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Police arrest picket at Silverwood Colliery, Yorks. Photo: John Harris. Terry French, Kent NUM, jailed for five years. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni, IFL



150 CLASS WAR PRISONERS

Free the jailed miners!

AS MANY as 150 miners are in jail because they are good trade unionists. Because they stood up for their jobs, their families, their communities and for their union.

Because they refused to roll over and play dead when the Tories sent semi-militarised scab-herding police to occupy the coalfields.

Because they fought back – against the Coal Board, against the government and against the Police.

Because they told Mrs Thatcher and her pit butcher MacGregor: "No, you don't. You've caused enough damage, inflicted too much suffering, wrecked too many working class communities – the miners aren't having it. We'll stop you."

These men are in jail because they are the best trade unionists in Britain. Because they are working class heroes.

They are men the labour movement should be proud to call its own. Proud to stand by. Proud to fight for. Proud to defend by every means at our disposal.

In fact, the labour movement is ignoring them!

Neil Kinnock denounced miners for resisting police thuggery in the coalfields, but he is shamefully silent about the jailed miners. Most of the labour movement is silent and seemingly indifferent.

Now at last the movement to defend the jailed

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

miners is getting under way.

The Mineworkers Defence Committee conference last Saturday, 9th, voted to launch a campaign for the class war prisoners.

The proposal for a prisoners' campaign was moved on behalf of Socialist Organiser by Lol Duffy, one of the Cammell Lairds shipyard

workers jailed last year when they occupied a gas rig to save jobs.

"We got off lightly", he said. "We were in jail for three weeks. But there are miners in jail for the same thing as us – fighting for their jobs – and they have sentences of several years.

"It's important for the

whole labour movement that we get those miners out of jail. Otherwise the threat of jail will be a factor in every trade union struggle in future.

"I know it has been a factor in the shipyards. Yards which had been thought of as militant have not taken action because they expected no support from the official

leadership and workers feared that any action would end up with them in jail."

Tide

The tide in the country is turning against Thatcher and her brutal boover-boot politics. The plight of the jailed 150 (and of the 650 miners who have been

sacked) must be brought to the attention of the labour movement. The movement must rally in their defence to demand that the jailed be released and the sacked be reinstated.

We must build a broad and powerful class war prisoners defence campaign.

A blow against the Tories

"THIS is a historic acquittal, comparable to the acquittal of John Lilburne in the seventeenth century, of Wilkes the radical in the eighteenth century, or the acquittal of various people charged with sheep stealing when that was a capital offence.

The jury asserted that it would not accept the use of the State power to crush people of conscience. Considering that it was a positively vetted jury that's a highly significant development.

The verdict also destroys once and for all, Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act and gives a fresh impetus to the campaign for a genuine Freedom of Information Act. That Section is now

LAST Monday, 11th, the hand-picked and politically vetted jury selected to try Clive Ponting under the Official Secrets Act defied the judge and found him not guilty.

He admitted that he had done what he was accused of – passing to an MP a secret government document about the sinking of the Argentine ship Belgrano during the Falklands War. Ponting pleaded that he was right to do it. The not guilty verdict is an endorsement of Ponting's action and judgement.

The jury rejected the judge's ruling that the interests of the state are identical with the interests of the government, and that it is automatically what the government of the day says it is. The jury endorsed Ponting's judgement that Parliament has the right to know and that the government had no right to misinform Parliament. This is a major blow to the government. Tony Benn comments:

dead and everybody knows it is dead.

The judge's summing up revealed his concept of the role of the State and the Law

in a way which is exceptionally clear. He said the interests of the State are the policy of the government.

Now when you reflect on

it, that is an incredible statement. Once you elect a government, that government's own policy – whether approved by Parliament, reported to Parliament – defines the total interests of the State.

The government's response needs to be watched very carefully. They have various options.

One is to pass new legislation which is more restrictive, given their anger at the defeat of the prosecution. They might adopt Diplock Courts as in Northern Ireland where there would be no jury.

One must watch out for this being made the occasion for a more repressive legal system.

Clive Ponting's offence, and this is what it was all about, is that he told the public and Parliament that the government had been lying about the Belgrano and indeed about the Falklands War.

Torpedoes

This information should force us all to go back and look at the whole Falklands operation. We now know that on almost every matter we were grossly misled.

So this in fact torpedoed the Falklands War.

Finally, in practical terms, any civil servant, in the Department of Energy, for example, who believes it to be in the national interest to



inform Members of Parliament about the truth of the government handling of the miners' strike in a sense has had a carte blanche to do it. There is a risk but at the same time, that jury felt it was in the public interest to tell Parliament the truth of what is happening, so we have a green light to do so."

By Tony Benn

Editorial

Labour and the miners' strike

LET US pause for a while and ponder on the dilemmas of Neil Kinnock, mustering as much sympathy and understanding for him as we can.

Throughout the miners' strike he has cut a very unheroic figure — viewed from either side of the class lines. Thatcher and her ministers have abused and flayed him for not roundly condemning the miners. Militant miners and the serious Left detest him for his timorous hawing and dithering in the middle of a great working-class battle, when he should be at the head of our side of it.

Kinnock has trod his lonely road, in the middle of the industrial and political minefield, under fire from both sides.

Kinnock says, and probably thinks, that he serves the Labour Party's interests by this behaviour; more, that the very future of the Labour Party depends on it.

It seems to be a matter of fact that Labour (and Kinnock) have lost much support in the opinion polls because of Labour's links with the miners. To win elections Labour needs to gather votes from beyond the broadest parameters of the trade union movement. Kinnock and his friends conclude from this that the miners' strike must be kept at arm's length.

Army

When the miners were on the offensive, they resolutely refused to hoist their flag over the miners' army. Now that the strike is on the defensive, Kinnock and his co-thinkers attack the Tories as unreasonable and bloody-minded.

But they don't stand fully with the miners now, either. They stand for 'reason', 'moderation', and 'conciliation'.

The latest MORI poll shows Labour's loss of support being reversed, as people now blame Thatcher for the continuation of the strike. Things are now going Kinnock's way. So it is a good time, having looked at the question from Kinnock's point of view, to nail this nonsense.

The idea that Labour can rise electorally if the miners go down to industrial defeat is doubly false.

If the miners are beaten, then it will justify Thatcher's attitude in the eyes of many who wanted a Tory victory if it could be bought cheaply but are now turning squeamish. People who regret Thatcher's break with the old 'British ways', because the break has so far brought no benefits and increasingly horrible conflict, will be silenced by success. If Thatcher wins, the grouches will stop and the plaudits will rain down.

Worse than that. If the miners are beaten and the Tories come out of their war against the 'Argentines' at home' successful, then there may well be a cumulative effect on the labour movement. We will go into the Tory-imposed plebiscites to decide whether unions should have a political fund — that is, if the Labour Party should be permitted a trade-union base — in the most unfavourable conditions possible.

The chances of defeat, and of a serious erosion of Labour's organised trade-union base, will be massively increased in the industrial and social climate produced by a Thatcher victory over her designated 'enemy within'.

More: Thatcher has the nerve of a leader. From her own ruling-class point of view, she would be mad not to inflict as much damage as she can on the labour movement.

Three years before an election, it will take more than the swings of volative public moods to get Thatcher to call off the dogs. She knows very well that victory will not only settle accounts with the labour movement for now, but will also provide a basis to restore her position in the polls.

If Kinnock chases helplessly after public opinion and the polls, the Tories don't. Thatcher and her Cabinet base themselves on solid ground. They know what side they are on, and that the conflict is unavoidable.

Thatcher doesn't weasel or vacillate, wishing that the conflict would go away and let her get on with her parliamentary statesmanship. She recognises that the substance of that statesmanship is to fight the class struggle.

Thatcher is a leader in the class war. But Kinnock thinks he is an aspirant leader of a 'national community', with a 'national interest' that stands above the raging class struggle. Labour should not take sides with the miners, but should seek instead to secure the 'middle ground' of reason and conciliation.

Spurious

The class consensus is spurious. The national interest is mythical. Nothing solid can be built on the opinion-poll swings and movements which Kinnock and his co-thinkers guide themselves by. If the miners lose, any Labour gains will quickly vanish.

Electoral support from beyond the labour movement will not automatically come with industrial victory; but it will come a lot more easily to an industrially victorious labour movement than to one that has just suffered a terrible defeat.

Victory in the miners' strike would put new heart into the whole labour movement. It would shatter the Tories' appearance of strength and invulnerability, destroy their mystique of knowing what's best and having policies where Labour has none that carry credibility with either Left or Right.

It would mean that we went through the Tory trade union plebiscites on political funds when the spirit of cohesion, solidarity, and purpose in the labour movement had been given a firm boost rather than a painful blow.

No, Kinnock's strategy has never been right, never far-sighted, never serving the interests of the movement in a difficult period. It has been ignoble, blinkered, obtuse — essentially helpless drifting in the powerful cross-currents.



Arthur Scargill addressing the August 11 demonstration

Organise for March 6

By John Bloxam

LAST Thursday the NUM national executive committee met in joint session with the executive committee of the pit deputies' union, NACODS.

They issued a joint statement, calling on the Coal Board for immediate negotiations. They called on the NCB to drop their demand that the NUM should agree to preconditions before talks. They demanded that the modified colliery review procedure, already accepted by the NUM, should be the basis for a negotiated settlement.

Within a matter of hours the NCB had flatly turned them down, repeating its demand that the NUM should surrender.

The Financial Times gave this report of the joint meeting: "... (it) was not an unqualified success: much was taken up with the NUM leaders attempting to persuade the deputies to call for industrial action if talks were not resumed: this the NACODS men would not do, preferring instead to keep their options open."

The NACODS EC meets today, Tuesday 12th, to consider their response, and undoubtedly they will do everything to avoid a commitment to action.

Ken Sampey, President of NACODS said on TV this morning that there was no chance NACODS would strike "for" the NUM.

The government and the NCB have spent the last week soft-soaping NACODS. They are acutely aware of the danger they now face: that their policy of smashing the NUM will drive the deputies into a corner and force them to fight back.

The NUM now wants a public inquiry. But as long as they think they can break the back of the strike, the government will

refuse a public inquiry.

That it is the government who now prevent negotiations is becoming clear to more and more people. Attitudes to the striking miners and to the government are therefore changing.

Opinion

Arthur Scargill made this point in the latest issue of *The Miner*: "Most important of all, public opinion is gradually seeing where the real intransigence in this dispute lies."

The government's blatant attempt to smash the NUM was always likely to trigger a reaction, and the government is now faced with that reaction.

The MORI opinion poll published in the Sunday Times shows that 60% of respondents are now against the government's handling of the dispute.

We now have the basis for a renewed appeal to the broad labour movement to rally to the miners.

Faced with the growing public disgust with its vindictive and bloody-minded handling of the miners, the government is also being hit hard by blows from the miners. The strike is still hitting the economy hard and disrupting the government's economic strategy.

The government still faces the danger of large scale power cuts, as well as the possibility of a second front being opened up in the latest round of wage claims.

Despite a massive NCB and government propaganda drive over the weekend, the number of scabs last Monday dropped by 50%. To keep up the pressure on the miners and create the impression that the strike is collapsing, they needed a lot more than that.

Nothing better illustrates the

strength and determination of the striking miners than the way they can still "hold the front" and push back the heavy NCB and government pressures after eleven months on strike.

Reports from the coalfields indicate that far from admitting defeat, many militants have regained their confidence and optimism.

But, as the NUM leaders urgently insist, more pressure needs to be brought against the government. Arthur Scargill put it thus: "The very best way to speed those talks along is intensification of picketing activity."

Heavy picketing was widely reported on Monday morning, 11th, at both pits and power stations. Many non-miners answered the call by some regional TUCs for a 'Day of Action' in support of the miners. The scale and effectiveness of the Day of Action was far from being enough, but it shows what can be done.

The solidarity movement now needs to build on the experience of the 11th. We must aim to provide physical assistance on the picket lines every day.

Second front

However, it still rests with other groups of workers to bring decisive pressure to bear on the government by opening a second front for their own demands or by taking direct solidarity action with the NUM. The miners' leaders have continually appealed for actions like this.

Why was there only sporadic action on Monday, 11th (in some London schools, among other white-collar workers and by groups of railworkers)? There wasn't any more for the simple reason that the official leaderships — both at a regional TUC

and national trade union level — refused to call for it, to campaign for it or to fight for it. And they did very little to publicise the actions that were taking place.

Most militant miners spit in disgust if you mention the TUC.

But these cowards and traitors still have the authority to call decisive action and no one else has the same authority. That is why the campaign to force them off the fence is still necessary.

Opportunity missed

We need a TUC special conference which can call them to account for their scabbing and weasling on their promises of solidarity. The South Wales NUM's call for a TUC conference was, unfortunately, not taken at last Thursday's meeting of the NUM national executive. This was an important opportunity missed. It comes before the next meeting, a week next Thursday, 21st. It should be carried.

The TUC has called a 'Day of Action' for March 6 over rate-capping. Scandalously, the TUC refused to link it up with the miners' strike (which will be exactly one year old on March 6).

There must be a massive campaign to get this scandal changed and to commit organisations to take strike action on both issues, whatever the TUC says.

Already, the North West Regional TUC and the Manchester Confed have called for action on March 6.

Let's use their example, and the experience of previous 'Days of Action', like Monday's, to start the campaign now for industrial action on that day. And let's urge the NUM to put their authority and weight behind the call.

Recall the TUC!

Paul Whetton's diary

THE process that we have experienced in the Notts coalfield would now seem to be spreading to all the other coalfields. You are now getting down to the hard core. There will still be a little bit of flaking off at the edges but we're now down to a pretty hard core of the strike and we're still in the region of 70% of our members out on strike.

The prophecies of the Coal Board ever since last June that there was a return to work have been shown to be a myth.

As far as the latest figures are concerned you are talking about people who have been on strike for eleven months. It is not a trickle back to work but a surrender to massive intimidation by the state - the DHSS, the police, the government.

These lads who have gone back have been driven back by starvation and hardship.

The fact that we still have 70% of our membership still out on strike would seem to me to be a total vindication of the stand of our union and a rejection of the arguments put forward by the government and Coal Board.

I was absolutely amazed that someone as high up as the South Wales research officer should go to the media prior to a national executive meeting and suggest that miners in South Wales might go back without coming to any agreement with the Coal Board.

To make that statement on the eve of a crucial meeting of the executive showed exceedingly bad judgement, at best, and at worst an attempt to scupper any cohesive policy put together by the national executive.

When it came over on the news, the reaction amongst Notts striking miners was one of horror. Absolute horror.

It was tantamount to a declaration of surrender, surrender of the rights of the 600 men who have been sacked, the 150 men who have been put in jail.

In fact the Notts striking miners lobbied the executive meeting. We did so firstly to oppose the suggestion coming out of South Wales, and as I

understand it, it wasn't raised at the national executive.

The Scabs

Secondly, we were there to express our solidarity with the national executive committee in urging them to carry out their recommendation to a special delegate conference to expel the Nottinghamshire Area.

The information we have is that that special delegate conference will go ahead at the earliest opportunity and the question of the expulsion of the Notts Area will be discussed.

It is a parochial issue in one sense, and therefore must take second priority to winning the dispute, but it is an important point. There is an attempt to bring about the rebirth of Spencerism and if that isn't slapped down at the earliest opportunity and with the utmost ferocity, it could well spread to other coalfields.

So in that sense, it is with the interests of the national coalfields that we are pursuing this so vigorously.

We need to preserve the national unity of the NUM and the only way we can do that is to cut out the cancer that is growing in our midst before it encroaches on everybody.

When the proposal to expel the Notts Area and organise a new Area for the NUM was first considered it met with a good response in the Notts coalfield.

But when the special delegate conference was postponed, a majority of the working miners concluded that they were not going to be expelled. They were told by the scab leaders that not only would they not be expelled but they could not be expelled. This has had a demoralising effect in the Notts coalfield.

There are all sorts of rumours, suggestions that they have now been forgotten by the national union and so on. We know that's not true, but you can't blame people for speculating on what seems to them to be correct information.

We feel that the only



Miners still determined. Photo: Rick Matthews (IFL)

way the situation can be rectified is to hold the special delegate conference with the expulsion of the Notts Area on the agenda.

As far as NACODS are concerned we're telling our members what we told them last time NACODS threatened strike action - don't pin your hopes on it.

There are some very good militants within the ranks of NACODS - in fact some of them could teach our members a thing or two - and I'm not being derogatory about our members.

Nevertheless, I'll believe it when I see it and not before. That, I think, is an attitude that is held throughout the coalfield.

If it comes off it will be one hell of a bonus for us, but we're not pinning all our hopes on NACODS coming to our rescue like the US Cavalry.

NACODS have got a clear mandate from their last ballot. One of the items on that ballot was the argument about economic capacity and NACODS should, in the light of the Coal Board's arguments, go to the Coal Board, say that we've got a mandate on that argument, we've got an agreement that says the deputies will be included in any arrangement. And here you are trying to tell the NUM that if they sign surrender terms then they can have their way, and you are excluding NACODS.

They should insist on using the mandate given to them by their members unless the Coal Board come clean.

Scargill v. Walden

It was interesting to compare Brian Walden's interview with Arthur Scargill

with his previous interview with Thatcher.

To Thatcher he was subservient, virtually feeding questions to her along the lines of what do you want me to ask you your most highness. To Scargill he put a very abrasive and very objectionable line of questioning.

Arthur Scargill nevertheless handled the interview very well, and if there was anybody in the ranks of the NUM or the wider trade union movement who had doubts about a sell-out or whatever they want to call it, I think he laid it fairly strongly on the line. There is going to be no sell-out, there will be no retreat from the principles advanced by the national executive, there will be no negotiations on pit closures and there will be no signing of documents that amount to little more than terms of surrender.

NCB and Tories

It is a good thing that people, generally, are recognising the intransigence, not of the Coal Board but the government behind the Coal Board. I would have thought that it was blatantly obvious that the government does not want the Coal Board to negotiate, but to grind our noses into the dust.

But people have to bear in mind that the government have got problems as well as the miners. We don't dispute that we've got problems with this strike. But we are in a fairly solid position.

It's like a very long boxing match in which we've been pacing ourselves and the government have punched themselves out.

Paul Whetton is the secretary of the Notts Miners Rank and File Strike Committee, writing in a personal capacity.

Back the miners



A Recall TUC

I was disappointed that the proposal from South Wales and Durham to go for a recall TUC wasn't discussed by the NUM executive. I think it is a quite legitimate claim. We should demand a recall of the full TUC Congress to discuss openly and honestly the problems that we have been facing recently.

What seems to have happened is that at both the Labour Party and the TUC Conferences, a lot of people on the platform made a lot of fine speeches, and a lot of fine rhetoric, and there is no intention whatsoever of fulfilling their obligations and promises.

We need to recall them and say look, if you don't want to support us then at least have the decency to say so.

If you are going to support us, then work towards it and come up with the goods.

Either we mean it when we say we are going to fight Tory industrial relations law, or if we're not going to fight it then let's say so. Let's not say one thing and mean another.

I expressed my view on this and other matters at the Mineworkers Defence Committee conference last Saturday.

I believe a recall TUC conference should take place. I believe a date should be set for a general strike and I think that recall TUC conference should set that date and then work openly and actively towards it.

If they won't do it then they must make way for those who will.

I was disappointed with the conference in one respect. There are still sections of the labour movement that are being very, very sectarian and very obstructive in trying to use the miners' dispute as a power base for their own brand of politics. That has got to stop. We cannot afford to allow that sort of thing in the middle of the greatest industrial dispute that this country has ever seen.

Today was the day of action and we went from Nottingham into the Yorkshire coalfields. The East Midlands Regional TUC had organised nothing.

We were spread over quite a few collieries in the Yorkshire coalfield and they were very glad to see us. There were several demonstrations in the Yorkshire coalfield. I went to one at Bentley.

It is amazing, the very firm bonds that have been forged between striking Notts miners and Yorkshire strikers. This is something that is going to bear a lot of fruit in the future.

We must now try and lift the tempo of the strike. Morale is quite good even in Nottinghamshire.



A snowman gets his own back

Miners' pickets at a pit near Rotherham recently decided to build a snowman. To give their creation a little extra decoration they placed on its head a child's policeman's helmet.

Soon there arrived on the scene a police superintendent well-known in the South Yorkshire coalfield for his tin pot bullying and instructions to officers to 'take prisoners'.

This custodian of the law strutted up to the pickets and ordered them to remove the policeman's helmet from the snowman's head.

When the pickets refused he resorted to stronger phraseology, telling them to 'get that f...ing thing off that bastard snowman'.

Their stern refusal was more than he could bear, and he stormed off to his Land-Rover with the intention of running the innocent snowman over. This he duly did, but much to his surprise the front of his vehicle received a very large dent, because the pickets had inadvertently forgotten to tell him that they had built the snowman around an 18-inch thick concrete post.

Ten years of the enemy within

A SECRET society is running Britain. Ten years ago, in a carefully planned and executed coup d'etat, a small group of determined fanatics seized control of one of the oldest of British institutions. Four years later they had established their grip over all the seats of power. For years, the Tory ladies had been plotting. In Vicarage tea parties they laid their plans. Armies of them — with snotty accents, expensive hair-dos and ridiculous hats — would assemble at Tory Conference every year, apparently harmless, to prepare for their moment.

Their number one agent was a vicious grocer's daughter called Margaret Thatcher, previously convicted for stealing children's milk. In 1975, their plot hatched. Taking over the main bosses' party, they set themselves on the road to power.

Thatcher knew what she wanted from the start. And she had been brought up to take what she wanted.

In 1975 she said: "The pursuit of equality is a mirage. Opportunity means nothing unless it includes the right to be unequal".

When she got to power, she did everything to protect that inalienable right. She was determined to make everyone as unequal as possible.

Thatcher and the Tory ladies behind her longed for

glory. And in 1982 they got their chance.

But the blood of Argentinians only whetted their appetites for more.

From the start they had a special end in view. One aim above all others fired their sordid little middle-class imaginations when they first set out to conquer the world. One vision of the future Thatcher and her minions had always held before them. That was the image of workers grovelling.

They set out to fulfill that dream.

Right now, somewhere in Surrey, underground meetings of Tory ladies are taking place. They are all dressed in leopard-skin hats, mink stoles, and various other dead furry animals, and each carries a special secret weapon (code-name: handbag).

They are spending their evenings gorged on Pimm's and pate de foie gras. They discuss their new brass mantelpieces, and the state of the stock market.

And every half hour they dance round a burning effigy of Arthur Scargill.

Power in the shape of Agent Number One has driven them all so mad that they think they have won.

Renegades' reunion

MR Frank Chapple, the former leader of the EETPU and now the Baron Chapple of Hoxton, took his well-earned seat in the House of Lords recently.

Dressed up in regal woollies to do the ceremonial mumbo jumbo required of new-minted nobles, he had as his chief sponsor a certain Lord Willis, who introduced him to the House of Lords.

Lord Willis used to be plain Ted Willis. His greatest achievement in a public career that goes back 50 years was the creation of "Dixon of Dock Green", the BBC TV serial about the friendly neighbourhood bobby which ran for 20 years or so.

When those two dressed up in funny robes and hats to perform a pseudo-medieval pantomime in front of the TV cameras they thereby wrote an ironic footnote to labour movement history.

For Lord Willis was once a Communist, as, of course, was Chapple.

According to his recently published memoirs, when Chapple left the Labor Party and joined the Young Communist League in 1939, he did so in response to the urgings of Willis.

Willis was the leader of a powerful undercover Stalinist faction in the Labour Party youth movement, at that time known as the League of Youth.

When the Labour League of Youth was closed down by the Labour leadership in 1939, Willis broke his cover and publicly appealed to left wing Labour youth to follow him into the YCL. Hundreds of them did so, among them Chapple.

Willis changed his mind in the '40s and was sent to the House of Lords by Harold Wilson in the '60s.

Chapple stayed in the Communist Party until the mid-'50s and then went over to the virulent Right.



Miners' demonstration last summer

Conference calls for a general strike

Martin Thomas reports on the Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference on February 9, in Sheffield.

Their position, in fact, was full of contradictions. The most glaring and irresponsible was seen in the fact that they combined exaggerated pessimism about the prospects for solidarity with giving their votes in support of mindlessly "left" motions which demanded "no compromise" from the NUM leadership. (One speaker for this motion went so far as to declare against any "negotiated settlement".)

But the ultra-pessimistic and defeatist SWP's support meant that those motions were carried.

THE conference of the Mineworkers' Defence Committee in Sheffield, last Saturday, February 9, decided to expand the MDC organising committee. The committee set up from a fringe meeting at last year's Labour Party conference, which has organised MDC activity so far, will be augmented by delegates from national unions and campaigns and regional representatives elected at the conference itself.

Campaign

A motion originating from Socialist Organiser which committed to MDC to campaign for a general strike and a recall TUC was carried, but its significance was greatly reduced by the poor attendance at the conference.

Bill Ross from Maltby NUM told the conference: "This strike can be won. It's not a dead fight. Get your chins off the floor and stand proud with the miners".

Since Militant boycotted this MDC conference (like the last one), the largest single group present was the Socialist Workers' Party. They played a very bad role there.

Their main concern was to lead the (unsuccessful) opposition to the general strike call. John McLoughlin, Julie Waterston and Doug Holton from the SWP told us that a general strike is not the way to win. The TUC obviously isn't going to do anything, so we shouldn't put any demands on it. A general strike does not 'fit' the present situation; instead we must argue for the minimal forms of day-to-day workplace solidarity.

Unmoved

SO speakers argued that campaigning for a general strike complements, rather than contradicts, the essential day-to-day solidarity work: but the SWP was unmoved.

For many months the NUM leaders have been appealing for solidarity action — both via the trade union leaders and over their heads to the rank and file.

Yet the TUC has done almost nothing to help — and we didn't get a nationally-coordinated rank-and-file campaign (the MDC) going until nine months into the strike.

Now that the miners are in a difficult situation because of lack of solidarity, it was neither decent nor useful for this solidarity conference to start reading lectures to Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield about "no compromise".

Our job is to organise sufficient solidarity so that the NUM doesn't have to compromise.

Last Saturday's conference did support the call to organise

for a general strike and to campaign for a recall TUC, but the turnout was disappointing.

Organised on a tighter delegate basis than the December 2 conference, it was always going to have smaller numbers than the nearly 2000 who turned up then; and the weather badly affected attendance. But the 400 at the conference were fewer than expected, and most of them were supporters of left groups.

Nevertheless, the MDC still has a useful and irreplaceable role to play as the only national rank-and-file coordination of the various support groups.

If the new committee can work together constructively, especially for the class war prisoners' campaign, then we can still make up the lost ground.

More than days of action

Speech to the conference by Steve Battlemuch.

pay £5 billion for what they see as a 'worthwhile investment'. The labour movement needs to meet the Tories with the same strength and determination. We need a leadership as loyal to our class as Thatcher is to hers.

What is needed to win the strike and stop the Tory attacks is a general strike.

Now a general strike won't happen just by passing it at this conference, but passing it here is a vital first step. If we cannot convince the activists, we won't convince the movement.

Arguing for a general strike is not counterposed to day-to-day activity. We need money, yes, but we also need wide-scale industrial action.

If the TUC and Labour leaders had campaigned for a general strike from the begin-

ning, it could now be an immediate reality.

There have been two national dock strikes and solidarity action on the rail, including the magnificent action on January 17. There are other struggles taking place around the 1985 pay claims. My own union, CPSA, is committed to all-out action over our claim this year.

If the miners were defeated, we know these struggles would be much harder to win.

We need to demand the recall of the TUC to call our leaders to account.

A recall TUC would focus the debate in the movement around what action is needed to win the strike.

In conclusion: step up the collections; step up the picketing; mobilise for February 24 and March 6; recall the TUC; organise for a general strike.

The Tories are prepared to

Peter Heathfield

TUC: redeem your IOU!

Peter Heathfield speaking at the Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference last Saturday.

48 WEEKS on and the overwhelming majority of Britain's miners are still on strike.

You wouldn't get that impression from reading some of the popular papers who try to create the image that the majority of Britain's miners are now at work.

But at the commencement of the 48th week, the message from the NUM is quite clear and quite simple — no surrender, no bowing of the head, no sell-out, we stand firm behind the principles that motivated the union when we came out on strike on March 6.

That is the official situation in the NUM and you no doubt will recognise that during the past three weeks there has been yet another example of the National Coal Board's and the government's attempts to destabilise the NUM — talks are on, lifting morale, talks break down, demoralised miners, get back to work.

All these pressures have been exerted by the State on British miners and yet in this 48th week, the vast majority are standing firm, and their message to the leadership is coming through loud and clear, that we will tolerate even longer the hardship, the poverty, privation, yes, and in some instances destitution that the fight for the principles of defending jobs, the industry and mining communities has provoked.

That is the situation and we all have to recognise that during the course of the past eight weeks, there are those of our members who have succumbed to the pressures, not because they have changed their minds on the principles for which they have struggled for so long, but they have been driven back in many instances, by economic circumstances.

The National Coal Board privately acknowledge that their campaign to get people back to work has failed miserably. And it didn't start just before Christmas. The campaign to get people back to work commenced at the end of June, when the Coal Board first agreed to speak to us. It was when those talks failed that the campaign to get people back to work really commenced.

But throughout the long summer, throughout the long autumn, it remained very much a drip, and the campaign of bribery and blackmail that prevailed prior to Christmas also did no more than create a drip of a return. It didn't become a trickle as they anticipated. It failed to become a surge that they required.

And they stated that by Christmas the strike would be broken; by Christmas 8,000 men a week would have returned to work. And there is only two weeks in that whole period when more than 5,000 men have gone back to work.

5,000 men represents about 2½% of our total labour force.

So it is a drip, which in my opinion is going to dry up. But the pressures in the next few weeks are going to be on those areas that have stood absolutely firm from day one. The pressures are



Edinburgh NUM Rally. Heathfield, Scargill, McGahey. Photo: Rick Matthews, IFL

going to be on Wales, with 98% of their members on strike; the pressures are going to be on Yorkshire with 93% of their members still on strike; the pressures are going to be on Durham with 84% of their members still on strike, and on Scotland.

Ask Paul Whetton, the Notts miner, how many Nottinghamshire miners have returned to work in the last three months. You can count them on two hands. Similarly the Kent comrades are doing exceptionally well, but the bulk of our members are carried by Yorkshire, Wales, Scotland and Durham, and Nottinghamshire of course. So that's the situation.

Notts

In Nottinghamshire, 3,000 men are still sticking it out, and since May there has not been more than 4,000 out on strike. They are the foundation of the NUM, they are the solid supporters of the policies of the NUM.

How many miners have returned to work in the small coalfield of Leicestershire? It employs 2,000 men. The "Dirty Thirty" are still there. They have sustained the pressure, they continue to support the union, and now the media and the propaganda machine will turn their direction to Yorkshire, to Scotland, to Durham.

So it is those coalfields who need your support as well. They need the morale boosters. They need the help that the labour movement has got to provide to sustain us through this struggle and on to a victory. And I am confident that rank and file trade unionists around the country will respond in the way that they have responded since the solidarity committees around the country were set up to help us through this difficult period, to help us over this

hurdle that will get the Coal Board back to the negotiating table, willing to negotiate an honourable settlement for Britain's miners.

We've gone through an interesting three weeks and it is worthy of note that at the annual meeting of the Coal Industry Benevolent Trust, some three weeks ago, it was the National Coal Board that approached the NUM about the need for talks, for negotiations without preconditions to get away from this dispute which has cost the nation £5 billion, and is costing the National Coal Board dearly.

With MacGregor's approval, they approached us and talked about informal talks to lay the foundation, with no preconditions, to establish negotiations that would bring the dispute to an honourable conclusion. I, along with our chief executive officer, met Ned Smith and Kevin Hunt in a four hour meeting, when we had in my view a formula for negotiations, unfettered by preconditions.

I came out of that meeting at 3.20 and bought an Evening Standard that had been published at 1.00 p.m. With banner headlines, the Evening Standard said, "Talks have failed" and Eaton is quoted as saying that the informal talks have proven to be futile. "There will be no negotiations". And that paper was published three hours before those informal talks finished.

Signatures

Then the NCB and Mrs Thatcher said "We need a piece of paper on which the NUM append their signatures that they will accept the closure of uneconomic pits." They are inviting the NUM to sign away its birthright; to sign away the fundamental principle of defending the

interests of their members.

And there's no chance of the NUM's negotiators selling that birthright.

So, no negotiations. We see the media propaganda war once more directed at the leadership of the NUM. We see David Hart on behalf of Downing Street, spewing out his filth against the NUM and the principles of trade unionism.

NCB

Those within the National Coal Board who wanted to negotiate have thus been undermined.

We've spent three weeks burning the midnight oil, talking to the TUC, talking to ACAS, and all along the line there is a clear indication that Mrs Thatcher does not want an honourable settlement to this dispute.

She wants the heads of Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey on a platter. Her objective is to destroy the NUM. I say to the broader trade union movement that it is time you all recognised that the attack on the NUM is part of a growing attack on the whole of the British trade union movement. While the movement sits back and allows the NUM to be isolated, then it seems to me we are prepared to sow the seeds of the movement's destruction. If the trade union movement is not prepared to defend itself, then the face of trade unionism in Britain will be adversely affected for almost a generation. The movement must take some responsibility. We must continue to call on the movement to respond to the campaign and struggle of Britain's miners — a struggle which, since the beginning of December, has been conducted without access to our funds, to our own money.

When our funds were sequestered and a receiver

appointed, they galavanted around Europe, seeking to get all of that cash, allegedly staying in £85 per night hotels at the NUM's expense, and guess what, the fine has been paid.

They've officially got money from Zurich. I'll let you into a secret. The NUM's money is still sound. It has not been touched. But the parent bank in Europe has paid the money over to the Receiver to avoid any further embarrassment to the banking system.

The important aspect of this search for the NUM's money is that the money for the fine of £200,000 has been available since day one. The National Coal Board owe the NUM sufficient money to pay that fine. So it is not the fine that preoccupies the Receiver and the sequestrators, it is getting hold of the money and preventing the NUM from functioning.

Survival

We are able to survive at this time because of the help of one or two friendly organisations, but there is a limit to what those trade unions can do. And a lot of trade unions, when they received the official letter from Price Waterhouse reneged on their commitment. They didn't want to be dragged before the courts. But there are those who have continued to support us.

And so the struggle is intensifying. The British miners are continuing to defend their jobs. It is a problem for the whole of the trade union movement. It is not, now, the problem of British miners and my appeal to you is this: please help us to persuade Britain's labour movement to redeem the IOUs they entered into last September at the TUC Congress. This dispute will be brought to a conclusion when there is some action,

Back the miners



when the determination that has been expressed from rostrums and podiums, is displayed at grass roots level, by working people who realise that their future is at stake as well.

I don't think the NUM, throughout this dispute, has been making any excessive demands on society. It is rather ironical that the longest industrial dispute in Britain's history stems from a union that hadn't got a demand on the table.

We had no demand in front of the employer. Our demand, if it be a demand, is for the withdrawal of a unilateral declaration to destroy the Plan for Coal, by MacGregor's insistence on taking out capacity and closing uneconomic pits, deciding how much capacity needed taking out and then finding the pits to fit the bill.

That is in conflict with the tripartite agreement drawn up by Tony Benn, it destroys a long-standing agreement that has operated and protected the country's energy needs through to the turn of the century, and MacGregor, aided by Thatcher is seeking to destroy that principle.

Right

It is not excessive to demand the right to work. It is a fundamental principle and I say miners and working people have the right to plan their lives free from the fear and anxiety of unemployment.

They are entitled to plan their lives like those that have the wealth of this nation are able to plan their lives. Unemployment is not an act of god, it stems from the policies of man and woman and working people by combining together and working together will be able to resist those kind of pressures that are imposed on us.



John Harris



John Harris

Economics? Wh

THE Government and the Coal Board claim that the striking miners are defending their own particular interests at the expense of the nation as a whole and the hard-press taxpayer.

Why should we subsidise miners to produce coal at a loss, they ask. We may perhaps sympathise with the miners, but their struggle is a vain attempt to thwart the iron laws of economic necessity.

A lot of people agree: the NUM has not been able to communicate an alternative perspective to them. The NUM's negotiating position, which rules the 'economic' state of the pits out of consideration, seems to be a quixotic stab at the realities of the modern world.

The real issue behind the dispute, however, is not whether 'economic' considerations should be taken into account, but rather what kind of economics.

The actual conflict is between a monetarist conception of economic rationality, based on profit maximisation, and a conception based on the general needs not only of miners but of the majority of the people.

The goals of the strike in fact accord not only with the defensive needs of miners to keep their jobs and communities intact, but also with a rational plan for energy.

Economists of various political colourings have made this point in the long duration of the strike, but their explorations have been obscured by the barrage of counter-propaganda.

Take first the issue of the 'profitability' of the mining industry. The NCB claims that pits make a loss, and that state subsidy can only be avoided by means of closing the least 'economic' pits. This claim is borne out by the figures which the NCB produces.

But 'profit' figures can be

The fight against the closure of 'uneconomic' pits gets right to the heart of the capitalist system. It challenges the law of profit over people.

What is meant by an 'uneconomic' pit? How do the bosses judge what is and what is not 'economic'? Bob Fine looks at the issues

very misleading.

Andrew Glyn, for example, has shown that the NCB's version of 'costs' includes the costs of closing down pits — the very thing against which the NUM is fighting — and costs (of subsidence, pensions for retired miners, etc.) — which would continue even if every pit in the country were closed.

They also include £400 million interest payments from the NCB to... the government. A large chunk of the state 'subsidy' to the NCB goes straight back to the state again as interest payments.

Thus the costs of the mining industry appear higher than they actually are and the profits appear lower. In fact Britain's pits produce coal of value greater than its costs of production: the NCB's figures make it

appear otherwise.

We should also remember that the price at which coal is sold is regulated by the state. It is not a product of market forces.

The huge leap in the price of oil around 1973 showed that energy prices are not set by free competition. Depending on political circumstances, the price of oil today could be anything between the cost of production in Saudi Arabia — a tiny fraction of the present price — and the cost in the most difficult oilfields, in the US for example. Supply can be balanced to demand at almost any price just by choosing how fast the more easily-worked oilfields are going to be exploited.

Coal prices could be cut dramatically, no doubt about it, if the NCB switched to a policy of exploiting only the richest,

easiest seams, and leaving the rest. Would such a switch be 'economic'? Yes and no. It would be a choice for short-term profit now, at the expense of the majority of the people in future.

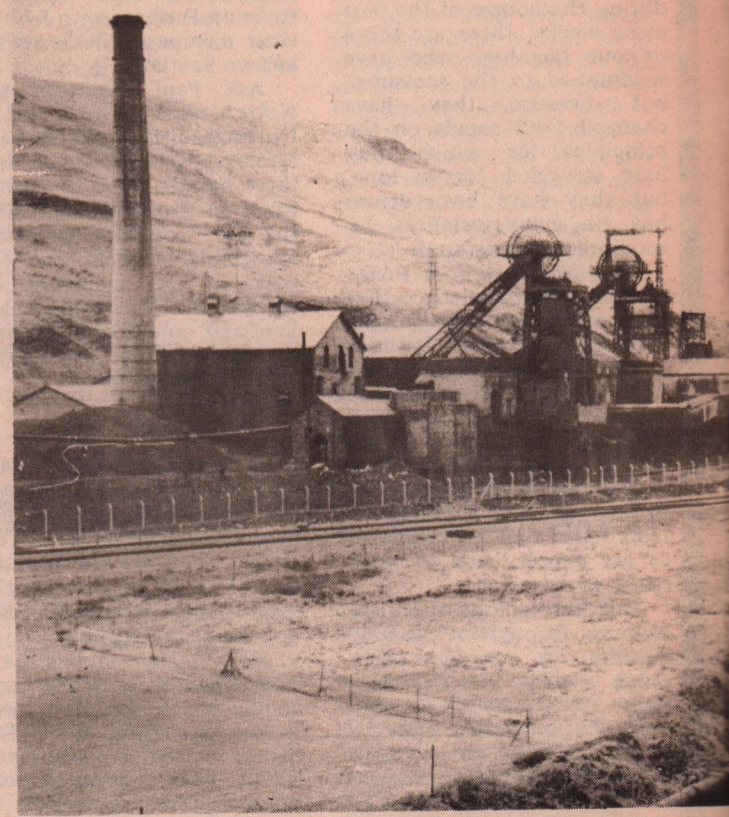
Again, the huge profits made by the Electricity Board represent a transfer of surplus away from the coal industry through the low price at which coal is sold to it. The profits which appear in the Electricity Board's books were in considerable part produced by coal miners. A number of economists have concluded from such considerations that, as things now stand, the NCB makes a considerable surplus. Far from being subsidised by taxpayers, it makes a sizeable contribution to the state's finances.

But surely, whatever the state of the mining industry as a whole, a lot of particular pits are 'uneconomic'?

Andrew Glyn has examined this claim too, and shown that if you include the costs of redundancy payments, dole, lost tax revenue, etc., then there is not a single pit where closure would be 'economic' in terms of costing less to the state than keeping the pit open.

In addition, it is difficult to fragment the industry and treat each pit like an independent concern. A lot of the Coal Board's costs cannot be allocated precisely to this or that pit. From the figures given about Cortonwood, for instance, a Professor of Accountancy has reckoned that it was making a surplus before the strike started. And yet its impending closure without consultation was the spark which lit the fuse in the first place.

In addition, the profitability of individual pits is not just a function of the material coal deposits lying within them, but of managerial policy decisions



An 'uneconomic pit'. Lewis Merthyr in the Rhondda Valley. Photo: John Harris

— how much investment is put in, what kinds of new technology are developed, what output figures are set, how machinery from already closed pits is redeployed.

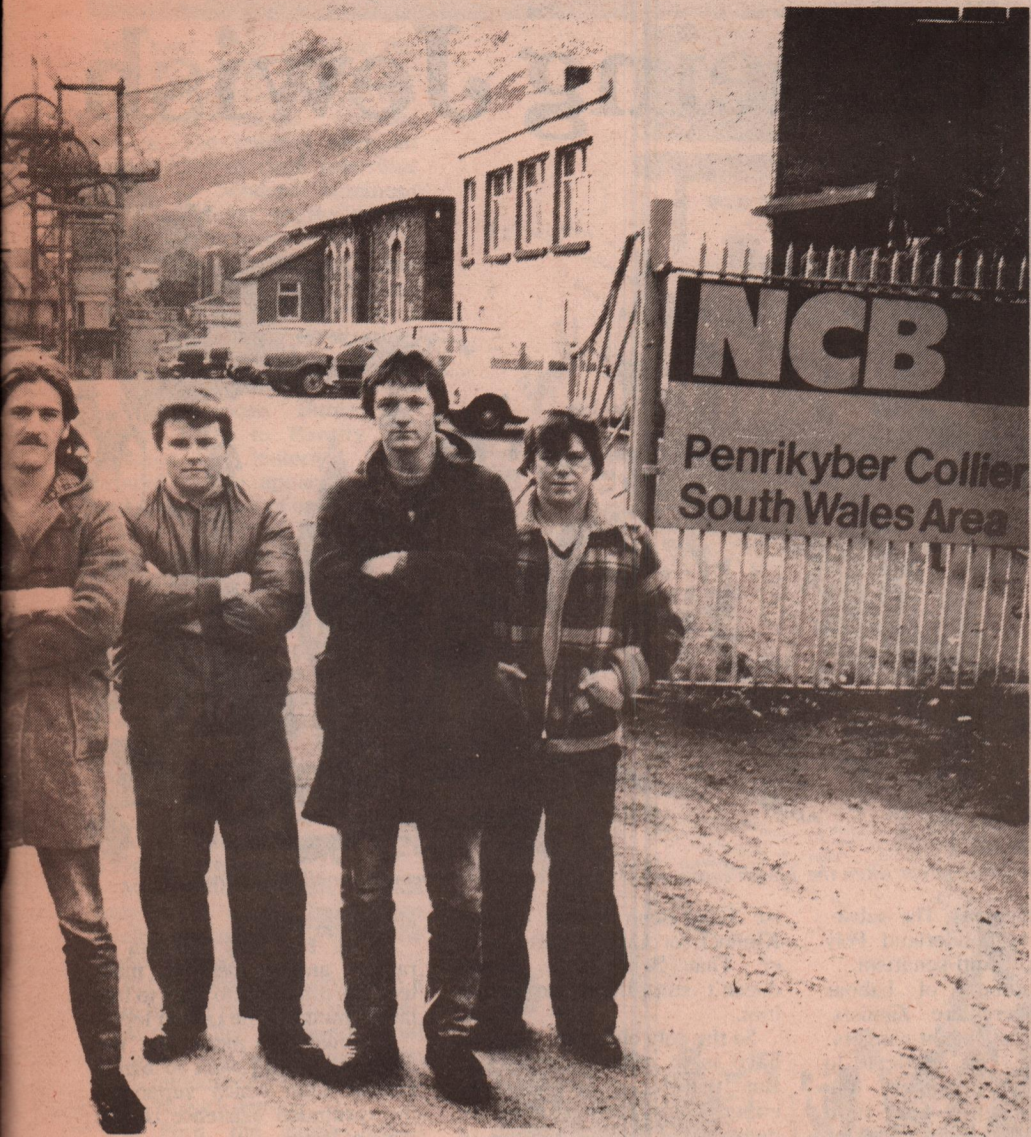
In other words — rather than pits being singled out for closure because they are 'uneconomic', pits are 'uneconomic' because they have been singled out for closure and therefore have not received investment.

The NCB claims that it has good grounds for closing particular pits which are not revealed in the figures. As the professor declared, however, the NCB cannot expect to be taken on

trust without revealing their case either to the miners or to the general public.

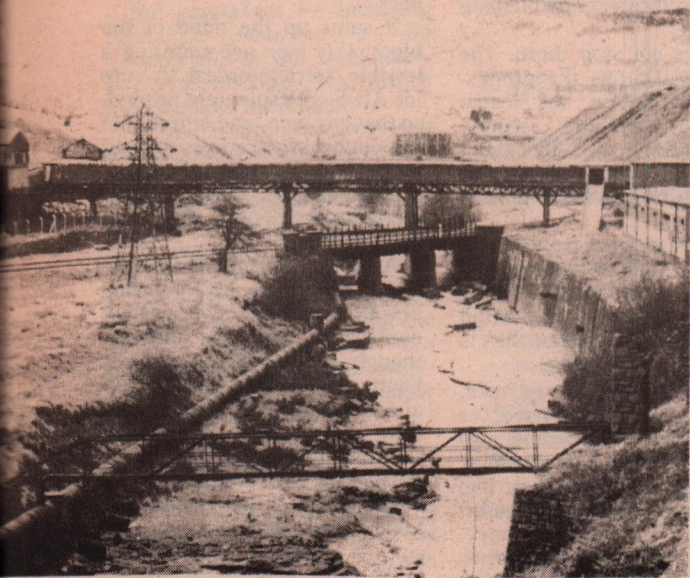
The Coal Board's 'profit' figures also leave out of all consideration the social costs of closing pits. The most obvious of these is the cost of unemployment. As well as the direct loss of pit jobs, there would also be a loss of other jobs and businesses in the mining communities.

If we see the strike itself as a result of the closure programme (rather than Scargill's 'political' manipulation of 'gullible' miners!), then the huge costs of policing, substituting oil for



John Harris

Close economics?



...al, dole, loss of coal production, deliveries by road rather than by rail, etc., should be added to the social costs of the Thatcher/MacGregor position. If pits are closed, what about the costs of alternative sources of energy? The government's focus has been on nuclear power. But it appears that nuclear power stations are more expensive than coal, even without taking into account the potential risks of leakage, waste disposal, and transportation. Alternatively, the government threatens that it will import coal from wherever it is cheapest. This would probably mean

America, South Africa and Poland. The sum total of world energy resources will be reduced by the wilful 'sterilisation' (as the NCB call it) of maybe five-sixths of Britain's coal reserves. Meanwhile, the price of foreign coal will depend on the changing exchange rate between the pound and the dollar. Andrew Glyn points out that though imported coal is cheaper (at Tilbury) than British coal at the start of the strike, the fall in the pound means that British coal is now cheaper than imported! Such coal imports would be a

lever to import into British mines the dire working conditions and environmental neglect that is characteristic of the production of cheap coal in countries where trade unions are weak.

Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has called the miners' strike "a worthwhile investment". What does he have in mind?

The government's aim is to maximise the *rate of profit* in the mines, whatever the economic and social cost — and, by crippling trade unionism, to increase the rate of profit generally.

It stands to reason that some pits are more profitable than others. If the less profitable ones are closed, and only the more easily-accessible coal is mined, then the rate of profit as a whole will rise. This is the nub of Lawson's economic insights.

In pursuing this plan, the government and the NCB declare their indifference to the damage caused to miners, mining communities, Britain's overall energy requirements, and world energy needs.

If you try to calculate the total costs to the nation, then keeping pits open is more 'economic' than closing them. But who is 'the nation'?

For the ruling class, pit closures are economic, because they increase their profits and weaken their enemies (the trade unions). For the working class, pit closures are uneconomic, because they put people on the dole, destroy communities, and weaken trade unionism.

There is no umpire to average out the costs and benefits of different classes: struggle decides.

The government's policy will make a speciality of its use from their point of view if the mines are sold off to private owner-



John Harris

ship, as the *Economist* magazine has advocated. From the point of view of private capital, the rate of profit is all that is important. The cost to the general public counts for nothing — or may even be a benefit! (High unemployment has its advantages for the bosses). The scenario has been set by allowing private monopolies to take over the open-cast mines. Now, presumably, in deep mining, the huge costs of investment and closures, paid for by the taxpayer, could be discounted by the government — as was done in the case of British Telecom — and the mining industry sold off to eager profiteers. Maximising the rate of profit

on the mines is a policy so fraught with damage to miners and most of the people that it must require the elimination of all democratic influences over how the industry is run. Union-busting and privatisation are the two sides of this coin, backed up by a rhetoric of the 'managers' right to manage'. What does this right mean except that the public be barred from any say over the management of a vital public resource? The hypocrisy of the government's commitment to democracy comes into sharp relief in its championing of a slogan which can only indicate a return to the days of absolute management.

What would democracy in the mining and energy industry mean in practice? Formally, that the books of the NCB must be opened, that far greater parliamentary and trade union scrutiny over decisions about production and distribution be instituted, that the massive financial privileges of managers be curtailed, that top managers be subjected to some form of democratic selection procedure, and so forth. The ways in which mining could be democratised in its structure clearly need to be subjected to public debate.

In terms of economic content — the mining industry needs to be run not to maximise the profits of a few, but to gain the maximum economic and social benefit for the majority of people. This too requires debate over such matters as how much of the surplus should be distributed to miners, how much should be reinvested in the mining industry, and how much should go to other social uses.

Production geared to social need, rather than the private economic interest, will raise more rather than less public discussion.

In my view this is what lies hidden under the seemingly simple categories of the 'economic' and the 'uneconomic'. What is at stake in this strike — though it has often been only partially articulated — is not *whether* economic considerations are important, but *what kind*.

Locked in uneven combat are two different conceptions of economic rationality: in one corner profit maximisation and managerial dictatorship, and in the other, social need and industrial democracy.

The Government 'referee' has firmly taken sides — and is indeed the captain of the side which fights for private profit.

French CP in disarray

By Martin Thomas

THE FRENCH Communist Party congress on February 6 to 10 was as dramatic in its way as the British CP's present crisis.

For the first time since the Stalinisation of the CP in the 1920s, the Central Committee did not come to the congress united. Pierre Juquin, Marcel Rigout, and other prominent CP leaders openly challenged general secretary Georges Marchais.

The French CP, with 600,000 members and over 20,000 full-timers, is much stronger than the British CP, and the party machine was able to keep a big majority behind Marchais. But rank-and-file discontent is certainly much wider than the 3% vote against the Central Committee majority, and the 7% abstentions, which the party officially admits.

The broad lines of the division are similar to those in the British CP, but the details are different. The French CP leadership has a similar line to the Morning Star in Britain.

In the 1970s it officially abandoned the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and declared its willingness to work within NATO. But since 1977, when it broke away from the 'Union of the Left' (an alliance with the Socialist Party), it has stayed quite close to Moscow.

It supported the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan and the martial law in Poland.

The opposition within the CP leadership is similar to the 'Eurocommunists' of Marxism Today in Britain. They are not happy about the CP's withdrawal from the Socialist-led government in July last year and its subsequent shift to a more militant line in industry. They talk about the danger of the CP 'marginalising' itself and becoming 'the biggest grouplet of the far left' rather than a major parliamentary party.

Pierre Juquin calls for an alliance of 'the socialist parties, Greens, pacifists, Third-Worldists, and some religious forces'.

But, as in Britain, the 'working class' rhetoric of the pro-Moscow wing is pretty shallow. The official line is a 'new majority popular rallying'. As with the 'broad democratic alliance' in Britain, no-one quite knows what it means.

The difference between the British CP and the French CP is that the French CP has a mass working-class base. It is also less rare in France than in Britain for CP workers to see themselves as revolutionaries. The up-beat, declamatory style of the French CP daily *L'Humanité* contrasts with the lame,

hangdog manner of the Morning Star.

What do the CP workers think about it all? It is difficult to tell. Some agree with Alain Amicabile, a former electrician who told the Central Committee last June: "For the youth, we are not the party of human rights, we are not the party of democratic socialism; we are the party of the Gulag and of Afghanistan".

But most are just disillusioned. The CP officially admits to having lost 100,000 members since 1980, and dissidents claim that only one-third of the branches, and one-third of the members in those branches, are active.

The CP vote has declined dramatically. Up to 1979 it was around 20%. But during the 1970s the Socialist Party — which had been down to 5% of the vote in 1969 — overtook the CP. In the 1984 Euro-elections the CP got only 11% of the votes cast. As a percentage of the total electoral roll — 6 per cent — the CP's vote was the lowest ever.

Even that minimal vote is pretty disillusioned. Opinion polls show that between 35% and 50% of CP voters have a 'negative' attitude to Marxism, dislike the USSR, think the public sector should be rolled back, and consider that sexual liberalisation has gone too far.

In a way the French CP's crisis combines the crises of the Labour Party and of the CP in Britain. Like the Labour Party here, the CP has been the major party of the working class — but its drab, bureaucratic and timid version of socialism (1945 vintage) is less and less attractive. Like the British CP, the French CP has the problem that its main point of distinction from a bigger social-democratic party — its link with Moscow — is now a liability. (The French SP has suffered electorally since its 1981 peak of 38%, but still has many more voters than the CP).

The CP is caught both ways. Either it distances itself from Moscow and moves closer to the Socialist Party — in which case it looks like a second-rate SP, and loses support. Or it moves away from the SP and closer to Moscow — in which case it looks like "the party of the Gulag"... and loses support.

The crisis could go a lot further yet. The collapse of the Spanish CP is an indication. Since 1977 it has gone down from 200,000 to 40,000 members, and from 9% of votes to 4 per cent.

The question is whether the decline of the CP will yield new recruits for the revolutionary left, or only for the SP and for political apathy.

Banned for being Jewish

By Jane Ashworth

THE Union of Jewish Students is still outlawed at Sunderland Polytechnic. Over 500 students at the almost 1000-strong general meeting voted last Friday to continue the ban.

Student Union President Andy Burke, who opposed the ban, now faces a no-confidence motion at the Executive and intends to take the whole matter to the union council later this week.

During the week leading up to the general meeting, the Union of Jewish Students organised a national rally in Sunderland which was leafleted by Socialist Students in NOLS (SSIN) supporters from the North East and Manchester.

Unfortunately, there is now the danger of the Polytechnic's management stepping in. The leader of Sunderland Council — Jim Slater — is a Zionist and a right winger who sits on the governing body. It is feared that the ban will be used to further erode the union's autonomy.

The ban has more serious implications than at first seem obvious.

The confrontation at Sunderland started when the general meeting passed a motion saying that Zionism is racism. So it followed that the UJS, which is a Zionist organisation, should be banned.

But that simple equation is a nonsense in principle. Certainly Israel is a racist state, but to say that Zionism — the belief that Jews have a right to a state — is



The Battle of Cable Street when the Jewish communities and the labour movement mobilised against the fascists.

racism is ridiculous. The subsequent ban at Sunderland Poly is bordering on anti-semitism.

Large numbers of Labour Party members are Zionists. And not just right-wingers. Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Jo Richardson all support the continued existence of the state of Israel. In that, they are Zionists, even though support for Israel is only one part of their politics, they are still Zionists.

Many of the comrades at Sunderland who voted to ban the UJS are also on the left of the Labour Party. Some will be supporting the campaign to pressur-

ise Tony Benn to run against Kinnock for Labour Party leader. That Benn is a Zionist doesn't stop them supporting him.

So the only objection they can have is to organised Zionists. But that doesn't hold true either. Benn and Heffer are members of Labour Friends of Israel, so in that sense they are organised Zionists.

When it comes to wider politics, then the misguided comrades at Sunderland do not think that being a Zionist puts you beyond the pale.

Zionism is not such an issue for them that everything else is

always secondary.

So to say that Zionism is racism, and to mean it, must lead the comrades to want to ban large chunks of the Labour left.

It would also mean that the comrades would want to ban a Labour Club which supported the continued existence of the state of Israel.

But Sunderland wouldn't carry that out. Certainly they may choose to leaflet or picket a Tony Benn meeting, but to talk about banning him is clearly ridiculous.

The only people Sunderland want to ban are the Jewish Zionists!

Bigots latch onto AIDS

By Edward Ellis

"GAY plague kills priest", blazes the Sun, as Reverend Gregory Richards became the 52nd victim in Britain of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome — AIDS.

"Two pubs ban gays in AIDS terror", the Sun goes on a few days later. A Sun reporter quotes the publican: "AIDS is a real threat to society's moral fibre".

It seems his clients were afraid of catching AIDS from beer glasses. Like the publican, some of them may think their "moral fibre" is a physical organ.

The same article goes on to report the rampaging of the AIDS virus across the length and breadth of Britain: Liverpool, Bournemouth...Truro.

In Truro, it seems, three suspected AIDS victims were treated as out-patients. The Sun comments: "The three men — all homosexuals — have been allowed to return to their own homes and wander about the community." Whatever next?

Such is ignorance about AIDS that the media can suggest that it is quite permissible to effectively imprison gay men who are merely suspected of having the disease.

Now, 'practising homosexuals' are not to give blood, because someone died as a result of a blood transfusion. (Anyone ever heard of blood tests?)

A number of basic points are put across in the hysteria about AIDS, which are worth looking at:

1. AIDS is not only incurable, but completely contagious. The slightest contact with an AIDS victim could mean certain death.

2. AIDS is a 'gay plague'. By this is meant not only that gay men are among the highest 'risk groups', but that gay men put everyone else at risk, too.

3. Therefore, AIDS is a pro-

duct of moral depravity (for many indeed — including, among others, Donna Summer who made her fame and fortune out of gay discos — AIDS is divine retribution).

These three points all contradict each other. If, as they claim, AIDS is the result of moral depravity, that is, sexual promiscuity, then how can it be caught from beer glasses? It is difficult to see how non-gay people can contract a disease from gay people that requires sexual contact.

But the hysteria is not built on logic. It is built upon anti-gay prejudice. And an article by Peregrine Worsthorne in the Sunday Telegraph (February 10) in attempting to give a rational coating to the reactionary pill, spells it all out.

It is easy, Worsthorne comments, to look to homosexual men as a 'scapegoat', as AIDS threatens to reach epidemic proportions.

"Not that scapegoat here is quite the right word", he adds, "since it carries with it the suggestion — wholly inappropriate in respect of AIDS — of some innocent person or group being forced to bear an undeserved burden of guilt."

So, gay men are 'guilty'. Guilty of what? Of being "the main transmitters of the disease".

It is utterly bizarre logic. According to Worsthorne, presumably, when a flu epidemic is going around, the 'blame' lies with the first person who caught it and then spitefully inflicted it on everyone else.

But it is worse than that. It is not only bizarre and illogical to 'blame' gay men for AIDS: it is sick.

Thousands of people have died from this disease. Thous-

ands more have had their lives ruined, and expect to die at any time — the smallest cold can lead to death.

Many of these thousands are not gay men. Many, of course, are. The tragedy is that these perfectly innocent people have been devastated by an uncontrollable virus. Worsthorne and his like can only add to their terrible predicament by blaming them for it.

He does not stop there. The cause of AIDS "is the promiscuous indulgence in sexual practices which until recently were condemned by both Church and State as perverted and unnatural, not to say grossly unhygienic."

Quite why gay sex is less hygienic than heterosexual sex is presumably a secret locked in Worsthorne's sordid mind. But his statement is logical nonsense anyway.

If AIDS is caused by gay sex, then all people who have, or have had, gay sex would also have AIDS. Sex obviously doesn't cause AIDS. It is like saying food poisoning is caused by eating.

Worsthorne goes on to protest at "their (i.e. gay people's) conscious policy, in recent years, of coming out of the closet...in proud, not to say brazen, publicity."

This is the crunch. Worsthorne cannot abide the fact that lesbians and gay men are who they are, refuse to be put down for it, resist all manner of oppressions and repressions, and fight the kind of sick bigotry he himself so crudely represents.

Dr Worsthorne has a cure for AIDS, saturated with his bigotry. "There is already a moral vaccine against AIDS: chastity, which needs no taxpayer's subsidy."

So: the moral solution is to stop having sex, and all the

better because Mr Worsthorne won't have to pay (except perhaps for increased numbers of psychiatrists)!

People like Worsthorne, are not, when they talk about AIDS, talking about the virus. They are using the tragedy of AIDS to once more foist a savagely repressive morality on gays. They want to turn the clock back.

It sums up the mind of the bigot. Gay men are suffering a terrible, terrible ordeal. A cure for AIDS is desperately needed, so that gay men, and others, can live out healthy sex lives without mortal fear. Worsthorne's 'cure' is that people should simply mutilate their own existence, deny their own nature.

AIDS is transmitted through blood, or through semen during sex. People with the virus do not necessarily catch the disease, though they will be carriers. High risk groups include gay and bisexual men, intravenous drug users, and people from Central Africa (where AIDS appears to have originated, and where most of its victims are heterosexual).

Sex

It cannot be caught from cups, towels, toilet seats or any other such objects.

What is needed is as much money as possible to be spent on finding a cure.

The "cure" of the Worsthornes for what they call the 'gay plague' is no cure but a more terrible social disease. It is to subject society once again to the plague of repression — which has mutilated, crippled, incapacitated and killed untold millions of men and women. We are still fighting to break free from that plague. The moralists and the bigots feeding off AIDS are that plague's freshly virulent and reinvigorated bacilli.



THE lights went out over the Peruvian capital of Lima last week while the visiting Pope was castigating radical Catholic priests. The culprits were an organisation of rural guerrillas known as Sendero Luminoso who had blown up the pylons providing electricity to the city.

In Peru, as in many Latin American states dictatorships come and go, violence flares across town and countryside: chaos rules.

A new Special Brief from the Latin American Bureau — "Peru: Paths to Poverty" — explains the historical background to the apparent chaos and makes sense of it.

Peru is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. And as elsewhere in the Third World, there is great inequality of wealth: the poor are extremely poor, and getting poorer. Purchasing power has fallen by over 50% over the last ten years, leading to widespread malnutrition.

In 1983, the minimum wage paid for less than half of the necessary family food baskets. Peru has a high death rate, and a low life expectancy.

Meanwhile the state spends only 4.1% of its budget on health (as against 12% on the armed forces).

But it is also a country with a long history of popular struggle.

A relatively advanced social system, ruled by the Inca kings, was conquered by the Spanish in the sixteenth century.

In Peru, the native Indian population was not wiped out, as it was, for example in Chile and Argentina. The colonial class system was moulded on to divisions between the Spanish-descended conquerors and the Indians. This relationship continues to be important for Peruvian politics.

The economy became incorporated into the world market. Peru did not, however, become trapped in the production of a single export crop. During its history, various exports — all raw materials, to be sure — have been dominant.

By the beginning of this century, Peru was ruled by an 'agro-export oligarchy' allied to foreign — by this time US — capital. This oligarchy grew fat on an export boom "based on a range of products that was unusually wide for a Latin American country (including) sugar, cotton, wool, rubber, silver, copper and oil". (p.25).

But capitalism — including capitalist industry — did develop and so did a relatively powerful working class which built a labour movement.

In its youth, the Peruvian working class was heavily influenced by anarcho-syndicalism. It was able to organise a general strike in Lima in 1911. And in 1918 a second general strike won the eight hour day.

But by the early 1920s, popular movements — including the labour movement — were becoming an ideological battleground between two major political forces.

Communist Party

One, which was to become the Communist Party, was led by the greatest figure in Peruvian socialism, Jose Carlos Mariategui. Mariategui rejected the Stalin-Bukharin view — becoming dominant in the international communist movement at that time — that in countries like Peru, the working class should ally with the 'national bourgeoisie' for a 'bourgeois revolution'.

He argued that conditions in Peru meant that revolution had to be socialist to succeed.

The other intellectual leader at that time was Victor Raul Haya de la Torre. Haya, who founded the APRA (American Revolutionary Popular Alliance), was an influential figure throughout Spanish America. His and APRA's politics — although initially quite radical — were populist rather than

Above: general strike 1977, below peasants mobilising in the sierra.



Paths out of misery

Clive Bradley reviews 'Peru — Paths to Poverty', a Special Brief from the Latin America Bureau, written by Michael Reid, 130 pages, £2.95.

socialist, looking to 'national' rather than working class goals.

In the 1930s, the military crushed opposition from both APRA and the Communist Party — including an attempted insurrection by CP-led miners in 1930.

By the period of the World War, APRA had moved seriously rightwards, so after the war it became the major force in the government.

"Impressed by Roosevelt's New Deal, Haya...reversed his position on US imperialism [which meant] the end to Aprista [i.e. APRA's] opposition to foreign investment." (p.34).

Industrialisation

Peru underwent quite rapid industrialisation in the 1950s and '60s, bringing forward new social forces, including an increasingly vocal capitalist class. While APRA continued to be the major single political force, it was by the early sixties being seriously challenged by the middle-class Accion Popular (AP) of Fernando Belaunde Terry.

The 1962 elections led to deadlock between APRA and AP, with the army stepping in to

see to it that Belaunde took office the following year.

However, the left was growing rapidly in the late 1960s, and the Belaunde government becoming increasingly unpopular. It resorted to repression of the left as a whole following a brief attempt at guerrilla activity, and became notorious for corruption and economic mismanagement.

Bloodless

Finally, having been seen to surrender Peru's interests to foreign oil companies, the Belaunde government was overthrown by a bloodless coup in 1968.

The regime of General Juan Velasco Alvarado in large part aimed to simultaneously head off and repress the left and the popular movements. But it also carried out some dramatic and radical reforms.

Apparently radical military regimes seeking to 'modernise' their countries — i.e. advance capitalist development — are, of course, common in the Third World. In many respects Velasco's was typical.

It embarked upon "a series of nationalisation and state take-

overs between 1968 and 1976 that transferred to state ownership the majority of large foreign or oligarchic enterprises in strategic sectors of the economy" (p.44).

It also introduced a land reform that began to redistribute land to the poorer peasants.

The actions of the Velasco regime broke the power of the old oligarchy, modernised the Peruvian state (in particular through a fairly radical educational reform), increased the State's role in the economy, and established a more equitable relationship to foreign capital.

In 1975 the Velasco regime was removed in a second military coup. The new president, Morales Bermudez, attempted to roll back many of the 'state capitalist' reforms and in particular to take back the gains the working class had made.

Deflationary policies, attacking workers' living standards, brought the regime up against the workers' movement. Workers began to face terrible reductions in real wages and living conditions, and responded in a series of strikes.

In turn the Bermudez regime "acquired the characteristics of

a traditional military dictatorship" (p.69). It failed to defeat the working class, however, and in June-July 1977, huge strikes erupted in protest at price rises, culminating in a one-day — and highly successful — general strike.

Working class combativity forced the military to stand aside. Elections were held in June 1978 for a Constituent Assembly. APRA once again emerged as the major single force. But this time new political forces to APRA's left were growing and collectively they won 30% of the vote. These included FOCEP, an alliance of various groups led by the charismatic Hugo Blanco, a long-standing Peruvian Trotskyist.

Reinstatement

The elections took place against a back-drop of heightened class struggle. Many workers had been victimised and sacked after the general strike the previous year. The demand for their reinstatement became the focal point of working class struggle.

But the CGTP, the union federation controlled by the main 'Communist' Party (the CP-Unidad), "backed out of a further general strike planned for January 1978, being partly influenced by a government call for national unity following a border skirmish with Ecuador" (p.73). And a general strike in

February proved a failure.

However, strikes continued including an 81-day strike by the Maoist-led teachers' union SUTEP. The SUTEP strike had wide support and received powerful solidarity action. During its course, a 48-hour general strike protested a new austerity programme. The strike was solid, but the government turned to repression in its aftermath.

The labour movement went onto the defensive. A national miners' strike was defeated after 32 days, and a three-day general strike for the reinstatement of those made redundant proved unsuccessful. A second SUTEP strike, backed up by the fifth general strike in two years, also failed.

This was a bad period for the labour movement, and for the Left. In the 1980 elections, the far left vote declined; and the left as a whole was seen to be extremely divided. The victory of AP led to Belaunde Terry's return to power after twelve years.

The new government opted for an economic programme modelled on that of Chile's ultra-Thatcherite 'Chicago Boys' — that is a vicious, anti-working class monetarist policy. In part, no doubt, encouraged by recent working class defeats, they attempted a restructuring of the economy in the interests of foreign and domestic capital, and in particular financial interests.

But they could not implement their programme. And it has proved economically catastrophic.

Miners

Severe recession has led also to repression. "The deployment of riot police equipped with tear gas and water cannon, violently dispersing marches by striking workers, became an almost weekly occurrence in central Lima" (p.75). Hardship intensified for the working class: "A thousand miners and their families...camped out in squalid conditions in Lima for more than a year before the government intervened with loans to refloat their mines."

In such conditions, some sections of society turn to desperate solutions. The final chapter of this Special Brief deals with the guerrilla organisation Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). Sendero have taken over part of rural Peru since their first military action in 1980. In retaliation, the government has placed areas of Peru under wholesale military rule.

Sendero Luminoso's Maoist strategy ('from the countryside to the towns') is combined with an extreme backward-looking nationalism. "The limited experiments in rural areas temporarily controlled by Sendero suggested that the 'New Democracy' [the guerrillas' programme] amounted to a kind of primitive communism or backward-to-the-Incas liquidation of a half a millennium [500 years] of [Spanish-American] domination. This involved the rejection of the capitalist money economy in favour of barter...It also involved the rejection of modern technology" (p.109).

As the author rightly notes the guerrillas constitute a "blind alley of violent protest [of] frustrated and marginalised generation."

The failures of the labour movement undoubtedly have contributed to the growth of such a movement. But the labour movement continues to offer of real hope for the future and there is reason for some optimism. March 1984 saw a solid 24-hour general strike.

This Special Brief is attractively produced, inexpensive, well written and politically trustworthy. It provides a concise survey of Peru's history and a useful analysis of its labour movement. It is available from bookshops and from the Latin America Bureau, 1 Arrows Street, London EC1R 1UL.



Scenes from martial law 1981 as riot police attack Solidarnosc headquarters in Lodz

The Road to Gdansk

Mick Ackersley reviews 'The Road to Gdansk', shown last Monday (February 11) on Channel 4.

WE LIVE in a weird world. Frank Chapple, the trade union leader who took his place in the House of Lords two weeks ago, had been aptly rewarded by Mrs Thatcher for his bitter opposition to the miners' strike. Yet Lord Chapple has been a loud supporter of Solidarnosc, the independent Polish trade union movement, while some of the best militant miners treat it with suspicion, and many with hostility.

The paradox of Solidarnosc was summed up by one of its supporters interviewed in 'The Road to Gdansk' (Channel 4, February 11). Millions of Polish workers were on the streets carrying pictures of the Pope and the Virgin Mary. They were in fact left wing.

They were demonstrating against an authoritarian government which uses 'left' slogans and bits of Marxist jargon, but is in fact right wing.

'The Road to Gdansk' tried to unearth the roots of

Solidarnosc in Polish history. Destroyed as an independent state 200 years ago, and partitioned between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, Poland re-emerged after World War 1 as a buffer between Bolshevik Russia and Germany.

21 years later, in 1939, Poland was again wiped off the map. This time it was partitioned between the Nazis, invading from the west, and Stalin's army invading from the east.

Treating the Poles as sub-human slaves, the Nazis tried to wipe them out, and killed five million of them. Stalin deported to Siberia 1½ million of the five million Poles living in the territory he grabbed. (The rest of the 13 million population were Ukrainians and White Russians). Some of those deported only returned to Poland in the late '50s, and many died.

But then the USSR won its war against Hitler, and in 1944 occupied Poland. A Polish state (with greatly

altered borders) was restored. But it was a Poland under the complete control of the USSR.

The USSR began to shape and change Polish society, remaking it in its own image, wiping out the landlord and capitalist classes. By 1948 Poland's economic structure was identical to the USSR's.

What about the working class? The international working class movement had a long tradition of active support for Poland's right to independence. The Polish workers had a fine record of socialist struggle, and a distinct Marxist tradition of their own, most eminently embodied in Rosa Luxemburg. A small but vigorous Polish communist movement existed in the 1920s and '30s.

But the Polish Communist movement was wiped out in 1938. Stalin's Comintern condemned the Polish CP as incurably infected with Luxemburgism and Trotskyism, and dissolved it. Its

members were denounced to the military dictatorship that then ruled Poland.

When the Nazi-USSR war started, there was no CP. So one was hastily cobbled together. Some of its key people were released from Stalin's jails. This party was hoisted into power by the USSR after the war.

Above

Independent working class activity played little part in the social 'revolution from above' carried out by Stalin's army of occupation in Poland. Nevertheless, the Stalinist regime's rapid industrialisation policy massively augmented the working class.

The bulk of the Polish working class is no more than two generations removed from peasant life. But it has done great and tremendous things in that short span.

In 1956, 1970, 1976, and then in 1980, the Polish

workers rose against the system of state dictatorship imposed on them when Stalin's army chased out Hitler's 40 years ago.

In 1956, the Polish workers organised workers' councils which challenged the Stalinist system and helped loosen its iron grip. In 1970 the Gdansk shipyard workers responded to attempts to cut their living standards with attacks on police barracks and on the headquarters of the so-called 'Communist' Party. An unknown number of workers were shot down, but they toppled the government and extracted promises of reform.

Forced

A lesser protest movement in 1976 forced the government to abandon plans to raise food prices.

And then in 1980, the Polish working class did, in a matter of months, what no-one had ever done before.

They organised a mass working-class movement in a Stalinist state, and after a month of mass strikes forced the Stalinist government to grant them the right to free trade unions and the right to strike. No Stalinist state had ever granted such rights before.

'The Road to Gdansk' brought out the tragedy of Solidarnosc very plainly. Here was a movement that mushroomed within a few months to ten million members. It had the right to organise while all opposition political parties were banned, so it inevitably took on the role of an opposition party.

In 1980 the Polish workers wanted to destroy the Stalinist system — not, as the liars say, to restore capitalism. Why didn't they?

Because of the fear of a Russian invasion, which would be a certainty if the government were overthrown. Poland came within a hair's breadth of a full-scale Russian invasion in 1956, at the time of the bloody invasion of Hungary.

So, instead of overthrowing the government, or the system, the ten-million strong movement tried to live within the system as a movement of political reform and pressure which was also a trade union.

The authorities bided their time and made their preparations. Just after a conference of Solidarnosc had demanded a plebiscite to determine whether or not there should be free elections in December 1981, they struck. Martial law was declared, Solidarnosc was banned, its key militants were interned.

'The Road to Gdansk' allowed Solidarnosc activists to speak and give an account of themselves. It also gave much space to official Polish government representatives.

The 'independent' film producers who made it in 1983 seem to have had the co-operation of the Polish state. The 'editorial line' and general framework was that of the Morning Star or Marxism Today.

Stalinism

For example, the account of the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939 was crassly Stalinist. Rebuffed by France and Britain, the film said, Stalin had no option but to do a deal with Hitler. He only invaded Poland in the east two weeks after Hitler attacked in the west, and after the back of the Polish army was broken...

No international context was given for the Polish events of the '40s and '50s. There was no mention of Poland's basic problem, that it is not independent. The programme ended on a note set by a Polish government representative — things will get better in the future, once the economy is sorted out. And so on.

That aspect was very disappointing, though the subject of the film, and much of the footage, was fascinating.

The Polish workers are still struggling in the underground to sustain and rebuild an independent labour movement, cherishing the old traditions of the Polish working class and labour movement which they rediscovered in 1980.

It is time the workers' movement in the west unearthed our old attitude to Poland, going back to Karl Marx and the first Workers' International, which took as one of its central demands the call for the independence of Poland.

In the world today there is, arguably, no more important workers' movement than that which struggles to survive under the heel of Poland's Stalinist dictatorship.

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The Labour Left and the break up of the Communist Party

SCIENCE

AIDS: what causes it?

By Les Hearn

AMID the panic and scare-mongering about AIDS recently, a whiff of controversy is emerging over who "discovered" the AIDS virus.

This may have implications for patent rights in what is an exploding industry. The market for kits to screen blood for AIDS may amount to some \$80 million in the US alone. More importantly for victims of AIDS, research may have been misdirected as a result of a false identification of the virus's family.

US researcher Robert Gallo has believed for some time that AIDS virus was related to the Human T-Cell Lymphoma Viruses (HTLV), discovered by him in 1980. This is despite the fact that HTLVs make T-cells (a type of white blood cell) multiply uncontrollably, while AIDS virus kills them.

In May 1983, the American journal, *Science*, published three articles on experiments trying to link AIDS with HTLVs and one report from a group of Paris-based researchers saying they had found a virus in a patient with symptoms of developing AIDS. These symptoms are known as lymphadenopathy (suppression of a person's immune system).

The French group, led by Luc Montagnier, originally thought their virus was related to HTLVs but later changed their minds. They called it LAV (for Lymphadenopathy-Associated Virus).

A year later, in May 1984, Gallo announced the discovery of a virus thought to cause AIDS. He called it HTLV-3.

So which virus causes AIDS — HTLV-3 or LAV? Let's examine the French claim.

In late 1982 a working group on AIDS was set up in Paris. The members decided to investigate the lymphadenopathy found in AIDS patients which they thought might be an immune reaction to the AIDS virus. They soon isolated a type of retrovirus* from such pati-

ents. Subsequently they showed that this virus, LAV, killed T-cells and in fact caused AIDS.

Were there perhaps two AIDS viruses? About three weeks ago this question was answered with the publication of the sequence of the genetic material of both viruses... and they turn out to be the same virus.

What's more, there is no significant evidence of similarity with the other HTLVs (despite Gallo's feeble protestations). In fact there are several significant differences.

But does this matter, as long as the virus has been identified? The answer may well be "Yes", not just for financial reasons, but because researchers may have spent considerable time and money trying to establish the connection of AIDS virus to the HTLVs. This may have led them in the wrong direction in the search for a test for the AIDS virus and a vaccine against it.

*Retroviruses carry their genetic material in the form of RNA, turning it back into DNA before multiplying. This is the opposite way to usual, hence "retro".

Information — Omar Sattaur in *New Scientist*.

Happy Birthday, *Science* Column.

Once again the *only regular science column* on the Left celebrates a birthday — its fourth. Only *Socialist Organiser*, out of the plethora of socialist journals, sees the need for weekly coverage of science, health and environmental issues, whether urgent, relevant or merely interesting.

So if you have appreciated or enjoyed reading the *Science Column* over the last four years (or weeks) how about giving it a birthday present? Last year we raised about £20 for *Socialist Organiser*.

Give your donation to your SO seller or send it to: SO *Science*, 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.

No change from Health Authority

By Keyvan Lajevardi-Khosh

LAST Tuesday, February 5, Redbridge Health Authority was lobbied by the Barking domestics who have been on strike for almost a year.

The District Health Authority originally handed their cleaning jobs to Crothalls. But Crothalls, who have been busing scabs in under police protection since last April, have been unable to maintain a minimally satisfactory level of cleaning. The total hours allocated to cleaning have been reduced.

At the DHA meeting one member blamed the continuation of the strike for Crothalls' shortcomings on the contract!

Before the meeting, full-time NUPE official Barry Neal urged attendants, about 50 in number, to 'keep quiet' during

the meeting — so that the Tory DHA could not find an excuse to go into private session.

This was futile because the hatching DHA was most unlikely to be sympathetic to any of the strikers' demands.

They were unlikely to terminate Crothalls' contract because of their bad record and reinstate the strikers!

At the end of the day the DHA agreed to defer any decision on the contract until April when it comes up for renewal.

The DHA hope the strike will have ended by then and that they will then be able to consolidate Tory health policy — less jobs, worse service, and, they hope, no accountability from the people who make these vile decisions.

Pickets bring out depots

By Tom Rigby

SERTUC's Day of Action was badly planned, badly publicised and badly executed in most of the region.

In Southwark, however, up to 80 or 90% of council workers took action. This was the result of the energies of the TGWU ACTSS 1/208 branch, and left-wingers in NALGO.

Having been important in committing SERTUC to calling the Day of Action in tandem with

Yorkshire and Humberside, the TGWU branch members decided — unlike SERTUC leaders — to take it seriously.

All through the run-up period, meetings were organised to publicise the Day of Action.

And on the morning of February 11, a flying picket was organised, involving two miners from Kiveton Park.

Although they had received

no prior publicity, workers at council depots agreed not to work after meeting pickets. This happened at Nechinger Road, Spa Road, Grove Vale, Manor Place and Lower Road depots.

The branch secretary of NALGO gave clearance for the pickets to visit NALGO workplaces at lunchtime, which was extremely successful.

The experience in Southwark proves a lot of important things. It shows first of all that the Day

of Action could be successful if it was organised properly. The problem of February 11 was not that workers were not prepared to take strike action in support of the miners, but that they did not know they were being asked to. SERTUC's publicity was appalling.

It also shows that a well-organised flying picket, if it makes contact with shop stewards and trade union officers, can be extremely effective.



Teachers demonstrate last May. Now they could be taking strike action over their pay demands. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni, IFL.

Teachers move towards pay strikes

By Clive Bradley

TALKS between teachers' unions and employers have broken down, raising the possibility of strike action.

Unions rejected the 4% pay offer and calls for arbitration. The National Union of Teachers is to hold a ballot to approve action similar to that held last year.

The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, the second largest union, plans a half-day strike on February 26.

NUT members have been refusing to supervise lunches, cover for absent colleagues, or attend out-of-hours staff or parents' meetings.

Last week (Thursday February 8) two local authorities threatened to invoke the Trade Union Act 1984 because the NUT had not called a ballot before taking the action.

Under the Act, failure to hold a ballot for official action results in the union losing immunity against claims of damages of up to £250,000.

The NUT insisted at that point that its members were 'withdrawing good will' rather than taking industrial action.

The breakdown of talks now means that industrial action will be taken, and taken — as far as is possible — legally. It means in effect stepping up the campaign of disruption. Action taken so far has been fairly effective (although reports vary). The new action being proposed will include three-day strikes as well as continued withdrawal of good will.

Last year's strikes — which were to force the employers to go to arbitration — resulted in an unfavourable award. This year, teachers' unions have rejected the — hypocritical — offer of arbitration as a result.

LPYS regions: North, NW, Eastern

By Jane Ashworth

WHILE the Northern Region YS Conference took place in the middle of the biggest class battle for decades, the same old resolutions were being discussed.

The liveliest debate was over black sections in the Labour Party, where a Militant YS — Newton Aycliffe — moved a motion against Militant's position and called for black sections to be set up.

Class fighter/Socialist Organiser delegates from Durham City YS seconded and argued that black sections would bring more black people into the Party to fight against racism.

Militant sewed it up with Neil Kinnock's argument that the only people who support black sections are middle class careerists.

Militant caricatured our arguments in all the debates. They claim that Socialist Organiser think all police are fascists, for example. This way of arguing helps them disguise their own views. Militant can't afford to let too many people know that they want the police in the TUC when everyone can see they are the front line of the Tories' attacks on miners.

In the elections, it looked certain that Socialist Organiser supporter Tony Serjeant would

be elected as there were only four candidates nominated for four positions. But the Regional Committee spotted their mistake — which would let an SO supporter onto the committee — and changed the rules to re-open nominations.

The hustings speeches were so bad — "I'm a Militant supporter, vote for me" — that a Militant delegate felt forced to stand up and object. He thought that candidates should explain their politics and not say which badge they wore.

At the North West Conference a gay delegate from Manchester Gorton was harassed by two visitors. He was visibly shaken and a deputation demanded that the platform do something about it.

However, all they were prepared to do was apologise to the delegate "for any inconvenience". At this point Lynne Ferguson, delegate from Manchester Central grabbed the mike and demanded that a vote be taken on her proposal to exclude them from the rest of the conference.

Amazingly, the Militant-dominated conference voted against the Militant-dominated platform's recommendation and

the two bigots were thrown out.

But once again, despite the background of the miners' strike, the Militant's motions left out any reference to working class action. Once again they all concentrated on what a future Labour government should do and not on what working class militants should do now.

The Eastern Region confer-

ence was a very small affair.

Very few delegates were women and there were no dissenting motions for conference to debate. Consequently copies of *Socialist Organiser* and *Class Fighter* were very well received — 12 were sold in under an hour and one YS is now fixing up a meeting for *Class Fighter* to speak at.

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Socialist Organiser

CLASS WAR!

LAST Saturday (9th), Tony Benn told a miners' solidarity conference in Sheffield:

We've got to broaden this struggle. And broaden the political struggle, too.

The largest group of Royal Engineers to take action since the crossing of the Rhine, led by the Defence Secretary in military uniform, has been deployed to remove 100 Quakers from a peace camp.

They felt confident enough to use the full power of the state because they thought the strike was over.

In Northern Ireland they have been practising these techniques for years. They're going absolutely for the centre of our trade union rights and civil rights. They did it in Brixton and Toxteth in 1981. Comrades, our task is to link these issues together into one great political struggle...

Our strength lies in the generalisation of the arguments. The miners' strike has been like a surgeon's scalpel to open up the whole body politic and expose the cancers of capitalism and monetarism and authoritarianism which have grown because we have not dealt with them politic-

ally and industrially.

There has been far more industrial support for the miners than the government has been prepared to admit. But what we need to see is an extension of industrial action.

NACODS is the most obvious and immediate example. But it is not only in the coal industry itself that the action is needed. Issues like rate-capping are the basis for action building up into a more general stoppage.

On Wednesday 6th several hundred military police and 1500 Royal Engineers were sent in to evict 150 peace campers from the edge of the RAF base at Molesworth in Cambridgeshire.

The use of state forces against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland and against youth in Brixton and Toxteth were rehearsals for the police tactics against the miners. And now, in turn, the strong-arm operation on the picket lines has paved the way for the action against the peace campers.

The Tories followed up with a High Court judgement on February 11 to forbid mass picketing at five South

Wales pits. Up to now, the "six pickets" rule has only been a "guideline", and the police have rarely tried to enforce it.

Now more than six pickets are illegal. A further court judgement on February 12 extended the ruling to a number of Yorkshire pits.

At stake in the miners' strike are not only pit closures, not only trade union rights, but also the civil liberties of us all.



Field Marshall Michael Heseltine leads his troops into battle against the Molesworth peace camp. 1500 Royal Engineers were deployed to install a temporary fence around the Molesworth RAF base where Cruise missiles will eventually be sited. The temporary fence cost £1 million to construct. The operation represents yet a further attack on civil rights in Britain by the Thatcher government.

Reinstate sacked miners!

By John Bloxam

was rioting... and it wasn't the pickets."

At the Sheffield Crown Court, the jury threw out the evidence of over 30 police and accepted the defence case. The arrests, they pointed out, were the result of the police policy of 'taking prisoners'.

The jury recognised that these prisoners are class war prisoners. But this is unlikely to change the state's blatant policy of using police and police cavalry backed by charges and the threat of imprisonment to try to intimidate strikers.

During the NCB's first big 'return to work' push last November, the case of scab Michael Fletcher received a lot of national publicity. Strikers were alleged to have burst through his door and beaten him with baseball bats. General MacGregor posed for a picture with him in the hospital.

27 local strikers were subsequently charged, including

the Fryston Branch President, Roy Wright. He was charged with inciting others to cause grievous bodily harm and originally remanded in custody. Just before Christmas he was granted bail, provided he lived in Southport and didn't contact any NUM members.

Last Friday Roy Wright walked free from Pontefract magistrates court after the charges against him were dropped.

Riot and assault

But the 26 other miners arrested with him have now had their charges increased. 'Besetting' charges have been dropped, and replaced with riot and assault. A number of these miners have also been subjected to 'internal exile' - forced, as a condition of bail, to live away from their home area and not to be involved in the strike.

The case of scab Fletcher got a lot of publicity last November; so also did the case of scab Barry Newton from Hawthorne (Durham).

Masked strikers were alleged to have attacked him in the street and thrown paint stripper in his face.

Last Thursday he was fined £150 with £20 costs for wasting police time. He had splashed paint stripper on himself to get publicity!

He is quoted as saying: "I thought if I set myself up as a martyr, some normality would return to the coalfield and men would follow my example by going back to work."

There were few reports of the outcome of this case in the national press.

STOP PRESS

The most recent case of strikers being victimised comes from South Wales. Four lodge officials from St. John's pit, including South Wales NUM EC member Ian Isaacs, are reported to have been sacked for 'intimidation' on the picket lines.

Far from such action intimidating strikers, its effect is to make them more determined to win reinstatement for those sacked. All 650 and more!

FUND

AN extremely meagre week for our fund - £1 from Penny Campbell, £5 from Sarah Cotterill, £2 from Sally Page, £9 from an East London reader, and £1 from Geoff Ward, bringing the total so far for February to only £73.70.

We need £400 to balance the month's budget - and then some extra to put aside for premises.

Send money to: 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.