

# Workers Power

25p/10p strikers

paper of the Workers Power group

# STRIKE OUT FOR VICTORY

The Tory government has not budged one inch in its determination to break the NUM. So far its tactics have failed. Its courts, police thugs, lorry convoys and media run back to work movements have all failed to break the resolve of the miners.

Now the Tories hope divisions in the NUM executive, pressure from the TUC and the scale of coal stocks, coal imports and government subsidy for strike-breaking operations will force the miners to retreat. That is why they are not prepared to negotiate a compromise at the request of Norman Willis or Stan Orme. They want to defeat the NUM not treat with it.

The back to work campaigns have not been as big as the NCB hoped for. They have been of no major significance in Yorkshire, South Wales or Kent. But there are clear signs of division and disarray in the NUM leadership's ranks and of plans for treachery on the part of Congress House.

## ■ DANGER OF WAVERING ■

Faced with the governments coal stocks, oil burn and refusal to negotiate, the majority of the NUM executive are desperate to get back to talking and searching for a way out of the dispute.

There are signs of a re-alignment of forces on the executive. And there are signs that Arthur Scargill is powerless and unwilling to resist those who want to retreat. So too is the Broad Left which decided recently to argue for no major changes of tactics for fear of splitting the executive. In other words they will let the conciliators call the tune.

The most significant crack to appear in public is the stance of the traditionally 'left' South Wales area. Their executive unanimously embraced a plan for settlement put forward by a collection of church leaders.

That plan asked for no more than an 'independent' enquiry into the future of the coal industry! Apart from the ludicrous belief that there can be an enquiry independent of both sides in this bitter dispute the South Wales executive touchingly believe that it would find in favour of the miners.

Even more astonishing is their belief that Thatcher will compromise at the sight of an assemblage of dog collars. The massive determination of the NUM has yet to budge her. What hope a delegation of vicars? After all, how many battalions does the church command against Thatcher's police?

Throughout this dispute it has been made abundantly clear that the Tories will only compromise in the face of forces that are capable of inflicting bloody defeat on them. They will not compromise with those who show them the white flag, except to "compromise" on their own terms.

That the South Wales executive counsels this form of retreat should



Miners and rail workers unite on the picket line at Shirebrook

come as little surprise. Their leading forces have been locked into a Welsh Congress for the Defence of Mining Communities which is an alliance of the Communist Party, the Labour Party, Welsh Nationalists, 'Independents' and the Church. As is the case in all such alliances so beloved by the Communist Party it was the church that could call the tune to those fearful of driving them and "public opinion" away.

The South Welsh decision offers the prospect of a major retreat on the part of the executive. It has allowed the old right wing leaders like Vincent to come out of the woodwork and propose compromise. It opens the prospect of a new alliance with the Yorkshire leaders who miserably abstained in December on the issue of whether to pay up the fine to the courts.

There is no sign that the executive in and of itself, can reverse this process. McGahey is declaring that "Its time that negotiations got started." Arthur Scargill himself supported a proposal to enlarge the negotiating committee to include the entire NUM executive. Arthur Scargill defends this on the grounds that all the executive will be able to see how intransigent the NCB is. But this cannot conceal the fact that this is a climbdown in the face of the compromises and the right wing.

It means that scab masters, reluctant strike leaders and those who

want to call the strike off for an enquiry are freed to make common cause with the NCB. It makes it all that much easier for the traitorous machinery of Congress House to be put into action to engineer a settlement at the expense of the miners.

Miners and their supporters must turn the tide now. They must cut off the road to retreat and defeat. The militant miners at present manning their own pit picket lines; those billeted in the cities collecting money; above all those still at home must draw on all their reserves and turn their face decisively to the rest of the rank and file of the labour movement.

## ■ "UNREALISTIC" ? ■

They must say firmly and patiently, "Your money, gratefully received, does not buy our silence. We tell you now, brothers and sisters, you will have to pay a much higher price than a few pounds if you do not strike with us now. If you allow the political spine of the labour movement - the NUM to be broken by Thatcher then the whole body will fall limp and useless."

The rest of the working class need to be reminded that unemployment is still on an upward trend. It's not just mining communities that are at risk. Whole towns like Stoke will die if the decision to sack 2,000 Michelin

# EXPEL ALL SCABS

By the end of this month some 30,000 scabs in Nottinghamshire should no longer be able to tarnish the banner of the NUM. The January 10th Executive has recommended expulsion of the Notts area to a special delegate conference on the 29th January.

The hope expressed by the NEC that the Notts area may change its mind by then has been scotched by the Area meeting of the 12th which took the offensive against the NEC. It not only suspended Henry Richardson, the area secretary who has been pulled along behind the strike, but now looks set to recommend a ballot of the Notts scabs to end the overtime ban.

## PATH TO SPENCERISM

The NUM leaders have certainly underestimated the determination of the scab officials in Notts to follow the path that George Spencer marked out for them nearly 60 years ago in forming a breakaway union for bosses men.

Roy Lynk and David Prendergast financial secretary and area agent of Notts area respectively, have firm control of the area apparatus and look forward to the day when they claim the area HQ as their own palace and get their hands on the £2 million assets of the area NUM.

Of course, there have been divisions and differences of perspectives within the various scab groups. Early last May Chris Butcher began to organise the scabs in Notts and later with the financial backing of the Daily Mail and political advice from David Hart - one of Thatcher's kitchen cabinet - began to organise the National Working Miners Committee. Basically, this is an outfit of red-neck miners, mostly non-officials.

After last June when branch elections in Notts swept strikers from branch positions many of the branch and area officials distanced themselves from the overt Tory connections of Butcher's outfit. Since then they have organised the Nottinghamshire Working Miners Committee.

The claim of this scab outfit has always been that it did not wish to split from the NUM. But this was only ever true on condition that they could use their base in Notts to organise the right-wing in the whole British coalfield with a view to oust-

ing militants everywhere and eventually Scargill from the national leadership.

Striking miners can only take limited comfort from the manner in which this split has taken place. The truth is that the NEC have from the beginning of the whole affair handled the question of what to do with the scabs badly. To begin with Rule 51 was only passed under pressure and was then left in cold storage while the scabbing operation continued and grew bigger.

Even now the decision to expel the scabs under Rule 40 (b) involves a serious fudge. This rule allows for expulsion where an area refuses "to adopt the model Rule resolved upon by Conference as being applicable..." But so far only Nottinghamshire have taken this road: fellow officials and miners in Leicestershire, North Wales and South Derbyshire for example will still be allowed to scab. As long as they continue to nod in the direction of the union rules they can flout them with impunity! No wonder Toon, McKay and Jones are laughing. Even Scargill said after the NEC meeting that he welcomed individual scabs into a re-formed NUM if they agreed to pay lip service to the national rules.

## A STRONGER UNION

Striking miners must not rest satisfied. Apart from anything else the thought that wretches like Chadburn will be entrusted with the leadership of a new NUM in the Area is disastrous. If the NUM were to be defeated it will be hard to tell the difference between Chadburn and Lynk in a years time. Then the scene will be set for a reconciliation between the NUM and scabs on the scabs' terms just like it was when Spencer's union returned to the fold in 1937. If we leave Toon and company inside the NUM this is a dead cert.

No, militants must send resolutions to the January 29th Conference demanding that all scabs everywhere are expelled now. Better a smaller NUM but one that is stronger politically and more able to defend the members it represents. Then, the scabs - back broken and betrayed by their officials - will be forced to crawl back to a real union on the NUM's terms. □

workers is allowed to go uncontested.

British Rail is set on a major showdown with the rail unions. The health workers face the full force of Thatcher's privatisation offensive. The axe of rate-capping hangs over the jobs of thousands of council workers. None of these workers can afford to wait to fight their employers after the miners strike is over. If the NUM lose then it will be immeasurably more difficult for a whole period to encourage trade unionists everywhere to fight closures, redundancies, attacks on local democracy, the political levy to the Labour Party.

Above all else, the still militant majority in the NUM must connect with the minority in other unions and win the argument for a general strike. It is impossible to leave this question on the table to be discussed later. If you win the argument for solidarity strike action then many will learn soon enough that the whole machinery of injustice - the law courts at the head - will bankrupt and bully them into retreat. Unless, that is, that whole weight of the labour movement is marshalled for a general strike to smash these anti-union laws.

To the cautious one must repeat, "You may not wish to risk the wrath of the courts by fighting alongside us, but one day soon you will be forced to fight your own battles and then you will not be able to avoid it. So join us now!"

Of course, the NUM must take the

lead in demanding the TUC put its political weight and resources behind such a call. Moreover, it is vital to force Scargill to go straight from his public platforms into Congress House and fight for the general strike.

Yet the reality of the situation is that the tens of thousands of strikers must become an array of agitators for the general strike. Without this it will be easy to agree that the call is "unrealistic". But what is "unrealistic" becomes possible and even probable if thousands are committed to going out and arguing for it.

Was it "realistic" a year ago to hold out the prospect of a ten month long miners strike? It's happened because NUM members believe in the justice of their argument. This applies to the argument for the general strike.

## ■ COUNCILS OF ACTION ■

It's down to the rank and file to bring this tactic alive. In the same way, the rank and file of the NUM and other unions must organise the strike to keep it alive. In each small example of contact between rank and file trade unionists we see the germ of an organisation that can keep it going and extend it - Councils of Action. Sure of their arguments and powerful inside such an organisation the NUM militants can still lead other trade unionists to a general strike. ■



# FOR A RANK & FILE MOVEMENT IN THE NUM.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE WORKERS POWER EDITORIAL BOARD

The last weeks have shown increasing evidence that rank and file militants are growing wary of their national and local leaders. They are more and more prepared to organise themselves to take the strike forward and to stop any backsliding on the part of the leaders.

On the initiative of the striking minorities of Keresley and among Leicester's 'Dirty Thirty' a rank and file meeting was held in Ollerton with strikers from most of the major coalfields with the exception of Scotland.

Many of the same militants were back in action the next day fighting shoulder to shoulder with Coalville NUR members to force the 'left' leaders of the NUR and ASLEF to fight to defend their members from victimisation.

Around Brodsworth pit in South Yorkshire rank and file militants have started to produce their own bulletin for Highfield village. In South Wales rank and file members of Maerdy, Penrhwiweiber and Tower Lodges lobbied their own area executive calling on it to stand firm and resume mass picketing. A Maerdy strike meeting tried to send a telegram urging the NEC to stand firm until it was blocked by the Lodge committee.

## TAKE THE STRIKE FORWARD

These are all important and extremely healthy developments. The future of the dispute is in the hands of these militants. By building on and extending these initiatives the possibility exists to forge a rank & file movement that links the militant vanguard across the coalfields.

That movement would be able to take the strike forward whatever the waverings of the leadership. It would be able to organise the forces to foil any attempt to sell the miners short by the NEC and to prevent delegate conference being used as a rubber stamp for the executive's decisions.

These developments take place not one moment too soon. The miners strike is in danger. The NEC does not know how to take the strike forward. They have, demobilised the pickets and blocked attempts to organise sustained mass picketing. They have dithered for months over the scab areas despite having held up rule 51 as their answer to the scabs.

Now they have brought the whole executive in on the negotiations. In come Toon, Bell, McKay and Jones who have organised scabbing from day one. In comes Emlyn Williams who is praying that clergymen will persuade Thatcher and MacGregor to accept an 'independent' enquiry into pit closures!

The NUM executive is signalling that it wants a 'compromise'. The left and this includes Arthur - show no sign that they are prepared to organise the rank and file in order to resist such a climb down.

## MEANINGLESS PROMISES

Scarcely a day goes by without the executive's 'left' friends in the NUR and ASLEF revealing quite how meaningless were the promises they made to the NUM last spring. The windy talk at Brighton's TUC Congress has come to nothing.

Yet at each different stage in the dispute the executive has told you that theirs was the way to secure solidarity and that matters should be left in their hands. After the TUC Congress the lodge and strike committees increasingly were left to function as collection agencies. Many of the best militants became political exiles in the cities working as money collectors rather than agitators.

That these small steps to organise the rank and file have taken place shows that this state of affairs can be reversed. It is possible to put an end to this drift and retreat. But it is necessary to move with the greatest urgency. There is no time to lose.

The Ollerton meeting was mainly attended by militants from those coalfields where scabbing is most widespread. Understandably, therefore, it concentrated much of its discussions on the problem of dealing with the scab areas.

Of course, the cancer has to be driven out of the NUM before it is allowed to devour the entire body. But while this would serve to protect the NUM for the future it would not, in itself, fundamentally change

the direction of the strike.

Militants in South Wales and the other coalfields are also understandably anxious to re-start, and in some cases commence, mass picketing of the power stations in particular. From South Wales through to Scotland the executives have generally obstructed mass picketing and clamped down on it even further since the autumn deals were struck with the TUC.



John Sturrock (Network)

Jail sentences and bail conditions have also taken their toll of the pool of potential picketers. In North Derbyshire around 1000 pickets are prevented from picketing by bail conditions. 40 are in jail.

Those of you who take advice from the Socialist Workers Party will even see mass picketing at the power stations as the key to victory. But the bitter experience of Or-greave and the real lessons of Saltley show this to be mistaken.

Firstly, in order to be effective, mass pickets must be organised, drilled and defended if they are not to lead to yet more arrests, injuries and deaths at the hands of the armed and protected police thugs. That's why we have called on strike committees to form defence squads of their fittest and

bravest from the very beginning of the dispute.

Secondly mass pickets in themselves are no substitute for the central task of winning solidarity action from other workers. It is becoming more and more evident that the Tories will spare no expense to beat the miners. By standing alone, mass picketing and waiting for 'General Winter' to do the trick the miners will not break the Tories resolve to win.

The NEC is clearly losing its nerve before Thatcher is. This is not a simple trade dispute where the NUM has to simply stand firm until the government accepts it cannot afford to finance its own victory. The Tories are fighting a political war against the miners. They have repeatedly stated that any expense is a worthwhile political investment to destroy the strongest union for their class.

Against that enemy the executive's strategy will not secure victory. Neither will mass picketing in and of itself. The key to victory lies in going out and winning solidarity action from other organised workers. It lies in fighting for a general strike.

The gates of Saltley closed in 1972 when the wheels of industry were ground to a halt by solidarity strike action by Birmingham's engineering workers. So too can the Thatcher government be defeated if the miners can spearhead an all-out working class struggle to break her attack on the organised labour movement.

This is a political battle that the NUM cannot win on their own. Moreover the labour and TUC leaders are doing everything in their power to keep the miners isolated from their fellow workers.

A new rank and file initiative must be built with the express purpose of waging a political struggle to mobilise the forces that can destroy the Tory government and everything it stands for. It is not enough to hanker for the resurrection of last spring's picketing tactics.

Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield will tell you they have done all they can to secure backing. The truth is that as trade union officials themselves they are not prepared, in the last analysis, to break out of the cramping agreements they have struck with their fellow officials in the other unions.

It's up to the rank and file members to get out there and do that. It's down to them to turn the massive sympathy shown by the scale of collections into physical solidarity. That will mean treading on the toes of the trade union leaders and the NUM leadership.

Arthur will say that he's already arranged to speak to power shop stewards. Fine. But that must not stop rank and file militants getting to rank and file power workers too and putting the case for action.

In small ways the rank and file initiatives have moved in this direction. In the lobby of ASLEF and the NUR Midland miners and rank and file railworkers fought together to intervene, against the

Federation's treacherous leaders.

That broke all the rules of bureaucratic diplomacy. Kent miners have stood with the dockers on their picket lines. In Leicester, striking miners joined forces with threatened council workers to give Thatcher a harsh reception.

Rank and file workers can be reached out to for more than money. But its down to the militant rank and file of the NUM to do it. This means the rank and file movement has to do more than press the NUM leaders to stand firm through lobbies and telegrams.

It must get out to the power workers, the transport workers, the thousands of council workers who are threatened by rate-capping and put the case for them to fight alongside the miners - for themselves, the NUM and the entire working class.

It must fight to commit the NUM leaders to wage that battle too. They must demand that the TUC leaders call a general strike and that all trade union leaders give the lead to their members to join the struggle with the miners.

Arthur has issued the call for rank and file workers not to wait on their leaders. Its up to the rank and file to make sure that such calls do not simply remain platform rhetoric. The NUM must issue the call for the railworkers, power workers and council workers to join with the miners in establishing delegate action councils to co-ordinate and advance the battle to defeat Thatcher. No diplomatic deals with the TUC chiefs should be allowed to stand in your way.

## THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

The waverings of the executive have thrown many militants into moments of panic and despair. Trust in your leaders, and in Arthur in particular, has served to retard the organisation of the rank and file between pits and coalfields.

The national and local networks of the Broad left have been primarily organised as electoral machines geared to manoeuvring and wheeler dealing within the ranks of officialdom.

No wonder many rank and file militants feel powerless to influence the direction of the dispute and alarmed at Scargill and the Broad left leaders' inability to push the strike forward.

The new rank and file initiatives show that there is an alternative to standing back and watching the worst happen. A fighting rank and file movement can be built to switch the points.

It must reach out from the Midlands to the strongest areas. The militant pits in South Wales are amongst the most solid in that coalfield. It must link up with rank and file members in the strong coalfields as opposed to official area representatives.

With the officials if possible, without them when necessary must be the battle cry of a re-born rank and file movement in the miners strike. The events of the last weeks show that many militants are no longer prepared to leave the running of the dispute to the NEC. It is from these ranks that a force can be built to take the strike back onto the offensive and onto the road to victory. ■

## SUPPORT HATFIELD PICKET

The Hatfield Main wives support Group are organising a demonstration and mass picket of Hatfield Pit (near Doncaster) for Monday 21st January to show their determination to win this strike.

We spoke to Alan Robe, and miner from Hatfield Main who is actively organising for the demonstration, and Elaine Robe

I'm very proud of the women in the way they've organised themselves so quickly and efficiently after the lull of Christmas and the New Year. They realise a lot more than some of our members that this fight goes on for 365 days a year.

### What is being planned for the day?

Our rally is going to start at 9.30. We've asked quite a lot of speakers including Peter Heathfield and ASLEF and EETPU delegates from down South. We are going to end up with a march to the pit where we will have a mass picket.

Though it is short notice if people are true trade unionists they will be there at this rally. I know a lot of wives groups are sending delegates

to support us. I personally would like to see a general strike - the reason behind it being that the government, TV and media are spewing out their lies about this strike 24 hours a day. The only way people can be told the truth is to put themselves shoulder to shoulder on our picket lines.

### Who have you contacted about the demonstration?

So far we've been in touch with Doncaster Trades Council and are going to try to get their executive to support the march; also with womens support groups from Scotland and Kent and all over the country and we're also asking the unemployed.

Elaine Robe At our meeting tonight (8th Jan) we discussed our plans for the demonstration and we decided to lobby the Trades Council meeting next Wednesday, giving out our leaflet and trying to get the delegates to attend. We also want them to fix up factory and canteen meetings for us. We've really got over the Christmas lull and are back in full swing - we're also going to lobby the NUM executive on Thursday with some others to demand the expulsion of the Nottinghamshire scab miners from the union. □

HATFIELD MAIN WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

### DEMONSTRATION AND PICKET

MONDAY 21st JANUARY 9.30am

ASSEMBLE: FOOTBALL FIELDS  
BROADWAY  
DUNSCROFT  
(next to Broadway Hotel)

SPEAKERS: PETER HEATHFIELD NUM secretary  
LYNN CLEGG miners wife  
DAVID DOUGLASS NUM delegate Hatfield Main  
ROY LUCKFORD ASLEF delegate south east region  
RON LANSDALE EETPU Daily Mirror

PICKET FROM 11am ONWARDS

for details phone 0302 844446 845655



# Rate capping: Unions must lead fight

"THE GOVERNMENT HAS declared war on local government. If their proposals are implemented it will mean around 75,000 jobs lost and quite devastating cuts in services to the public..."

This joint statement from 7 major TUC unions came in response to the government's 11th December announcement on Rate Support Grant levels for 1985/6.

Since coming to office in 1979 the Tories have cut local government expenditure by a massive £10 billion pounds. This has meant that the government has reduced its share of local authority spending from 61% of the total to 52%. Before penalties this will fall further next year to 48%.

The response of Labour-controlled councils up to now has been mixed. Some, like Wakefield had no pretensions to a fight and have passed on the cuts readily. Many have fought with words. A few have fought and - like Lothian (1981) and Lambeth (1980) - they retreated when faced with Tory resistance and implemented devastating cuts.

In 1981 1,500 jobs went in Lothian as a direct result of the councillors' collapse. In Lambeth the present leader Ted Knight oversaw a £1.50 rent rise and 48% rate increase at the end of a campaign.

In more recent years Labour councils have staved off the confrontation by manoeuvres and "creative accounting".

## A LONG TIME COMING

But now the time for manoeuvring has passed. The Rates Act has been a long time coming. It was first threatened when Heseltine was Environment Minister over 3 years ago. Failure to curb public spending - one of Thatcher's chief manifesto pledges to the bosses - has finally led to this legislation which aims to reduce the burden of indirect taxation on industrial profits to her electoral supporters.

Put simply the legislation has two parts. First Whitehall assesses the needs of the local authority and sets an expenditure level required to pay for them. Secondly the Rates Act allows the Tories to set a maximum rate level for each authority. Previously, an authority could raise rates to compensate for a reduction in central grants. Now they can't.

The class bias in Patrick Jenkins' decisions is transparent as well. Local government as a whole faces a 5% cut in real terms. But the cuts are not spread evenly. The Tory shires don't suffer the full 5%. And Tory controlled town halls fare relatively better this year as a reward for supporting the Rates Act. For the 18 rate-capped authorities, (16 Labour) however, the average cut is 12% and for London's rate-capped authorities the average is 17% of total revenue.

Local government is a large part of total government spending - approximately one third last year. If the Tories are to reduce it then they must break those Labour councils that stand in their way.

Together with the proposed legislation to abolish the GLC and Metropolitan Counties and replace the former with a Tory-controlled appointed body, the Rates Act amounts to the elimination of local democracy. Elected local authorities will be stripped of all meaningful power.

## DIG DEEP

Taken together these Tory initiatives will dig deep into the services provided by local government, strip it of up to a quarter of a million jobs and bind the local state more tightly to central government in readiness for future cuts and the grubby hands of the privateers.

What should be the attitude of working class people to these attacks? Revolutionary Marxists believe that in the long run the local state is no friend of the working class. The council chamber is no less distant than the Houses of Parliament from the concerns of most people. We aim to break it up and replace it with new forms of workers' democracy where political debate and decision-making is rooted in the daily life of workers where they live and work.

However we will not let the Tories and their paymasters destroy local government for their reasons. The Tories hate the GLC and big Metropolitan Counties because in these large urban concentrations the working class can form an electoral majority in these districts.

While we oppose rate rises and the whole rating system we cannot support a measure purporting to reduce taxes when it is an instrument in the hands of the ruling class to cut the services upon which working class people depend.

The decisive question now is how do we defend what we have and even extend our services which are woefully inadequate?



John Harris (IFL)

How should we campaign, around what demands and who should lead it? To begin, we have enough evidence of the record of the Labour Party and Labour Councils to establish that workers cannot rely upon them - the Labour Conference last October endorsed illegality in the council's struggle. Immediately afterwards such a course was abandoned by Kinnock. John Cunningham, Shadow local government spokesperson, has been quietly campaigning for a negotiated settlement. This "campaign" has won many supporters in the ranks of Labour Councillors who risk the wrath of the central state in the absence of compromise. It is their livelihoods (surcharge) and careers (disqualification) which are on the line. Some have already made contingencies for defeat (Islington have identified £8 million "good housekeeping" savings according to the Local Government Chronicle) well in advance of any plans for action.

Moreover this willingness to compromise has been strikingly illuminated. Under Thatcherite pressure several "left" Councils have broken manifesto commitments and forced "their own" workers to strike.

Back in 1980 Ted Knight and the Lambeth Labour group were forced to reverse its initial decision to implement a 4% cut due to opposition from within the local CLPs. But after spitting blood at the Tories the Council caved in. He said at the time: "We can't walk away from it. Their jobs are going to be cut. They (the local Trade Unions-WP) may decide that they prefer to do that with Labour in control than with the Tories or receivers or anyone else."

The only choice then was who wields the axe!

Today Knight is once more fronting a hard campaign against the cuts. Knight's preferred strategy this time round - likely to be followed elsewhere - is not to set a rate at all.

## THREE OPTIONS

This is one of three options that has been debated for months between the various councils. One strategy, deficit budgeting entails setting a rate in line with government requirements but refuse to cut the weekly level of expenditure. This way cuts would be postponed until later in the financial year. This was rejected because it would mean different councils running out of money and into trouble at different points, allowing them to get picked off by the Tories. It's also weak in that it concedes the principle of obeying the new legislation from the outset while only rebelling later (if at all) to its consequences.

Not setting a rate at all is meant to put all councils in the same boat, who all run out of money fairly soon after April 1st. It is hoped that

this will first put pressure on the money markets as they contemplate the prospect of not being paid for their loans, and secondly, the public health and safety hazards will force the Tories to act and make concessions. Such is the theory.

In fact, the strategy is very weak. To start with, it deprives the council of resources for a fight. Then, it leaves the initiative and timing in the hands of the Tories. In reality the campaign is based on the one that Liverpool ran last year. It is designed not to upset the soft left (like Blunkett) who are not committed to an illegal fight. Councils, after all, are not obliged to levy a rate by law. More importantly, it is meant to leave open the door for negotiations with the government which will allow some small concessions from the Tories to be hailed as a victory. Such was the case in Liverpool when in fact the resultant 17% rate increase was a big blow for many workers. This time around too the fight could easily get sidetracked onto a conflict over the right to set a rate.

## FLAWED STRATEGIES

The third option is to adopt a deficit budget. This means setting an illegal rate, preferably with no increase on the previous year, but carrying out a full spending programme. This focusses the "debate" on the removal of grant rather than on the rates issue while giving workers something tangible to fight for in the form of services. A clear commitment to no cuts and no rent and rate increases in the context of an illegal budget is far more powerful a mobilising weapon than Knight's option.

However all three town hall strategies are fundamentally flawed at another level; namely how to build support for them. The basic campaign plan involves producing lots of digestible information about the services the councils offer and point up the consequences of the Tories' cuts. Next, hold a series of workplace meetings to win support for the council's stand. In the weakest case-like Sheffield - all the local employees are then asked to do is inform others, hold public meetings and write to MPs.

In the case of Lambeth and other London councils the unions are much more wary of taking the councillors at their word. Their failures in the past have cost the unions dear. A sign of the greater degree of independence is to be seen in the emergence of the cross union shop stewards organisation for local authority workers - "London Bridge". It is correctly committed to all-out action in the hit-list boroughs in the event of redundancies - whoever tries to implement them, or if the Tories send the commissioners in. A one-day strike last November showed the potential of these organisations.

Crucially the fight must be taken into the private sector where unions can hit the bosses where it hurts - in the profits. All workers benefit from the services of local government and must be organised to defend them through their trade unions, steward committees etc. But importantly too, the struggles of different sections of workers, all facing Tory onslaught in one way or another, must be linked. Delegate based bodies of all workers - action councils - must be built now and they must be open too to representatives of the unemployed, tenants groups and organisations of the racially and sexually oppressed as well as local Labour Parties.

"London Bridge" does not yet have this perspective. In fact some of its leaders are even casting doubt upon the effectiveness of strike action, touting the idea of occupations which don't run the risk of hurting the consumers of council services. This is short-sighted. It is utopian to believe a fight can be waged where people don't make sacrifices - look at the miners. But the point is suffering or inconvenience can be brought to a swift end by mobilising these consumers as workers in action.

## MEET LOCAL NEEDS

It is vital that the whole campaign is run by the unions not by the councillors. It would be fatal to allow control and the initiative to remain with them. If this doesn't happen it will only take the right and soft left councillors to desert the cause for the fight to get derailed.

Labour Councillors must refuse to comply with rate capping and frustrate the attempts of central government to impose a budget. In place of the cuts they should massively increase spending to meet local needs. The first instalment can come by spending the money that the banks cream off in debt repayment on services.

A council like Sheffield pays out £61 million a year (16% of all spending) on paying interest to the City sharks. To regard this waste as "a long-term commitment which is difficult to change now" as Sheffield does, is revealing in that it only serves to undermine the fact that legal obligations are put consistently before working people's interests.

At the same time all the records of the local state should be opened to workers so that they can see how much of their taxes go to pay the bankers.

We call on the councillors to put the vast resources of the local state at the disposal of workers. Finally they should put themselves at the service of the action councils of workers, which they must do all in their power to create. If they are not prepared to fight they should stand down and make way for those that are.

In the end only the working class organised in action councils, prepared for General Strike action locally and nationally, ready to defend themselves against the paramilitary police, will be able to take the kind of victory that will reverse the retreats of recent years. Much debate will ensue at forthcoming conferences and meetings over when the action should begin. In January 1985, after 10 months of a bitter miners strike supported by hundreds of thousands of local government workers, there is no point in waiting for April, for Ted Knight's o.k. or for our trade union leaders who say the government has declared war on us. The time has come to open up a new front. Bring our demands forward. Fight now. ■

by Dave Jenkins

## URGENT APPEAL

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

A miner's wife in the Hatfield Main Womens Support Group had her bag snatched from her by youths in a Brixton street on Wednesday January 9th. Apart from personal items the bag contained over £200 collected from supporters of the miners in London branches of the EETPU. The money was to fund food kitchens for striking miners in Hatfield. After 10½ months on strike the money was desperately needed. We appeal to all trade unionists and supporters of the miners to help us make good the loss by rushing money to:  
The Hatfield Main Womens Support Group,  
c/o 26 Abbeyfield Rd,  
Dunscroft,  
Doncaster.  
Cheques and POs payable to the  
Hatfield Main Womens Support Group



# THE NATIONAL QUESTION

You were in Jaffna shortly before your visit to Europe. Can you describe the situation there at that time?

Anyone visiting Jaffna at that time could easily observe the situation in this part of the country. Briefly there is an army of occupation in the whole of the northern province together with the police and the air force. This means that not only the Tamil fighters but the civilian population of Jaffna are subjected to harassment, serious injuries and killings by the armed forces.

The government and army were repeating what it had previously done. That is they move into the areas allegedly held by the guerillas and, of course, the guerillas fight back. They have sufficient strength to hit the army and numbers are being shot at and killed. When the government's armed forces are unable to get at the Tamil militants the army goes to the nearest area and kills a large number of civilians.

I happened to go to an area of the northern coast where I was told the police had caused considerable damage to civilian property. I saw the large numbers of houses destroyed by the armed forces. They had simply surrounded that area with the army, used a school as a base for their operations for three days and from there they regularly ransacked Tamil houses. Many of these were empty since when the population had heard of their arrival they abandoned their homes and fled to the jungle.

When they came back they saw that the army had been looting. In that area a certain amount of smuggling takes place. The army confiscated all the money, jewellery and electrical goods they could find and then set fire to the houses from inside. They took care not to do it from the outside so that when an observer looks from the outside you cannot see that it has been burned.

I also visited a neighbouring area where the navy had fired onto the shore at the large numbers of fishermen's homes. This was retaliation for a couple of Sri Lankan sailors' deaths at the hands of the guerillas. The damage was immense. I also saw for myself the state of the police stations. Practically every police station in the province has been destroyed by guerillas and the police have had to evacuate and go somewhere else.

Now it would have taken many hours for the guerillas to destroy these stations and remove their property. At no time were the police and army able to come to the scene during the attacks.

Jaffna is a big city, for Sri Lanka, with offices, banks etc. Practically every bank in Jaffna has been broken into by the guerillas and the money taken. The banks do not function as a result. Schools are not functioning because the children cannot guarantee to get back home before the army steps up its operations in the afternoon. The children can also be victims of an emergency curfew imposed without warning.

The government is paralysed in Jaffna. A few offices are open. A train occasionally moves. The buses operate in a restricted manner.

What is the difference between the 1983 pogroms and the current repression?

What took place in July 1983 was an anti-Tamil pogrom of an unprecedented character that had been carefully organised over several months. The aim of this pogrom was not so much the killing of Tamil individuals in the Sinhala majority areas but the destruction of the economic base of the Tamils in those areas.

Concretely we saw the burning and destruction of houses, shops, hotels, factories. The part played by the government forces was passive. The police and army were watching while Sinhalese hoodlums carried out the pogrom and looting. In fact, the army gave encouragement to the mobs. Feigning surprise over these attacks President Jayewardene soon launched attacks on the left parties accusing

Recently Edmund Samarakoddy, a veteran Trotskyist and a leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (RWP) of Sri Lanka was in England. During his stay he spoke at a very successful public meeting in Reading organised by Workers Power.

He spoke on the problem of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and their resistance to government oppression.

Few, if any, still active in Sri Lankan left-wing politics are as well-qualified as Samarakoddy to speak on this question. He was born in 1915 as a member of the majority Sinhala community in Ceylon (Sri Lanka since 1971), then under British colonial rule. He joined the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in the 1930s when he was a trade union organiser. During the Second World War he was imprisoned by the British, eventually escaped and helped organise the underground work of the LSSP. Samarakoddy was elected to parliament in 1951.

He speaks of the degeneration of the LSSP which claimed to be Trotskyist. From 1957 he was one of those in the party who resisted its capitulation to Sinhala chauvinism. This fight led to a split in 1964 and the formation of the LSSP(R). The RWP was itself formed in 1968 as a result of a further split.

The Tamil national question in Sri Lanka is the main political problem in that country today.

them of being behind the anti-Tamil pogroms. The three main left parties - the CP, NSSP and JVP were banned and warrants issued for the arrest of their leaders. Far from seeking to resist the tide of Sinhalese chauvinism, the government sought by such acts to strengthen the anti-Tamil sentiment and bring its representatives closer to the government.

They also issued a law banning the call for a separate state. Two months later the government were able, through this law, to push out of Parliament all the MPs from the Tamil United Liberation Front.

Thus July 1983 should be seen as preparation for the military onslaught by the government which actually began from about March 1984.

Why have the various governments constantly evoked Sinhala chauvinism against the Tamils?

The so-called Citizen Acts passed by Parliament in 1948 very soon after the elections by the bourgeois UNP government provides an answer to this question. These laws disenfranchised and made stateless nearly 1 million plantation workers. This was a blow struck directly at the working class movement of Sri Lanka. By the 1940s there was a strong working class movement led largely by the LSSP. By 1940 the plantation workers were being drawn into the developing strike movement.

In 1940 one of the biggest ever plantation strikes took place led by the LSSP. Prior to this in the election of 1931 and 1936 the plantation workers had used their votes to elect many Tamil trade unionists as members of parliament.

The bourgeoisie felt constantly threatened by these developments and they quickly realised the potential of anti-Tamil chauvinism as a weapon for dividing the Sri Lankan labour movement.

It was the leader of the so-called national bourgeoisie - the SLFP and its leader Bandaranaike who best understood the electoral possibilities of Sinhala chauvinism. After a split from the UNP in 1950 Mr Bandaranaike led only a small party with 9 MPs. In 1953 the General Strike ('Hartal') led by the LSSP took place. It was a mini-insurrection and displayed great unity by the workers.

A year later 1954, witnessed Bandaranaike first use the slogan - "Sinhala Only" as a state language. In the 1956 elections Bandaranaike won a landslide victory riding on the crest of a huge anti-Tamil wave.

Thereafter, both main bourgeois parties (UNP, SLFP) competed with each other in the field of anti-Tamil policies in order to win parliamentary seats and power.

Tamils form only 18% of the country's 15 million people. The majority are Sinhalese. The Tamils themselves are split into two. The minority are those of Indian descent, coming to the island thousands of years ago. They are concentrated in the northern province around Jaffna where they form a majority. Others work in commerce and are found in cities like Colombo in Sinhalese areas. It is from within this community that the British trained and educated a privileged elite to administer their colonial rule over the island. Hence the spontaneous support for Sinhala chauvinism after de-colonisation in 1948.

The bulk of the Tamils are super-exploited tea plantation workers in the Kandyan highlands. These were brought to the island by the British in the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only are their conditions of pay and work indescribably bad but they are also without political rights. 1984 was a year of renewed repression. In August/September last year police and army attacks killed over a 100 Tamils in six weeks. A state of emergency has been in existence for over a year and a half. Comrade Samarakoddy was able to observe the deteriorating situation in the north first hand shortly before his trip to England. Workers Power would like to express our thanks to him for this interview.



Samarakoddy shortly after his election as an MP

One victim of this competition was the 1957 pact concluded between Bandaranaike's government and the Federal Party of the Tamil bourgeoisie which, through an agreement on the "reasonable use of Tamil" and a fake measure of "regional autonomy" in the North, was meant to co-opt the Tamil bourgeoisie to the side of the SLFP. The present President, Jayewardene, managed at that time to rally opposition forces to defeat that pact. The end result was the June 1958 anti-Tamil pogrom, the largest up to that time.

From 1958 to the UNP victory in 1977, each election was fought using the weapons of Sinhala Chauvinism. Their principal aim remained to divide the working class and deflect from their state of bankruptcy in failing to solve the worsening economic situation.

What role have the main Tamil parties played in defending their people?

The first bourgeois party was the Tamil Congress. Between 1971 and 1984 the Tamil bourgeois and petit-bourgeois organised themselves within it. Their policies were ones of collaboration with the UNP/SLFP and win concessions. Eventually, this led them to support the citizenship laws of 1948. This led to a split in the Tamil Congress. The left-wing formed the Federal Party, still a bourgeois party. It called for a Federal government for the Tamils. From then on the petit-bourgeoisie (shop keepers mainly) flocked to this party. This party too collaborated for a long time with the various UNP or SLFP administrations, even accepting ministries within them. In return for collaboration the SLFP/UNP ensured there was no contest in the Tamil areas for the Federal Party seats.

In 1962 the SLFP passed a law which insisted on the use of Sinhala only in the courts. The Federal Party led a non-violent protest mobilisation against this. It was strictly confined to legal opposition. At this time there was a genuine possibility of linking the Tamil rights movement to the struggles of the Sinhala masses, because at that time the left parties (particularly the LSSP) had not totally betrayed themselves to Sinhala chauvinism. But the left avoided carrying out agitation on the Tamil question in the Sinhala areas.

What role has the LSSP played?

From 1935, when the LSSP was launched, up to 1956, the party was broadly seeking to fight inequality and injustice. They sought to fight discrimination against the Tamils. But from the start

when they established themselves in the Tamil areas they did so with an electoral outlook. At that time the Tamils themselves did not raise the question of self-determination, nor did the LSSP. The key task was to fight against the measures of discrimination.

In parliament the LSSP defended Tamil rights in a broad way. The real issues began in 1954/5 around "Sinhala only". That was the time that the LSSP had to take a firm anti-Sinhala position. This they did. The LSSP demanded parity for the Tamil language. I seconded that motion in parliament. We were, of course, defeated.

The LSSP however, was visibly effected by the 1958 pogrom. The leadership began to waver on language policy because they feared it may lose them parliamentary seats. That was the turning point. Step by step they capitulated. It ended in 1964 when they formed the coalition government with the SFLP. That act was an open betrayal of the Tamil population. Since that time, the LSSP have merely deepened this counter-revolutionary role.

Can you describe the origins of the various Tamil guerilla groups and what their demands are?

This is very difficult to answer, except generally. Open fighting broke out only at the start of 1984. Until then there was only sporadic raids.

All the groups talk about socialism, in fact their fight is to realise the state of Eelam (i.e. a Tamil state). A number of groups say this is not the final solution, others that the groups must link up with the Sinhala workers' struggle. However it is difficult to identify specific groups with particular policies because of the anonymous character of many of their documents and leaflets. Essentially, however, they are all petit-bourgeois, but it is difficult to say which direction they are moving in.

It seems to me that they have links with various guerilla groups outside Sri Lanka, possibly the PLO for example.

What is the attitude of the RWP to the actions of the guerilla groups?

Our position is unambiguous. Over the years we have stood for the right of the Tamils to self-determination, that is, to form a separate state. It is important to specify this because many will say they accept this right of self-determination but they do not wish to see the country divided.

But this is not enough. An armed struggle is taking place. Marxists cannot give political support to these groups. What we have to do is give military support. In our view this has to be conditional, but there could be confusion on this term. We are asked "Are you not unconditionally defending the oppressed Tamils?" On this question we are unconditionally on the side of the Tamils in their struggle for liberation.

But in regard to their armed actions we have to remember that these groups do not believe in other mass mobilisations. Apart from individuals fighting they do not believe in the class struggle, the organisation of strikes, demonstrations etc. If these groups were to oppose a strike in Jaffna then we have to disagree with them. That is the meaning of "conditional" support.

## International

Throughout the miners strike international solidarity has been important in sustaining the body and soul of the strikers. True, coal continues to be imported on a vast scale into Britain from European and American ports. It continues to be hauled across land by road and rail. Every ton so transported is a dagger in the heart of the British mining community.

Blacking action has been sporadic so far. It needs to be stepped up dramatically. The key to doing this is to build upon the links established so far with European rank and file trade unionists, an example of how this can be done is provided by the support work carried out in the Rouen area of Normandy in France. Rouen is France's largest port and Sotteville in the suburbs contains one of the country's largest railway depots.

Towards the end of last year two separate groups emerged dedicated to raising money for the NUM and gaining political support for the strike. In mid-December one group working in Rouen and nearby Elbeuf organised two public meetings (80 at each) for 2 Keresely miners and their wives. In addition they collected money outside the large Renault-Cleon car plant near Rouen. Together with a collection inside and a donation from the CGT Works Committee the sum collected there exceeded £600. Another £400 was collected on this trip including money raised as a result of a workplace meeting at Rouen Post Office sorting office where the miners spoke to 60 workers. Throughout this trip comrades of Pouvoir Ouvrier, fraternal grouping of Workers Power, were actively involved in the solidarity work.



Students protesting against the 1964 SFLP/LSSP coalition government



# IN SRI LANKA



Burning an effigy of Jayewardene

In addition there can be very harmful military actions which will not further their struggle. It can be a set-back. Thus, we have to intervene in this struggle while pointing out what is correct. We support the guerillas but mass actions are more important.

## Has the nationalist sentiment taken root among the Kandyan Tamils of the plantations in the Southern Highlands?

Actually they have not come into this struggle yet. But as a result of the government oppression

against them they will be drawn into their struggle sooner or later.

## How do the RWP see the oppression of the Tamils being overcome and how can working class unity be forged?

Today the Sinhala labour movement is infected with chauvinism. Until and unless there is movement from within on this then we are obliged to intervene to re-orient the Sinhala masses. Of course Tamil chauvinism also exists, which makes our task more difficult. But we have to begin. ■

# REMEMBER BLOODY SUNDAY

**THIRTEEN YEARS AGO** on Sunday January 30th British paratroopers shot dead 14 unarmed demonstrators in Derry. These innocent people were demanding civil liberties, jobs and a future denied them by the Northern Irish State. The British army met them with a hail of death.

Every subsequent year commemoration marches have been held. This year's march in Britain will be held in Leicester on February 3rd.

Every subsequent day the British army has continued a policy of repression of the nationalist community in the North with house to house searches, plastic bullets, torture, CS gas and a web of informers. This May the brutal RUC - backed up by British troops - attacked a peaceful march on three separate occasions and finally killed John Downes. Another Bloody Sunday was added to the list of British Imperialism's crimes in Ireland. Yet still the nationalist community refuses to lie down and will take to the streets once again to remember Bloody Sunday.

## ■ DEMAND BRITISH WITHDRAWAL ■

British presence in Ireland has always been opposed by the majority of Irish people. The partition of Ireland in 1921 was Britain's way of preventing the people of Ireland from deciding their own future. Until Britain goes this democratic right remains denied. That's why the Bloody Sunday march is more than a commemoration of the slaughter. It is also a vital mobilisation to demand British withdrawal from Ireland.

In recent years the state has resorted to bans as a method of crushing the demonstration. A march was banned in Coventry. Last year Blunkett and the Sheffield Labour leaders showed their true colours when they too banned a Bloody Sunday demonstration. This year we are determined that the march will go ahead in Leicester, the tradition of remembering this vile act of British imperialism will continue. To this end a "Bloody Sunday mobilising committee" has been formed, that is fighting for maximum support from the Labour movement and strengthening the understanding that many miners have of the links between the repression in Ireland and the brutal treatment that has been handed out to them on the picket line.

No doubt this march will bring the Fascists out of the woodwork, already they have begun to sell their paper in Leicester again for the first time since they were smashed in 1979. The Fascists have adopted a strategy in recent years of attacking Irish marches because they know the bulk of the Left is too opportunist to turn up. This is a trend we are determined to reverse, the nadir was reached this year when the Manchester Martyrs march was attacked by considerable numbers of fascists. We must make sure this does not happen again.

## ■ REPRESSION COMES HOME ■

The repression which the nationalist communities are so familiar with has finally come to Britain. The Thatcher government has unleashed the terror methods perfected in Northern Ireland against the miners. Daily experience in pit villages in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire shows how necessary it is for the British Labour movement to make common cause with those who are fighting our common enemy in the British occupied Northern statelet.

No effort must be spared to secure the maximum labour movement contingent on this march. In particular NUM lodges, branches and strike committees must be won to support. Few miners could support Tory policies at home. We know that when Thatcher talks about 'the national interests' she means the well-being of her class, not the interests of miners or other workers. But the same goes for British foreign policy, it's not designed to benefit us - the working class - but to serve the profits and prestige of the bosses. A blow against 'our' bosses abroad strengthens our hand at home, that's why we value international solidarity amongst all workers!

Just as miners have the right to call on solidarity action from Polish, French workers, etc so too should British workers make solidarity with their Irish counterparts when they are denied their right to self-determination and suffer the daily humiliation of military rule.

We have everything to gain from a defeat of Thatcher in Ireland. Already Britain's role in Ireland has benefited the ruling class here in their drive to beat the magnificent struggle of the miners. The picket busting violence of the cops

their military style occupation of pit communities, their propaganda machine, etc have all been tried and tested on the nationalist community of the six counties. How long before troops are used to break the strike?

Thatcher knows her 'enemy within'. She represents our enemy within - a class enemy unsparing in its attempt to subdue us. We say, Irish workers fighting Thatcher and her class are our allies! The labour movement must have no truck with any policy of repression in Ireland, it must fight to get the troops out now.

The march takes place at a time when Thatcher's police are increasing their attacks against Irish activists in Britain. Five people arrested under the PTA have now been charged with conspiracy to cause an explosion and will appear in court in Liverpool on Friday 18 January. Amongst them were two Sparkbrook activists - Dr O'Shea, a 65 year old semi-retired psychiatrist, and Peter Lynch who is a voluntary community worker. Both have been active in various campaigns over Britain's role in Ireland.

A 200 strong picket was organised at short notice on January 7th outside Birmingham's police headquarters in order to show solidarity with those who had been picked up. It was supported by Birmingham Trades Council and Dr O'Shea's ASTMS branch.



The Act is primarily designed to intimidate Irish political activists and to stifle opposition to Britain's presence in Ireland. It is a weapon of terror against the Irish community in Britain. Little wonder that the Sparkbrook area of Birmingham was singled out given its large Irish community and the record of campaigns against British repression in Ireland there. It is also Roy Hattersley's constituency. His verbal opposition to the PTA must be put to the test. He must be pressed to demand the immediate release of the five. Much more than this is required however. We must build a national labour movement campaign to free the five and smash the PTA.

Leicester prison already contains Irish political prisoners who have sent a message of support to the demonstration. It also contains a growing number of miners - class struggle prisoners who have been receiving the same treatment from the screws as that delivered to Irish prisoners. The march will pass the prison and remember the Irish and NUM hostages kept by the British state.

Workers Power calls for the fullest mobilisation behind this demonstration. It calls for all serious militants to attend this demonstration. ■

by Paul Winstone & Bernie McAdam

**Bloody Sunday Commemoration** Sunday 3rd February. Assemble 12 noon Spinney Hill Park, Leicester. March leaves 1.00pm to Leicester Prison.

# Solidarity

Around about the same time a solidarity committee of rank and file railway workers at Setteville were organising support for Lancashire striking miners, aided by the visit of NUM members from Bold Colliery.

Now the two campaigns are building on their success and jointly organising a late January visit of Lancashire striking miners and rank and file railmen taking solidarity action from Nottingham. One of these - Steve Morley - has been sent home by BR management since last spring for refusing to handle scab coal. If that kind of sacrifice and solidarity action can inspire transport workers in Rouen and elsewhere in France to step up their solidarity action then the trip will be a huge success.

So far the solidarity campaign has secured backing from 2 CGT branches on the service sector and from 4 CFDT (Railway Unions) branches for the public meeting on Tuesday 29th January. It is also planned for the miners and railworkers to speak to local workplaces and unions. Bon chance! □

## ■ WORKERS POWER PUBLIC MEETING ON IRELAND

Leicester

30th January - ring (0533) 552386 for details

## ■ BLOODY SUNDAY MEETINGS

Main speaker: Dave Douglass  
(Delegate, Hatfield Main NUM;  
in personal capacity)

- Keresley Striking Miners  
11am, Thursday 17 January  
The Hut, Keresley End, Keresley
- Coventry  
7:30pm, Thursday 17 January  
Barras Green Social Club,  
Barras Heath, Coventry Street
- Nottingham  
7:30pm, Thursday 24 January  
Nottingham Trades Council,  
Albert Hall Institute, Derby Rd  
+video

▷ Meetings with Dave have also been arranged in Hackney and the Kent Coalfield - venues not available at time of going to press.

## ■ IRELAND & THE MINERS STRIKE

with Dave Douglass

Cardiff

7:30pm, Friday 18 January  
Cardiff Miners Support Committee,  
May Street Institute, Cathays,  
Cardiff



# Muddleheads on the general strike

AT THE FORTHCOMING Mineworkers' Defence Conference three political organisations will be falling over themselves to oppose Workers Power's calls for a general strike. The Socialist Workers' Party, as we have often pointed out in this paper, hates the general strike slogan like the plague. Up until the day the general strike begins the SWP will be devising ever more ingenious excuses for why it is wrong to call for one.

The groupings around the papers *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Action* are rather different specimens. Both are on record as having favoured a general strike at one time or another. Yet both will join hands with the SWP in February and declare our calls for a fight for a general strike to be utopian fantasies. A brief survey of these two groupings' sporadic use of the general strike slogan illustrates why they will oppose us.

*Socialist Organiser* has, on various occasions raised a direct call for the general strike. After the appointment of the receiver to take control of the NUM's funds the December 12th issue raised the call "Demand a general strike". However on a closer inspection, this position turns out to be a slogan for an unspecified time in the future. The fight for a general strike now is replaced by pious and empty calls to "organise for a general strike". (12.12.84).

## ■ FORMAL POSITION ■

As they say, there's the rub. *Socialist Organiser* hold a formal position for a general strike, but in practice are always postponing the fight for one. Thus at the December 2nd Mineworkers Defence Conference they blocked with the SWP and *Socialist Action* to prevent discussion on a resolution from the Keresley miners and Coventry Support Committee which called for a general strike. There are no shortage of staff writers on *Socialist Organiser* to explain this contradiction between the formal position and the actual practice.

Way back in October Clive Bradley explained that "Ogreave was not Saltley," and that the rank and file were less able to deliver solidarity action. This state of affairs meant that the general strike, while desirable, was not on. Therefore, neither was fighting for it. Instead we had to sit back and wait for the working class to deliver us a general strike. As Martin Thomas put it in the November 1st issue: "A general strike seems a very remote prospect to most trade union activists today. But that could change quite quickly... In the meantime there are two priorities: collecting money, and forcing the union leaders to put the TUC promises into action."

In sum the general strike is not what *SO* fights for, merely what it wishes for. What *SO* fights for is the highly limited industrial action called for by the NUM- blacking of fuel.

By December Tony Benn and Audrey Wise had called for a general strike. In fact these reformists never went beyond a call for a "discussion" of the general strike. Nevertheless *Socialist Organiser* felt emboldened enough to re-raise their slogan "Organise for a general strike" and added the call for a 24 hour general strike for good measure.

Colin Foster was called in to bridge the gap between formal radicalism and practical opportunism: "*Socialist Organiser* has not quite called for a general strike as an immediate demand, our slogan has generally been 'organise for a general strike'... We need to do more than just call for a general strike. We need to explain, discuss problems and formulate additional practical demands (the call for a 24 hour general strike is sometimes useful here)." (12.12.84)

## ■ RADICAL PHRASES ■

We will come back to the question of the 24 hour general strike. First let us deal with *Socialist Organiser's* real position on the general strike. Colin Foster's refusal to raise the call as an immediate demand is a knee bend to Benn. The words "explain, discuss problems and formulate additional partial demands" are almost an exact extract of Benn's speech on the general strike at a December rally in Lambeth. He too declared in favour of a general strike, only to add, not as an "immediate" demand. At the Lambeth rally he talked about the spring of 1985 as a possible starting date! *Socialist Organiser* in fact go no further than Benn did. They declare in favour of a radical objective but argue that it is an impossibility in the here and now. They are radical phrasemongers.

It is undoubtedly true that whole sections of the working class are only passively supporting the miners. Thanks to the failure of the NUM leadership to fight for a general strike inside the labour movement, and the TUC's wretched refusal to call for strike action, the fight for a general strike is a hard one. But difficulties are not excuses for revolutionaries. They have to be acknowledged and overcome. We cannot be certain that this will happen spontaneously. Therefore we cannot sit back and wait for "future crises" as *Socialist Organiser* counsels.

Moreover the call to "organise towards a general strike" (12.12.84) has little to disguise *Socialist Organiser's* opposition to the use of the slogan. How do we "organise" for this? In our view you do this by fighting to win a call for the general strike in every union branch, workplace, steward's committee and trades council. You do not organise for it by telling workers that it "seems light years away now" (21.11.84) Revolutionaries should argue that such action is possible now, that miners' speakers should explain in every workplace why general strike action is necessary, that immediate action by railworkers, for example can begin a snowball effect. Putting the case for a general strike now, is the best way of organising for one. That is not what *SO* means by its slogan. For them it is a slogan designed to provide an excuse for not fighting for a general strike.

Of course a general strike will not happen overnight, but if we do not fight for one in the here and now, the chances of *Socialist Organiser's* wishful thinking coming to fruition are extremely slim.

*Socialist Action* have not been as concerned as *Socialist Organiser* were to square the circle of holding a formal position in favour, only to negate it in practice. They are content with confining the slogan, when they use it, to a 24 hour general strike. Like *Socialist Organiser* they were only prepared to raise this demand after Benn had given it his blessing. At the December 2nd conference they argued against the call for a general strike.

A few days later, after Benn's call at the NEC for a discussion on the general strike *Socialist Action* declared: "This should mean the TUC fixing the date for a national day of industrial action, a 24 hour general strike, against this legal attack on the NUM and the trade union movement. If this does not force the government to back down it must be followed up by industrial action sufficient to force the withdrawal of the legal attacks on the unions." (7.12.84)

Everything wrong with *Socialist Action's* position on the general strike is on display here. They are unwilling to go beyond the call for a 24 hour general strike quite simply because they do not want to offend the NUM leadership. Before and

since the December 7th issue *Socialist Action* limited their demands to those of the NUM itself - money and a fulfilment of the TUC's pledges. They added the call for a national demonstration for good measure. The reason that *Socialist Action* will not go further is because they believe the NUM leadership has the right to dictate what action should and shouldn't be taken by the rest of the working class. They believe that the NUM leadership is sufficient: "The labour movement needs the kind of class struggle leadership that the miners have got." (23.11.84)

Any idea of the labour movement needing revolutionary leadership goes out of the window. The left-labour and Communist Party dominated NEC of the NUM is sufficient. Their demands must be adhered to.

This approach is disastrous. Our starting point has to be what the miners need for victory. If we assess this to be a general strike, which we do, then we are duty bound to fight for this, against the NUM leadership if necessary.

## ■ ONE DAY ACTION ■

*Socialist Action's* idea that what is needed is a 24 hour general strike is laughable. A 24 hour general strike is nothing more than a demonstration. Sometimes a demonstration of those proportions can be useful. Would it be today? No way. The bosses have dug in for an all out struggle to smash the miners. The judges are lined up to use the laws to do this. Their determination is a product of their real need to solve capitalism's crisis on the backs of the working class. If a 24 hour general strike took place, the bosses could quite easily sit out, safe in the knowledge that the wheels of state and industry would commence to turn after an insignificant break. The likely impact on the working class would be demoralisation at the ineffectiveness of their action. That much is clear from the whole strategy of "one day actions" in the 1982 health strike which did demoralise the workforce.

After eleven months on strike the miners do not need a demonstration in their support. They need action that can help bring about victory. We

cannot scare the bosses with a one day action. *Socialist Action* are arguing we should say "boo!" to the bosses and if they do not give in, consider saying "boo!" again - but louder. Frankly this position is worse than useless. It is dangerous in creating the illusion that a mere protest by the working class can defeat the bosses and Tories.

## ■ CENTRIST FAILINGS ■

This track record leads us to suspect that these groups will oppose the call for a general strike at the February 9th solidarity conference.

They are centrist organisations. By this we mean that they do not maintain a consistently revolutionary position. Rather they chop and change, vacillating between revolutionary positions and reformist ones. This explains why *Socialist Organiser* can hold a formally revolutionary position (at times) on the general strike, and yet pursue a thoroughly right-wing practice when it comes to waging a real-life struggle for the general strike. In essence, both *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Action* devise their slogans and practice to suit the moods and wishes of left-reformists like Scargill and Benn. The general strike is only in order if backed by one of these men. At the same time they privately hope for a spontaneous outburst of generalised strike action. Tailoring and waiting are the stock-in-trade of these groups.

In the strike the miners have been offered politics of every stripe. Centrist, in its own feeble way, has been in contention. It has tried to prove its worth to the miners by parroting the positions of the NUM leadership. No doubt some short term popularity is won as a result. But by refusing to state what is necessary for victory, by refusing to fight, even against the odds, for a general strike, the centrists are doing a disservice to the miners. If they were ever in a position to lead workers, it would be towards defeat. We argue against their positions in order to prevent them ever winning such leadership. ■

by Mark Hoskisson

# Youth: Tories to cut benefits?

ON THE 17th December The Guardian reported that the government was seriously considering plans to "withdraw supplementary benefit from those jobless school leavers who refused to take places on training schemes".

Although the cabinet is not due to decide on these plans until the spring, Mrs Thatcher immediately put her full weight behind them, arguing in a BBC interview that "young people ought not to be idle, it is very bad for them". She said that "unemployment should not be a choice up to the age of 18" and that "the options ought to be to get a job, get some form of further education or go to training". *Guardian* 18.12.84.

These proposals are another stage in the Tories' attack on youth, dividing the rich (who can afford to support their children) and the poor (whose children are forced en masse onto slave labour YTS courses.)

What these proposals mean is that in order to get any money at all jobless 16-18 year olds will be compelled to go on YTS schemes. Thatcher, of course, says that they will not be compelled to go but simply lose their benefits if they don't! This breaks the "no compulsion agreement" made between the government and the TUC when the schemes were set up. Another result will be that freedom to look for jobs would be severely restricted and they would not be getting any money while they were looking.

The Tories plans would greatly increase difficulties for 16-18 year olds wanting to study for two reasons. Firstly for those students with no grant who at present can claim supplementary benefit if they study for less than 21 hours a week (including homework). Pressure has already been applied on students studying under this rule to join YTS schemes instead. These proposals would mean that no 16-18 year olds could get an education unless his or her parents supported them for 2 years.

## □ SLAVE LABOUR □

Secondly, a lot of YTS placements these youths would be going on would be at technical and FE colleges. There would not be enough industry to go round even though the bosses would be getting their slave labour for free! Many colleges and techs are already receiving the majority of their grants from the schemes which is greatly distorting what those colleges can offer students. First out of the window is anything political!

These proposals are yet another attempt to launder the unemployment figures, especially youth unemployment by removing thousands of 16-18 year olds from the unemployment totals.

They are also an attempt to reduce the wages

of everyone by paying £26.25 for a job which was previously done for adult wages.

Mrs Thatcher's three options are not real options at all. Youths are among the worst affected by unemployment - how can they get jobs if none are available? The only way 16-18 year olds can get further education is by depending on their parents to support them, and with 1 in 4 families with children below the government's official poverty line, for vast numbers of teenagers this is not an option either. But that's how the government wants it to provide a cheap labour force which can be moved around at the bosses' wishes and can be dumped when they are no longer needed.

## □ ORGANISE YOUTH □

What needs to be done? To begin, youth organisations such as LPYS, black youth organisations, student unions etc should campaign against these proposals alongside unemployed organisations, trade unions and the Labour Party. Teen-

agers about to leave school, and their parents must be made aware of what these proposals will mean to them. The youth organisations must also campaign for a minimum grant for all under 19s in full time education, not just those in universities and polytechnics.

Trade unions must boycott YTS schemes wherever new ones are proposed. Where schemes already exist they must fight to unionise the trainees and to push their wages and health and safety conditions to trade union level; this includes unions in colleges. Finally education should be paid for by elected local authorities, not unelected bodies like the MSC. Trade unions must withdraw from the MSC and must call on the TUC to withdraw. Even where schemes are being operated it would be better to fight the MSC openly to improve conditions rather than hope to negotiate improvements whilst still collaborating in the running of the scheme. ■

by Clare Alexander





# Labour lefts defect to Kinnock

**A CRITICAL TWELVE months has opened for the Labour Party. The Metropolitan Councils face the crunch of the Tories' abolition proposals. Labour Councils face the battle over rate-capping.**

By 1986 the unions will have to have balloted their members on their political levies. Above all however the Labour Party faces the question of the miners strike. Victory or defeat for the miners will shape Labour's future in the coming years.

Neil Kinnock's New Year message is typical of the man and his politics. Personally he is a completely empty tin can except for a few worthless pebbles of parliamentary rhetoric. But he makes a big noise when shaken by the Right-Wing. His themes are all too familiar by now. Labour must win the next election. The party must not promise too much if it is to win it. It must slavishly obey the law and order of the Tory parliament and judges. Above all we must have unity in the party. Everyone must shut up apart from Neil Kinnock.

Fresh from his chauffeur-driven trip to a picket line in his own constituency he manages to say just half a sentence on the most bitter class struggle of the century. Talking of the wondrous recovery he engineered after the doddering Foot's resignation, he blamed the miners for the fact that the Tories are now back at 9 per cent ahead in the opinion polls: "But in a year dominated by the miners strike that recovery faltered."

## ■ KINNOCK'S EXCUSES ■

The truth is that Neil Kinnock does not want the miners to win. He does not want Thatcher defeated. He whines that he "supports the case for coal" but that the media has blacked him out. What a wretched excuse. Doesn't the Labour Party have party political broadcasts at its disposal? Kinnock can make videos promoting himself. Couldn't he make one identifying himself with the miners' cause? In fact he wants to keep his distance and his only significant interventions have been against the miners.

Kinnock is in fact busy proving to Britain's bosses that it is a better bet to trust himself and the Labour Party with carrying out the Liberal-SDP Alliance programme rather than the Steel and Owen team. All this amounts to a sharp turn back to the good old days of Wilson and Callaghan.

The other element of the Kinnock prescription is to press on with weeding out the "Trotskyite infiltrators". A special working party has

been set up to draw up a "statement of democratic socialist principles". After eighty-four years Labour may get a "programme" but ironically only to act as a bible for witch-hunters. This cynical proposal was initiated by Ken Cure of the Right and given a "left" veneer by David Blunkett.

How has Kinnock got away with scabbing on the miners strike and maintaining a successful campaign to put the clock back to the Callaghan years? He has been able to do so because the official Left has fragmented and crumbled faced with his offensive.

Recruitment to Kinnock's bandwagon from the one time "Bennite movement" is gathering pace. Michael Meacher, the lefts deputy leadership candidate in 1983 has led the pack. The NEC "lefts" David Blunkett, leader of Sheffield City Council and Tom Sawyer, deputy general secretary of NUPE have moved decisively towards Kinnock.

Peter Hain of the LCC and Nigel Williamson, the new editor of Tribune are the main ideological spokesmen of this tendency. Laughably their excuse is that they are "saving Neil from the Right" by deserting Benn! In addition, Tribune and Kinnock aim to perhaps rescue Benn from his "Trotskyist" minders and footsoldiers of Socialist Organiser and Socialist Action. In the future Benn could still perform a useful role for Kinnock.

Williamson pontificates: "The next general election will be won or lost over the coming year....elections are not decided in the brief duration of a three week campaign but are determined by the image which the party presents over a much longer period."

Here we have Kinnock and the Right's obsession with image building - Saatchi and Saatchi socialism. We must concentrate on "winnable and realisable aims and objectives." Labour Councils must "campaign around a strategy which they can deliver"

With regard to solidarity with the miners "at the end of the day trade union leaders can only campaign around demands which their members are able and prepared to meet." Above all: "Calls for a general strike, if not irresponsible are at best a distraction from the real issues for it is not a demand that has any basis in reality. It cannot be delivered and there are those who, knowing that, raise the demand only to be able to cry 'betrayal' when it does not happen." (From Tribune)

"Neo-Realism" is far from dead. Indeed it has conquered the Labour Party, including a goodly proportion of its so-called Left-wing. From the point of view of working class interests this "political realism" is as unrealistic as the Len Murray variety proved in 1984.

Labour's lack of credibility has little or nothing

to do with its image or being implicated with lawlessness. Labour has no credible alternative programme to Thatcher and millions can sense it. She has a programme to boost profits by stripping the working class of its social services, its trade union won wages and conditions, its jobs, its democratic rights. Labour has no programme for solving unemployment at the expense of the bosses. It promises to alleviate unemployment - but "realistically" without hurting the bankers or the bosses. Millions sense that this is indeed the height of unreality. This does not mean that at this moment they are just waiting for a red-blooded communist programme. But they do know that Kinnock's pale-pink image has no substance to it.

What remaining solidly Labour has to it is based on it being a movement that can defend working class conditions here and now. If the miners can win then Labour will rocket up in the opinion polls - not due to Kinnock's "image", but because the working class will have shown itself a force to be reckoned with. If the miners lose then Labour will reap the whirlwind of disillusion and demoralisation.

What of Labour's "Hard Left" and its main figures Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner? They have stood by the miners it is true. In the period before Christmas both called for a general strike. They further suggested that they would be willing to call Kinnock to account by standing against the "dream ticket" this year.

## ■ BENN RETREATS ■

In the cold light of January they have already pulled back from the brink. Benn has announced he will not challenge Kinnock. He has trimmed his talk of a general strike and councils of action to a call for a day of action: "Ideally we should aim at a general stoppage of work." What has happened to the "Lefts"? Basically - under the impact of the legal attacks on the NUM and of its special delegate conference's decision to defy the courts Benn and Co shifted sharply to the left. But when the NUM leadership failed to challenge the TUC's scabbing inactivity Benn and Skinner were left in mid-air. Kinnock rounded on them and they were soon backtracking on their hot words.

Benn says in his New Year message that "It must be our task to take the initiative now and offer the leadership that will be necessary."

But that is just what he will not do. Like all the "Lefts" he is a permanent oppositionist - not a leader in struggle. Whenever the miners - or any other section of workers - go forward Benn is pushed or dragged along. When the class battle stagnates he "leads" the retreat.

In this strike tens of thousands of miners - and those who support them in other unions - have been enormously radicalised. They have been given a practical education in the real meaning of

## ■ ABJECT SURRENDER ■

parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the neutrality of the police and the greedy and inhumane system that demands that millions should face unemployment and poverty to feed it. Moreover these militants have also seen what the official Labour leadership and the TUC stand for - abject surrender. They have seen Willis and Kinnock back up Thatcher and sing psalms of praise to legality.

A tremendous fissure has opened in the Labour Movement between the militant rank and file activists who have rallied to the miners and the bulk of the union officials, councillors and MPs who have not. This should not be a cause for complaint - for laments about unity. Yes we are for 100% unity with the miners. Unity with Kinnock and Co? You can't have unity with both now - that is the brutal truth. An all out war is needed to help the miners win and the quillings in our own ranks should be shown no mercy.

In the unions first and foremost - but necessarily and vitally in the Labour Party too - the class fighters must be rallied for a life or death struggle against the class traitors. Then we shall see where the waverers and appeasers stand. This strike has shown the working class doesn't need a "broad church". It needs a mass party of the class struggle. It needs a party dedicated to overthrowing capitalism and able unequivocally to throw its full organised weight into each and every battle the bosses. To this end the militant miners and all their supporters should dedicate themselves in 1985. ■

by Dave Stocking

### MASS PICKET

Keresley Pit, Keresley Village, Coventry

Friday 25th January

Assemble from 5:30 am outside pit entrance



Kinnock: trying to laugh it all off?

## Reject the NUS "New Deal"

THE TORIES LATEST attacks on higher and further education have been met by the most widespread student protests for years.

Keith Joseph's proposals to levy tuition fees (later withdrawn in an embarrassing U-turn) and to abolish the minimum grant provoked large demonstrations in cities and colleges up and down the country.

This anger reached a peak when tens of thousands joined the NUS rally in London last November. Clearly inspired by the fighting spirit of the striking miners, students took to the streets, blocking London's traffic for hours. The response of the police was predictable. They obstructed and intimidated demonstrators, before a cavalry baton charge in Westminster. The sight of these unprovoked attacks and the media's claim that students had rioted and thrown clusters of nails at police disgusted a large number of the demonstrators.

Many understood that they had experienced what the miners had been up against since March. It was also noticed that NUS "stewards" had been conspicuously absent from the demonstration.

Unfortunately whilst huge numbers of students have shown themselves to be quite prepared for a militant campaign against the Tory proposals the NUS leadership has done very little to organise such a campaign.

## □ MILITANT ACTION □

The basis of NUS's latest activity is their programme for a "new deal" for students. The campaign has undoubtedly received overwhelming support in the colleges. But a close examination of the proposals in the "New Deal" shows it is an inadequate programme to unite students in a campaign both against education cuts and for a living grant.

In the face of government attacks the NUS has dropped its old demands for the abolition of the parental contribution. This would allow students greater independence. Instead the "New Deal" calls for a £900 minimum grant which would represent no more than a reduction of the parental contribution.

A retreat has also taken place on the question of racist fees levied on overseas students. The "New Deal" has replaced the demand for their

abolition with abolition of only full cost fees. This too is a sneaky way of demanding a reduction in fees not their abolition. Student unions need to organise action to demand the complete abolition of the parental contribution and tuition fee payments.

NUS's present demand for an overall 14% grant rise for the academic year 1985/6 should be supported. But if school and FE students are to be successfully mobilised it will also be necessary to demand a full mandatory grant for all students over the age of sixteen.

In his speech at the London rally the president of NUS, Labourite Phil Woolas argued that the government proposals represent the first step towards privatisation of further and higher education. Despite Joseph's retreat on tuition fees the threat is still very real. Apart from removing the right to higher education for children from all but the most wealthy families, privatisation threatens the wages and job security of tens of thousands of workers employed in the education system.

However the strategy that NUS has adopted to fight the cuts completely ignores the nature of the attack. With the complete backing of the Labour Party and CP students organisations, students have been urged to write endless letters to their MPs with the aim of raising the indignation of Britain's middle classes and the rebellious tendencies of certain backbench Tories.

The NUS claims that Joseph's retreat entirely vindicates this policy. But while revolting backbench Tories and NUS bureaucrats were patting each other on the back all semblance of opposition to the remainder of the government's package has been quietly dropped.

True to form the Tory backbenchers are loyally supporting abolition of the minimum grant, and NUS look set to organise no direct action to support their own demands. As National Student pontificated before the retreat: "Those Tory MPs will be prepared to do so only on potentially winnable issues. Inevitably this will make it necessary for NUS to temper some of its more utopian ambitions."

The NUS executive's disregard for the living standards of their members is glaringly obvious. Presumably the "utopian" ambitions now include defending your grant and opposing privatisation!

Reliance on the Tory wets or the NUS executive

is a recipe for defeat. A campaign of direct action needs to be launched in the colleges as a step towards building a movement capable of stopping the government's education cuts. Students need to launch fighting campaigns, such as the grants action forum launched at Birmingham University. These should organise action such as pickets and demonstrations, produce leaflets to explain the issues to the majority of students, place demands on existing student union leaders to take a real lead in opposing the cuts.

## □ "NEW DEAL" - RAW DEAL! □

Two things need to be done in particular. Firstly student unions need to be committed to indefinite occupations of college administrative blocks or government buildings. Such action should aim to draw in as many students as possible and get colleges to overspend rather than submit to UCG or government demands. Support must also be given to students at PNL in opposing the presence of National Front organiser Patrick Harrington.

Secondly students must recognise they cannot defeat these proposals on their own. Because of the national nature of the attacks single actions or even a national occupation would not force the government to back down. Recognising this is not a recipe for a cringing reliance on Tory MPs such as we have seen from Phil Woolas.

It points to the necessity of joining with those who face similar attacks from the same government, namely the organised Labour movement. Many colleges have given considerable support to the miners throughout the period of their strike. These links must be built on and developed. Grants campaigns should also orientate to workers in the colleges. The arguments against education cuts must be put, as must the case for strike action in support of occupations or other student actions.

Such a perspective receives no consideration whatsoever from the NUS leadership. They have named their campaign "Going for Broke." Their failure to build a fighting campaign aimed at drawing in active trade union support only shows how appropriate that slogan is. □

by Richard Gerrard



# RAIL-NOW IS THE TIME TO FIGHT



Lobby of ASLEF/NUR executives' meeting: Coalville workers and supporters

For thirty eight weeks railworkers at the Coalville depot, Leicestershire, prevented scab coal moving out of the county. Their solidarity with the miners - only thirty of whom are striking in Leicestershire - is a marvellous example to other workers. As a press release from the Coalville NUR pointed out: "No coal was moved by rail to Drakelow, Rugeley and Didcot power stations." The action was biting.

On December 17th management did move coal. They were determined to break the solidarity of Coalville. To do this they had to bring in relief signal men from outside Coalville NUR. To get these men in place they tricked a Coalville man into going for an interview in Derby. While he was away the scab went into his signal box to operate it. Two coal trains were able to move, while the Coalville signalman was eventually declared "mentally unreliable" after refusing a bribe of paid leave! He was, conveniently, moved off the job.

## LEADERS RELUCTANT

The BRB's despicable action against the Coalville man is part of a get tough policy. In fact at least two Coalville men had already been sacked. As winter bites they want to make sure they can move scab coal to power stations. Coalville was a thorn in their side. It was proof, that with the right lead, railworkers were prepared to act to back the miners.

If they can defeat the NUR on this issue now the BRB hopes to weaken the union's chances of fighting planned redundancies on the rail and winning this year's 30% wage claim. **The struggle at Coalville therefore has a vital significance for miners and all railworkers.**

Recognising this the Coalville NUR demanded industrial action from their own Executive. On January 8th a lobby of a meeting of the Federation (NUR and ASLEF) was organised to press for industrial action against the management's victimisation campaign.

The 'left' leaders of both rail unions were less than willing to meet their members. Despite assurances that the Federation meeting would be at Unity

House (the NUR HQ) Buckton and Knapp switched the venue to the ASLEF HQ in Hampstead at the last minute. This was a deliberate move to dodge the lobby.

As Roy Butlin said at the lobby meeting, "We've become an embarrassment to our own union."

True to form the NUR and ASLEF leaderships aim is to avoid having to fight alongside the miners. This is why they were so easily bought off with a pathetic pay deal last spring. It is why all they have come up with in support of the Coalville lads is a one day strike in only eleven depots. No wonder BR feel they can threaten to use the anti-union laws against the strike. They know that Knapp and Buckton are scared of a fight.

By refusing to call a national strike the leaders are keeping Coalville isolated. Calling out branches like Derby, Shirebrook, Nottingham, Westhouses and Toton is a shabby manoeuvre on Knapp's part. These branches are known to be wavering or scabbing on the question of moving coal. As Toton NUR member Steve Morley pointed out at the lobby meeting, these branches are weak now because they have been left isolated throughout the miners strike.

These branches have been given no perspective for linking the defence of their own jobs with the miners' struggle. Steve Morley argued that, "National industrial action in support of the miners, in defence of our jobs and against the anti-union laws will change the mood in the Midlands and throughout the country. The NCB and the BRB are hand in glove. It's about time the NUR and the NUM were!"

The danger of the one day national strike is that the support will be patchy. The leaders will then use this as an excuse for calling no further action. They will claim, as Bernard Hinks the NUR Assistant General Secretary did at the lobby meeting, that the NUR cannot deliver. In short they will stab the Coalville lads in the back.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the NUM are helping them do this. Leicestershire striking miners pressed Peter Heathfield to put pressure on Knapp and Buckton to call all-out action. He responded by saying that these two were friends of the miners, were doing all

they could and should not be asked to deliver any further action. In other words he shares the view of his fellow bureaucrats that a strike on the railways is not on. Heathfield and the rest of the NUM leadership should be called on by every militant to demand that the NUR and ASLEF take national strike action in defence of Coalville and in support of the miners. They should be told in plain words - don't cover up for traitors simply because they happen to talk left.

The lobby meeting on January 8th revealed a very different mood to that of the leadership amongst NUR and NUM rank and file militants. Calls from militants from many areas for serious action were loud and clear. Roy Butlin made it plain that if the Executive dodged a fight he would go straight to the rank and file. This was echoed by other militants. Now, this is exactly what has to be done. In Leicester, at a depot not called out, Roy is addressing a mass meeting to call for unofficial action. Moves in Waterloo and St Pancras in London are underway to get unofficial action. These moves must be built on.

## LAUNCHING PAD

Crucially in the Midlands the NUM, ASLEF and the NUR should set up a council of action to co-ordinate strikes and the halting of all coal movement. Such a council can play a vital role in overcoming the isolation many workers feel. It could help them turn the tide against the scabs. Even if the unions refuse to set one up, NUM strike committees involved in joint action with the railworkers like Keresley and Leicester (both of which were represented at the lobby meeting) should take the initiative and set one up.

In other areas unofficial action should be built for and on the basis of it links with the miners should be established. As Steve Morley stated, "Every one says that the miners' fight is our fight. Right let's fight with the miners, let's build joint committees with the miners, let's strike with the miners." January 17th should become the launching pad to get just this. ■

## WORKERS IN ACTION

# Stitch-up at Fords

After six weeks on strike, the Ford sewing machinists agreed to return to work after management conceded there should be an 'independent' assessment of their case. But this is a dangerously inadequate deal after such a struggle - one that is 16 years old!

A minority of women at Halewood felt that the strikers should have stayed out to ensure victory. They do not trust such an enquiry and quite rightly. The long dispute has included several enquiries into the women's grievances. Each one has served to demobilise action by the women. Each time the enquiry has denied the justice of the women's case.

This time the 'independent' enquiry is a 3 person body with an ACAS-nominated chair and two other nominated by management and unions. Clearly expressed determination to strike again if demands aren't met; vigilance while the enquiry tricksters perform; a united campaign with other sections in Fords under attack. These are the minimum steps necessary to force a concession.

The sewing machinists first struck for recognition of their skills in 1968. The strike was a landmark in the fight by women workers for better pay, conditions and for the T&G to take women workers seriously.

On that occasion, the women won the principle of Equal Pay. They had previously been paid at only 80% of the men's B rate. But they lost the regrading. The unions involved were the National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB, later part of the TGWU) and the Engineers, then the AEF. The NUVB didn't even support the strike until a mass lobby of the Dagenham women burst onto the scene at the union conference and an emergency motion declaring support was hurried through!

## UNION EXCUSES

Quickly the Fords National Joint Negotiating Committee proposed a 5 man independent enquiry, and the union rejected this. Labour minister Barbara Castle enlisted one Jack Sharp to help the officials and management. Eventually they conceded the principle of Equal pay and a staged rise. However, regrading was referred to a 'job evaluation committee!'

But 16 years later, the women are still waiting! The job evaluation system weights various skills such as physical effort, accuracy and visualising ability. Under this system the women have been consistently marked down, staying on the semi-skilled B grade despite having to have at least 2 years experience and pass a Trade test before even starting at Fords. The unions have continued to

submit the women's case to the Grading Grievance committee in 1970, 1974, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

But why hasn't it fought with strike action over this long period? To get the women back to work this time the union leaders at plant, local and national level used the excuse that the rest of the workforce was pressing the women to return.

Certainly, the women's claim was holding up the completion of the company pay agreement and payment of the new rates. But it was certainly not the machinists who were responsible for this! They would have preferred the claim to be settled years ago.

The Equal Pay Act of 1970, finally implemented in 1975 and also at the centre of the dispute was shot full of holes. Only in 1974 was the Act amended to include the definition 'work of equal value'. And even then, it is up to the Tribunals to decide what constitutes 'equal value'

## UNITE WOMEN'S STRUGGLES

In 1984, a tribunal conceded the case of a cook working at Cammell Lairds. Her work was judged as of 'equal value' to that of a painter. But when it came to the more significant case at Fords, the decision went against the women.

While the Act was a step forward for women workers, the real advances were made by women organising themselves. The period ushered in by the Ford strike in 1968 saw innumerable struggle against low pay and for equal rights at work - the Leeds Clothing Workers, Imperial Typewriters, Tricos. Between 1973 and 1976 women's wages had a small rise - but from the late 70s it began to drop again as a proportion of men's.

Now we are experiencing the attempt by the Thatcher government to force women back to being a source of the very cheapest, easily exploitable labour. That is why they have launched the campaign to privatise or de-regulate wages in hospitals. The union power built by women in the 1970s will be shattered if these plans succeed. We will lose all those gains.

Many groups of women in individual unions and communities have continued to fight. Now we have the strength of the miners' wives' movement to build on. We have the example of women at Barking. Neither they, nor the women at Fords should have to go it alone. Building a working class women's movement should start now, to stop union leaders sellouts, isolation, and the employers' offensive. ■

# POLITICAL PRISONERS

Christmas was bearable for tens of thousands of strikers last year. What was lacking in presents was more than made up for by the comradeship of struggle and community spirit.

But for the dozens of strikers languishing in jail none of this was the case. Many like the eleven miners in Leicester jail face two to three year stretches. 40 North Derbyshire miners are in jail. Just last week, Terry French from Betteshanger Colliery was handed down a five-year term.

Many if not most have been slammed inside on trumped up charges. Others, like Dean Hancock, Russell Shanklin and Tony Williams from South Wales who were arrested for the death of scab taxi driver David Wilkie are in Cardiff prison, faced life sentences for the crime of fighting for their class.

The solidarity committees and trade unions must rally to their side now. Prisoners' aid must become an item on every agenda of such sup-

port group. There are numerous and urgent tasks to be done. Letters of support and visits can be organised. Literature can be sent so that the time inside can be used as profitably as possible.

Given that many miners are in jail far from home and that their families are impoverished, we should ensure that accommodation is provided for relatives.

Above all, we must take up their cause inside the unions. We should aim to get trade unions branches to adopt a class war prisoner and take responsibility for some of these tasks. None of this work should mean that we quietly accept their fate, far more are threatened than have been convicted. Striking miners still at liberty must honour their comrades by fighting to include within the programme of victory the dropping of all charges and the immediate release of NUM class war political prisoners. We will be the real criminals if we allow their names to be forgotten. □

# workers power

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Picket Tilbury Power Station 21st January 6:45 am

# FUND DRIVE

As part of our fund drive to purchase typesetting and printing equipment we have raised £1897 over the last month.

Our target of £3000 must be reached by the end of February. Despite the financial commitment that all our readers have as a result of the miners strike, we ask all our supporters to rush donations to us at:

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