set piece meetings attended by the faithful there was no attempt by the area leadership to do any concerted campaigning round the pits. It was left to local rank and file bulletins to make the arguments.

The round of strikes in the run up to the election were carefully ignored by the election machine. Scargill's repeated stand against 6 day working, the code etc. rings rather hollow when miners fighting back against management are left isolated.

BENTLEY

The three men at Bentley who were at the centre of the dispute that closed most of South Yorkshires pits last month have been transferred off the heading demanded by the Board. Management threatened to close the whole of the new development completely with the possible loss of three to four hundred jobs. At the moment the heading where the dispute arose has been closed for a month.

The Board have been able to isolate Bentley using threats of disciplinary action against pickets they had photographed on the line. All the area leadership can do is hide behind the government's trade union laws and claim they can't get involved.

Meanwhile other disputes over "the management's right to manage" ie. reduced safety levels, speed ups, deciding on and cutting work teams, have affected the Barnsley area with Wistow and Kellingley walking out over bonus and Barnsley Main out for three days when craftsmen were put on rope jobs.

NACODS DISPUTE

Most pits have had NUM members sent home at least on Mondays. Bentley men were sent home for most of last week (Feb 8th-12th) - are management putting the boot in or what!

Although branches have said they will not work without NACODS members there is obviously no love lost between the NUM and NACODS and arguing for support has been difficult. The area leadership haven't helped by making no statements about the strike leaving it open to the likes of one Doncaster Area Secretary to argue that he would advise his men to work if BACUM was prepared to do the safety cover.

Feb 3rd. Frickley joined the nurses strike when approached by pickets from local hospitals and took the banner on to the Wakefield protest line. Miners from Frickley (the only pit to take action) argued that other pits should have joined the day of action. Action is planned for March 14th - we must not leave Frickley alone in defending our health service.

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THE NHS IN CRISIS

The NHS is in crisis. Hospitals and beds are closed due to lack of money, while waiting lists have grown to 688,000. Health Authorities have overspent by an estimated £150 million this year just to keep services going.

Small children are suffering and dying because there are not enough nurses to treat them. Nurses, already flooding from the NHS due to poor pay see their unsocial hours pay under attack. Patients are left lying in wet beds either because there aren't enough nurses to change them, or there are no clean sheets. Operating theatres lie idle while thousands survive the waiting lists on pain-killers.

Refusing to meet the parents of heart-op children, Thatcher said: "This is not a health service in crisis, it is doing very well."

Only somebody blind to reality could utter this. But for Thatcher and co. reality is very different from that of NHS users. Whether it is John Moore's pneumonia, or Thatcher's varicose veins, their treatment is never cancelled, because it is always paid for.

The Tories announcement of a 'whirlwind review' of the NHS signals the start of a major attack on free health care. Every plan so far announced, or leaked by the Tories involves working people paying more for health care and the bosses of the banks and big buiseness paying less.

THE FIGHT IS ON

But the fight to save the NHS has been taken up by nurses and other healthworkers. They have been supported in their action by thousands of other workers. Frickley miners struck for the day in support on Feb 3rd and Vauxhall car workers on Merseyside came out on the North West day of action on the 10th. Thousands of local authority workers plan to take action in Manchester on the 19th of February in another day of action.

Without a doubt the lead in the fight has come from rank and file healthworkers. The NUPE and COHSE leaders, content to rely on consultants and the likes of the Queen's gyneacologist to lead the fight for them, have been rudely awakened from their years of slumber. Now they are awake they are working overtime to sabotage the fight.

What we need is all out strike action, what the union leaders want to organise are isolated, unconnected days of protest action. Almost immediately after the London District Strike Cttee. called for strike action on March 15th (budget day), the national leaders of COHSE called for a 'rally' and a day of 'protest' on the 14th! If that's not a deliberate attempt to confuse healthworkers and other workers who want to take action then what is.

Tom Sawyer, Deputy General Secretary of NUPE said about strike action: "A strike is not an end in itself - it is a means of drawing public attention and public sympathy". But as every miner knows 'public sympathy never did any good when you are up against an enemy as ruthless as the Tories.

EVERY WORKER'S FIGHT

But it is not just the job of NHS workers alone to defend the NHS. The whole trade union movement should rally to the fight with solidarity action. The present bunch of union leaders have already presided over the defeats of the miners and the printers. They have allowed the Tories to get away with the virtual outlawing of effective trade unionism. We cannot allow these traitors to sit back and watch Thatcher destroy the NHS.

The action by healthworkers has certainly got the Tories on the run. What better time for other workers to link their fight to ours. Miners are curently faced with massive pit closures, a savage disciplinary code, and an attempt to smash the NUM prior to privatisation. The area and national leaderships of the NUM like those of NUPE and COHSE are running scared.

We have the opportunity to build in the coming weeks, class wide action which could reverse the tories onslaught. The action by healthworkers has given the biggest rebuff to 'new realism' in years, and been an inspiration to workers across the country.

Here is our chance to defeat Thatcher. Lets not waste it

by Workers Power health workers

ABORTION

With the help of 35 Labour MP's David Alton won a second reading for his anti-abortion bill in January.

Support for abortion rights is a necessary part of the struggle against womens oppression. If women are to be free and equal members of society it is vital that we win the right to control our own bodies.

The bosses treat working class women as 'mothers' and home builders, their role as workers has to be fitted around this. Just as the bosses fight any moves by workers to challenge their control by imposing laws through their state and rules in their workplaces, the state, backed by moral arguments from the church, seeks control over womens fertility. Abortion rights are not a matter of individual conscience - they are a class issue and as such must be fought for by the organised working class - women and men.

The Alton Bill is the latest in a series of attacks on the 1967 Abortion Act. The '67 Act has severe limitations in that the decision as to whether or not a womwn has an abortion remains with the medical profession, and that health authorities do not have to provide facilities for NHS abortions. However the '67 Act was a step forward from the horrors of back street abortions and has enabled many women to obtain a safe, legal abortion, if not always free. Less than half of all abortions are done on the NHS.

Women with money have always been able to pay for abortions from private doctors. If abortions are further retricted it will be working class women who will be the most affected.

The key to victory against Alton lies in mobilising working class women and men. However we cannot simply restrict ourselves to defending the '67 Act. For many working class women without the means to pay this is calling for the defence of something that does not exist. Only free abortion on demand meets our needs.

The extension of abortion rights requires the provision of NHS facilities to meet the need. This is only part of a series of demands we must make to ensure that women have real choice and control over their own bodies.We need free and early pregnancy testing, better contraceptive advice, improved maternity and ante-natal care, access to modern fertility techniques for women who have difficulty in conceiving and for free childcare facilities to enable women to choose to continue working We must link this to the struggle of the health workers in the NHS and to the struggles of working women to improve conditions in their workplaces.

Previous attacks on the '67 Act by anti-abortionists have brought the issue of abortion rights firmly onto the agenda of trade unions. Many have a policy of free abortion on demand, a woman's right o choose. In 1979 the TUC called a massive demonstration against restrictive legislation in the fight against the Corrie Bill The TUC has already given its support for the national demonstration called by the Fight Alton's Bill campaign on 19th March and we must now ensure that this support is mobilised into a massive trade union presence on the day. But we must not just wait for the union bureaucrats to act, rank and file members must take the arguments for abortion rights into their workplaces

In Yorkshire support for the Fight Alton Bill campaign has been passed by a number of branches and by the Yorkshire Area. This support needs to be to be built into action with miners, their families and branch banners out on the demonstration on the 19th. March.



* Stop Alton's Bill
* For a Woman's right to choose.
* For free abortion on demand.

Debate:
we publish here a letter by Dave Douglass in response to our review article in Red Miner No19 on A J Cook. We also print Mark Hoskisson's reply to his criticism. The debate centres on fundamental questions for revolutionaries concerning the nature of trade unions and the revolutionary party

The party and the unions

Mark Hoskisson in his review of Cook (Paul Davies) underlines not simply my difference with you but, I believe, your total lack of understanding of the miners and their union (MFGB/NUM). The central feature of our union in our lives over at least two centuries, the struggle to survive in a century and a half of gory carnage underground and ruthless oppression above ground, caused us as a people (the majority of miners are miners of generation upon generation) to see the MFGB and the NUM as the instrument of our very physical existence and the welfare of our families, and at times the means by which we prosecuted the political cause of our kind and the class as a whole.

The miners' union stands, and has stood at the very centre of the mining communities, from cradle to inquest. Yes, we have fought to win it to more radical and even revolutionary politics. At times we have characterised the union as revolutionary. At other times we, along with the rest of the class, have fallen to reformism and parliamentarianism, and that has been a feature of a decade or of an area. But whereas the rank and file see their involvement as being winning the union, altering the structure, redirecting its aims, you see the union in contradistinction to the rank and file. This is why your call for rank and file organisations is always misunderstood by rank and filers. The miners want such bodies to impel the miners' union, centralise a thrust in this or that direction within the miners' union, whereas you contrast such bodies not as complimentary but as contradictory. This is why in essence you stand not only out with the NUM but out with the miners, even the militant miners, as a whole.

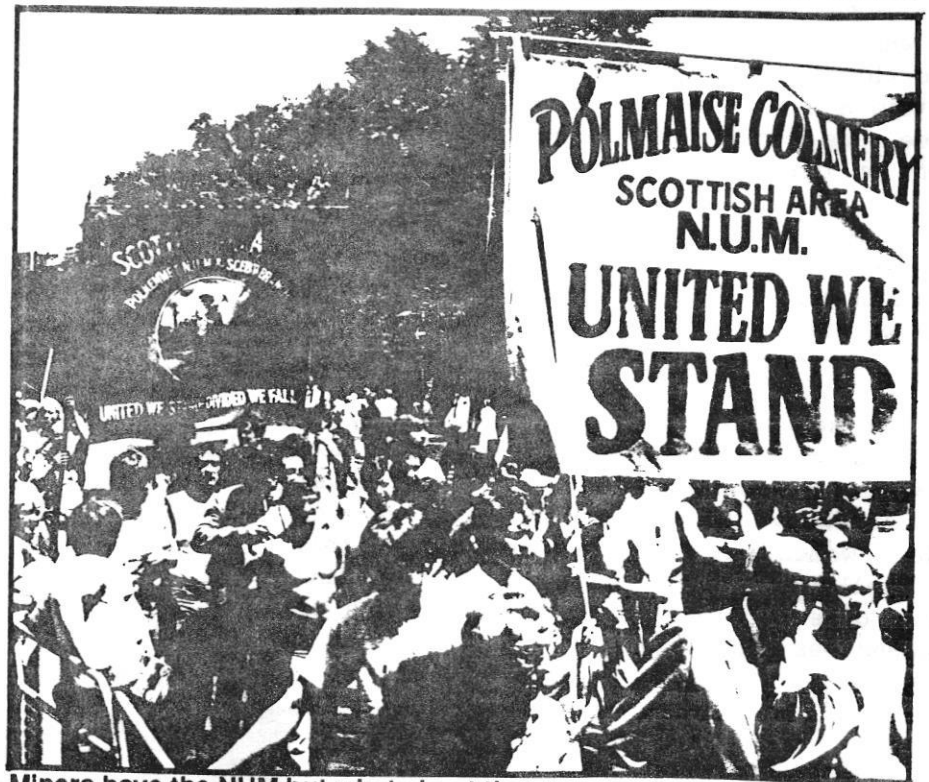
In all of this it is you who come closest to 19th century anarcho-syndicalist opposition to trade unionism. Indeed the modern—syndicalists have a much better grasp of the rank and file role of trade unionists and trade union struggle than you do. You come close to the situationist, 'Worker Oppositionist' trend which sees trade unions as the enemy of the working class which must be broken. At a time when trade unions as the last bastion of class struggle defence, are fighting for their very existence such simultaneous attacks show that the philosophical underpinnings are *anti-working class*, for there really is no defence of the class in abstract.

Which brings us to this word syndicalism. It has become a trend, among groups like yourself to use the word syndicalism as meaning trade unionism, or trade union sectionalism, It is a style borrowed or imported from the USA, where many militants, because of the strong European working class influence, used that word in its literal French sense. However, its use in English debate has always implicitly meant anarcho-syndicalism which means far more than that US usage implies. It robs the word of it's *political* meaning.

The syndicalists do not by and large believe in traditional trade union struggle to smash capitalism, more importantly they do not believe in the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Both Arthurs did believe (do believe in the case of Scargill) in the necessity of a workers' state. To call either of them syndicalist is just plain wrong. You may have made such a fetish of the party that you actually now see no difference between the means of bringing around socialism (i.e. the organs by which the workers move to raise class consciousness, mobilise the class for itself to smash the capitalist state) and the end, that is the construction of a workers' state.

You automatically now assume that if one does not embrace any of the multivariety of revolutionary leaderships, and seeks to advance the class struggle through other organs, i.e. unions in struggle, communities in struggle, or any other centre of resistance, then *ipso facto* you are a syndicalist. However there is no god given writ that says the workers *must* join a revolutionary party, even a good one, in order to carry through a successful socialist revolution, and construct a socialist state. Marx says the only pre-condition for socialism is the existence of the working class!

Its our experience, comrades, that the miners' union(s) and their Chartist



Miners have the NUM but what about the rest of the working class?

founders and forerunners have stood head and shoulders above most of the self named leaderships in political parties, in orienting and directing the class as a whole over a century of bitter struggle. In this context, is it any wonder that Cook, aye and Arthur now, put high premium on the survival of the miners' union, not simply as a means of self defence for a narrow group if you like, but as a vanguard sector of the class as a whole? It is also for this reason that following periods of bitter retreat (and I mean in human terms bitter) defeats for the miners following their betrayal by other sectors of the working class, or more precisely by their leaders, that we had then to consolidate our position as an organisation.

What should we do then, hail a defeat by cutting our own throats? Romantically fight to the last miner, and give the ruling class what it has wanted for centuries? No way, not socially, not politically.

The survival of this union is not simply the survival of some administrative organisation as you always see it, it is the survival of the miners as the sharp end of struggle, the tradition of what class consciousness actually means. Of course Cook sought to consolidate, get families an income after a year of deprivation (which it was in Durham, in Northumberland and other places). We have, it is true, tried principally to do the same now, but the state, seeing us down to 100,000 members is after the jugular and there is no compromise with the board available, even suppose we could find one.

Nothing short of the total elimination of coal mining in Britain is on the cards, not because some privatised collieries couldn't make profits, but that it is now obvious to the state that the NUM would survive privatisation, and that at any costs is not permissible. Not because we command a great strategic role, but because our leadership, our traditions and our influence is an ember too bright to be left unextinguished. We might not be able to start a bonfire by ourselves any more but we are sure enough the spark that could and can start the prairie fire. Could it not be said then that there is more revolutionary inspiration in the NUM than in Workers Power?

True, we do tend to ignore advice from self styled political leaders. You cite Cook's 'retreat' from the CPGB, indeed an outfit that called for all *power to the General Council* and got it! What did we get? Eight days of support. That is why we opposed the slogan then, and we opposed *your* version of it in 1984. We were for generalised strikes but to call on the TUC to call a general strike was an insult to our collective memory and not just the miners, but the millions of workers who wish to stand out for an end to capitalism.

Cook had never any faith in Thomas. He did have in the railwaymen in '21. By '26 when Thomas sat on the General Council of the TUC he had no faith in that body. Not surprisingly he rejected the 'leadership' of the CPGB who called for the running of our action to be placed in the TUC's hands. He was correct was he not? By the way, Ben Tillett who Cook counter-attacked *was* a syndicalist, although you it seems cannot distinguish them. Although to be honest Tillett from fiery beginnings betrayed his syndicalist beliefs, and it would be wrong to characterise the small but valuable contribution of British syndicalists by that man.

In short comrades, Cook, as all class conscious miners will tell you was a hero of our class and a champion of the miners. His lack of a political party offends your view of class struggle. You have it seems come to a point where unless one embraces your view that there is some fundamental law that necessitates the workers organising along one political track, i.e. the construction of *the* revolutionary party, then we, and those we lead, no matter in how principled a fashion, or even victoriously, are speaking a kind of class heresy. I happen to believe, as Cook believed, that the class itself will determine how it shall fight, through what organs, reconstructing here, abandoning there, but always determining it's own response to the class war. 'No saviours from on high deliver' etc, etc.

Revolutionary greetings

David Douglass
Industrial unionist/Marxist

We reply

Despite claiming that our attitude to Cook exposes the deep differences between Workers Power and himself, very little of Dave Douglass' letter to us actually deals with either the *Red Miner* article on Cook or the man himself. The main point of Dave's argument is that we are wrong on the question of the 'party'.

To justify his accusation that we fetishise the party Dave appears to reject the need for a revolutionary party altogether. There is no 'God-given writ' that says a party is necessary for a socialist revolution, claims Dave. There is, however, the historical experience of a whole series of revolutionary situations which repay examination. In Russia in 1917 the October Revolution was led by the Bolshevik Party, a revolutionary party made up of thousands of working class fighters united around a clear programme of action for working class power. The soviets (the workers councils) did not and could not, on their own, overthrow the bourgeois government and introduce socialist measures. The soviets armed with the Bolshevik programme could and did.

On the other hand, in Germany in 1918/19, a revolutionary situation existed, as did soviets. Yet the revolution was defeated. Why? Because there was no equivalent to the Bolshevik Party capable of preventing the betrayal of that revolution by the reformists. Luxemburg and the lefts who founded a Communist Party had not long split from the right wing and had not yet built a solid party.

Nor was success in Russia and failure in Germany just a fluke occurrence. The pattern of defeats has been repeated many times since then—Spain between 1936 and 1939, Italy 1943, Chile 1973, Iran 1979. In each case the path to socialism has been blocked and the parties of counter-revolution have triumphed. No parties able or prepared to take on and destroy the parties of counter-revolution and lead the base organisations of the workers in a struggle for power existed. And, more recently, the importance of a revolutionary party was posed in the 1984/85 miners' strike. The heroism of the NUM members, the militancy of their trade unionism, was not enough to defeat a ruthless political enemy.

The case of the NUM really does show why a party alone is necessary, not only to carry through a socialist revolution but even to win a major strike against a government in the role of employer. The Tories had prepared for a showdown by co-ordinating the police into a brutal but effective picket busting squad on a national scale, by piling up coal stocks, by transforming power stations so that they could work on oil, by putting in place a whole battery of anti-union legislation. In other words they used their political power to increase their chance of victory. This preparation required a political answer. The issue was about a lot more than pit closures. The anti-union laws affect every worker. In order to have won those workers to support the miners in action it was necessary to do more than just repeat that the miners were fighting for the whole class, true as that was. It was necessary to prove to the whole class that they had a direct interest in fighting for the miners. This was not done except on a sporadic basis and largely as a result of the activities of rank and file militants.

A trade union or even an industrial union (which we are in favour of) organises all the workers of a given trade or industry, except UDM style scabherders, irrespective of their political views. It can do this because the basis of trade unionism is a struggle—sometimes based on militant action, sometimes on moderate negotiation—for better pay and conditions within capitalism. Despite the clauses in many union constitutions in favour of the abolition of capitalism, politics are generally left to the Labour Party. The overwhelming concerns of a trade union are the sectional concerns of their members, not the interests of the whole class. It is precisely to transcend this inherent sectionalism of trade unionism that a revolutionary party is needed.

The bosses time and again have exploited the weaknesses that come with sectionalism. They did it in the miners' strike when they ensured that TGWU drivers were bribed to scab. And the TGWU, having its own sectional interests at heart and desperate to hold on to members, would not discipline the scabs. The Tories have exploited the sectionalism of the unions by taking on groups of workers separately. From the steel strike of 1980 through to the print strike that marked the end of 1986, the Tories took on section after section of workers and won, because they kept each of those sections isolated from the others. How did they get away with it? By exploiting the inherent divisions of pure trade unionism.

How do we transcend this narrow and divisive sectionalism? This is where a revolutionary party comes in. Unlike the unions it does not have members of different political persuasions. It is made up of workers who put their loyalty to the whole working class above their sectional interests. They are the people who will agitate in a miners' strike for the support of dockers', in a nurses' strike for the support of miners and so on. They are people united by their political views, by a programme of action for the whole working class irrespective of sectional (or indeed racial and sexual) differences.

No matter how radical and militant the NUM is it cannot and should not seek to become a party. It should seek to transcend sectionalism (and has one of the best records in doing so though it is not immune from the narrow minded and bureaucatic sectionalism that is all too typical inside the unions as was proved when even the wives' movement was denied representation in the union). However, as a miners' union it cannot, unlike a party, embrace militants from all sections of the working class in its ranks.

During the 1984/85 strike many militants said to us 'we don't need a party, we've got the NUM'. Our response was—how do carworkers, printers, dockers, unemployed youth etc, etc, join up and what has a mining union got to offer them? The question shows quite clearly the difference between a union based and a politically based organisation. Only an organisation for the whole class can unite workers from a variety of unions (and from the great mass of the unorganised) in the struggle for socialism.

Of course we do not counterpose the party to the organisations of struggle that the working class itself creates—be they unions, workers' councils or whatever. But those organisations in themselves are battlegrounds for different political ideas. The Labour Party and the Communist Party will seek to demobilise the revolutionary potential of such bodies. The spontaneous militancy of those bodies—as the wives' movement in the strike revealed—is not enough of a protection against misleadership. The misleaders need to be openly fought. For that task a political party is vitally necessary.

Ironically Dave recognises the need for a party—at least in the sense of a militant nucleus inside the class—despite his attack on the very idea. The problem is that he calls the party the NUM (and before that the MFGB). Dave says:

'It is our experience comrades that the miners union(s) and their Chartist founders and forerunners have served the interests not only of the miners, but have stood head and shoulders above most of the self-named leaderships in political parties, in orienting and directing the class as a whole over a century of bitter struggle.'

The miners are, and have been in key periods of class struggle, a heroic vanguard of the whole working class. But they are not the only section of workers who have led struggles for the whole class. In the late nineteenth century while the miners were being kept quiet by their Liberal supporting leaders, it was the great mass of unskilled workers who fought to build the new unions and who led the way for the whole class. And after World War Two when the miners' leaders accepted lousy pay deals in exchange for nationalisation, it was the dockers who repeatedly stood in the vanguard of the class in the battles against Atlee.

These examples do not in any way detract from the heroism of the miners. They merely prove that Dave's idea that the miners' union is the organisation (in fact a type of party) that acts on behalf of the whole working class is wrong and



Scargill—flawless leader?

dangerous. The miners' union is necessarily an exclusive organisation (you rightly have to be a miner to join it). An organisation that serves the whole class must be an inclusive organisation—a revolutionary party. Despite Dave's objection to our use of the term syndicalist, by portraying the NUM as a party he makes the classic syndicalist mistake. He recognises the need for a vanguard—a militant minority—but believes that it can be organised on a purely trade union basis. Moreover being a syndicalist and believing in a workers' state are not incompatible as Dave suggests. The difference between a revolutionary communist and a syndicalist is that we believe that political action, up to and including an insurrection, is necessary to get a workers' state. The syndicalist on the other hand believes (in line with his/her belief that the union is a party) that trade union action (at its most militant the general strike) is sufficient to overthrow capitalism.

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Dave is right to say the NUM's life is on the line. We are 100% in favour of the defence of the NUM. Any miner in any of the areas where we have branches knows that. And we never have been in favour of 'romantically' fighting on after a defeat. But it is not us who are helping destroy the NUM. It is the new realists in the areas who are presiding over the destruction of the union by their refusal to fight the continuing programme of pit closures by any means other than campaigns to win over 'public opinion'.

It is therefore insulting nonsense to accuse us, as Dave does, of being 'anti-working class' and of arguing that:

'Trade unions [are] an enemy of the working class which must be broken.'

Where do we say that Dave? Frankly, that is an affront to our comrades in a whole spectrum of unions, including those who are currently fighting to save the NHS and are working around the clock to recruit RCN nurses to genuine trade unions. What you really object to is the fact that we believe the trade union bureaucracy is an obstacle which must be broken. We will not retreat one inch on that. We believe that Norman Willis, Ron Todd, Alan Tuffin, yes and the bureaucracy that runs the NUM, are distinct from the rank and file. They get better wages, working conditions and perks than the rank and file. Their whole political life is centred around maintaining social peace with the employers—for goodness sake, look at what Mick Murphy and the so called left winger Jimmy Airlie are up to in Fords if you do not believe us. To fight these traitors in our midst, and to convince the rank and file that they should not rely on left wing individuals in the leadership, like Scargill, to solve all the problems, we are for organising the rank and file into a movement that can turn the trade unions into class struggle unions. We will not tell the rank and file to leave it up to left officials—remember Dave, in the words from the Internationale that you quote 'No saviours from on high to deliver'. So don't equate our view of a rank and file movement with the ultra left ideas of breaking from the unions that some of the comrades in the Direct Action Movement (an organisation that your name is associated with) are fond of arguing for.

Finally, to deal with the points Dave actually raises about the article we wrote on Cook. Again Dave is guilty of distorting what we say. He says we are effectively accusing Cook of 'speaking a kind of class heresy'. No we don't say this. We say that despite his vacillations Cook remained a loyal and eloquent 'advocate of the miners' cause'. We will not allow his positive contributions, to blind us to his very real mistakes and we are not afraid of criticising those mistakes openly and honestly. Likewise we are not afraid of openly criticising Scargill. No leader, no matter how left wing, is above criticism. Unless what Dave is saying is that Cook and Scargill are incapable of making mistakes, we cannot see how our criticisms of both men can be viewed as anything other than honest expressions of our opinion within the norms of workers' democracy.

On the 1926 strike, you imply that we support the CPGB's line of 'All Power to the General Council of the TUC', you say that our call on the TUC to launch a general strike in 1984/85 is the same as the CPGB slogan and you excuse Cook of any responsibility for the defeat that occurred in 1926. You are wrong on each count. First off, we do not agree with the CPGB's slogan. In our newspaper and our journals you will find a detailed criticism of the CPGB's attitude towards the TUC, particularly its left reformist wing. We think their slogans put too much faith in the left wingers and disarmed the rank and file when those left wingers, like Hicks and Purcell, betrayed the miners.

Our call for the TUC to launch a general strike in 1984/85 did not include a call to give them any power over that strike. On the contrary, we constantly argued for rank and file councils of action between workers in struggle (the miners and the dockers, the miners and the rail workers who took action etc) as the bodies that should control a strike. And we fought at a rank and file level to spread the miners' strike. We never said wait for the TUC. However, we believed that the TUC needed to be confronted. If the NUM had confronted the TUC and demanded support in the form of the general strike it would have strengthened the hand of every militant fighting in the workplaces for generalised strikes. In the event the NUM did a rotten deal with the TUC in September 1984 which gave the TUC control over all solidarity action and gave the NUM the worthless, paper support of the TUC. We know what that meant in practice—betrayal. Arthur Scargill welcomed that deal publicly. Our headline the week after it was 'Beware the TUC'. Who was right Dave?

Finally, as to Cook's role in 1926, it was him and Smith, not the CPGB, who actually handed control of negotiations to the TUC. That is not a matter of opinion. It is a fact. And it was Cook who conducted negotiations with individual capitalists, without the union's knowledge, in a bid to achieve a compromise that was no different to the one the TUC had originally put forward. The book we reviewed contains the documentary proof of this. And it was Cook, not the CPGB, who concluded the 'June Pact' with the TUC whereby all criticism of their terrible betrayal (including Cook's pamphlet 'Nine Days' which was withdrawn from circulation) was silenced. Of course this was coupled with examples of heroism and self sacrifice on Cook's part. We respect those examples. But they do not blind us to his fundamental political mistakes, ones that flowed precisely from his sectionalism, his inability to transcend militant trade unionism. That inability meant he refused to break with the bureaucracy at the decisive moment. The danger is that the same political weakness will lead Arthur Scargill to a similar fate. The struggle to build a revolutionary party capable of rallying militants to a class wide strategy for defeating the bosses and the fifth column in our own ranks, is, therefore, part and parcel of saving and rebuilding the NUM, not something counterposed to that task.

WHERE WE STAND

Red Miner

The Red Miner is produced by members and supporters of Workers Power. Workers Power is a revolutionary organisation fighting to build a new revolutionary party to overthrow capitalism - at home and abroad.

Workers' struggles

We support all workers' struggles against the bosses. We fight to turn all struggles into conscious anti-capitalist struggles.

Reformism

The trade union and Labour leaders believe capitalism can be reformed, made better, but they do not aim to overthrow capitalism. They act as go-betweens for the bosses with the workers. Even militant leaders limit their struggle to the fight for gains within capitalism. For this reason we are for building rank and file movements politically independent of the bureaucracy and committed to transforming the unions into democratic, class struggle unions.

Revolutionary Party

A revolutionary party will be a workers' party, a party that, built in stuggle, can learn and pass on the lessons of the 1984-5 strike and other struggles. We stand for miners taking their place in the front ranks of building such a party as they did in the 1920's. Only by building a new revolutionary party can we create the class army that can fight and destroy the stinking capitalist system that threatens us with always having to fight to protect our jobs, conditions and organisations.

Internationalism

We are committed to fighting capitalism internationally. We strive to build an international organisation of revolutionary parties. (Workers Power works with Irish, German, French, Austrian and Chilean revolutionaries in the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International.) In particular we fight nationalist solutions to the crisis put forward by reformists like calls for import controls. Such demands merely divide the working class.

Divisions

We fight all divisions in the working class. Divisions are fostered by the bosses to weaken us. We are implacably opposed to racism, immigration controls, fascism, discrimination against and oppresion of women, lesbians, gay men or black people.

The oppressed

We support all struggles by people oppressed by the bosses of Britain, America, France, Italy and the other capitalist (imperialist) countries. Immediately in Britain this means we support the right of the Irish people as a whole (not just those in the North) to determine the fate of their country. We unconditionally support the republicans and socialists in Ireland fighting for this right and demand the immediate withdrawal of all Bri tish troops from Ireland.

Workers' states

The USSR, Eastern Europe, etc are workers' states. Capitalism has been abolished. However, in each of these states a bureaucracy, based on the Stalinist Communist Parties, holds political power. This situation arose out of the international isolation of the Russian Revolution in the 1920's. The revolution degenerated at the hands of the bureaucracy headed by Stalin. The other workers' states were degenerate from birth in that they were created in the bureaucratic image of the USSR.

Therefore we call for a political revolution in all of these states to overthrow the bureaucracy and realise the full potential of these non-capitalist economies through democratic planning. At the same time, in order to preserve the gain for the working class represented by these economies, we defend the USSR and degenerate workers' states unconditionally against imperialism which, through war, will seek to re-introduce capitalism in these countries.

Overthrow capitalism

The revolutionary party we seek to build will have as its strategic goal the overthrow of capitalism by workers organised into workers councils and armed so as to defeat the police and army that the bosses have used, and will use again, against us. We are for a socialist society in which all property is in the hands of the workers' state and all production is directed towards the meeting of human need, not satisfying the profit greed of the capitalists. We stand on the old slogan of Karl Marx:

Workers of the world unite.
You have nothing to lose but your chains,
and a world to win!