Socialist Organiser

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Keep our unions LABOUR

LABOUR PARTY

800 miners strike against life jailing for

CLASS WAR PRISONERS

Last Friday 800 miners from two South Wales pits struck in protest at the murder verdict and life sentences handed out to Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock. Protest action was also reported from many other South Wales collieries.

On Saturday, over 1000 marched in a protest demonstration in the village of Rhymney. Ray Davies, mid-Glamorgan county councillor for Bedwas and Machen in the Rhymney valley was on the demonstration and spoke at the rally.

The disgraceful verdict of the court in Cardiff last Thursday sent shock waves of revulsion right throughout the valleys of South Wales.

That verdict was motiated by Margaret Thatcher who screamed "Murder" on day one of the incident without knowing anything at all about it.

On the following day, her ministers, again without knowing anything about the incident, reinforced her charge of murder, and after that, there was no way these lads would get justice from any court in Britain because they were branded as murderers by the Prime Minister before the case even came to the courts.

Wilkie came from Cardiff and for the last six months everybody on the right had been carrying out collections and so on.

Now the court has reached its verdict, but there was another verdict that was passed on the following Sunday, when a demonstration was arranged in the village of Rhymney, where the boys came from.

It was arranged at 24 hours notice and when we walked down to the centre to start the march off no-one knew where the march

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THE Sun

Thursday May 16, 1985 ... TV PAGE 14

ENTER THE GAY MAYOR

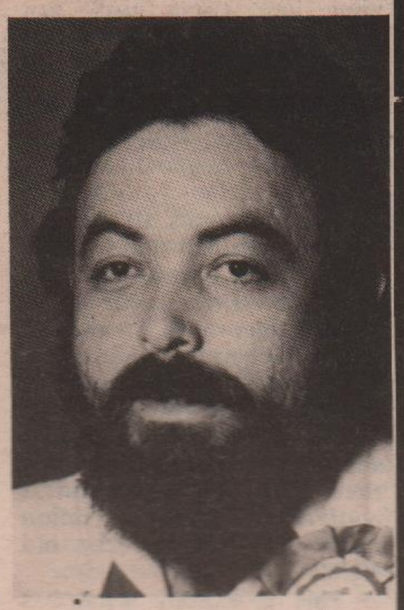
Mayoress is to be his fella

By [illegible]

GAY Labour councillor Bob Crossman is set to become mayor with his live-in boyfriend as mayoress

Enter the bigots

Bob Crossman spoke to Socialist Organiser about press reaction to his appointment as deputy mayor of Islington.



The Sun's reaction, surprisingly enough, was quite mild. The Express and the Standard had some disgusting stuff: The Standard last Friday effectively suggested that someone "do a Harvey Milk" on me* — it compared me to Milk, and said he was shot. If that isn't an open invitation, I don't know what is.

I feel a bit raw about it all. I'm not used to having my photograph taken and having reporters on my doorstep before breakfast. Really I feel it's a bit of a non-story.

What reaction there's been from the community has been positive. I've had people coming up to me in the street and shaking my hand. They've been saying: 'Don't take any notice of them, we know who you are and we support you'. That's been very heartening.

I've been completely underwhelmed by the response from the Labour Party. I'm not photogenic enough, I suppose.

There was talk of setting up a defence committee after last Friday, but I don't really want to be made into an object like that.

My reasons for being deputy mayor are that I'm a working class politician, and I want to stand up for the working class. I'm not going to be victimised: I'm determined not to be victimised by the press. Of course the Daily Mail, etc., aren't interested in hearing that sort of thing.

Lesbian and gay people need to put pressure on for the authorities to deliver. We all pay rates, but our needs are disregarded, in social services, housing and even in education, because we're invisible.

We need to be visible — and I suppose me being an openly gay councillor helps encourage other people to

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*Harvey Milk was a gay San Francisco supervisor (city councillor) who was murdered. His murderer was sent to prison for only five and a half years. See Socialist Organiser no. 228 for a review of the new film about Milk.

John Harris, IFL.

The NUM rule changes

FOR many miners their attitude to the proposed new national rule book to be decided at the July Annual Delegate Conference will be determined not by what is being proposed but by who is proposing it.

On April 2 the NEC agreed to propose changes on the suggestion of those who provided the miners with determined and heroic leadership during the strike.

On the other hand, the prominent opponents of the changes are the jackals of Fleet Street and the scab leadership in Nottinghamshire.

Arthur Scargill says it plainly in the latest issue of The Miner. "I urge our members to recognise the forces which are behind this campaign against our new Rules. I urge them to mandate their delegates to the July conference to give us a Rule Book which will protect our union and members against those forces . . ."

Socialist Organiser

New police powers

STRONGER police powers to limit our right to demonstrate are proposed in the new Tory Public Order White Paper, published last week.

People who 'organise or incite' refusal to comply with police conditions – which could be set in advance, or on the spot by the officer in charge – would face three months in prison and a £1000 fine. Participants in the action could be fined £400.

The proposals would extend existing police powers under the Public Order Act of 1936. That Act was introduced, on the face of it, to ban provocative Mosleyite fascist demonstrations. In reality, it has often been used against the labour movement and the left.

The new proposals would in particular increase police powers to control picket lines. As the White Paper puts it, "Where pickets deliberately try to obstruct the passage of those going to work, as they did at Grunwick and during the miners' dispute, the police should be able to limit their numbers or move them away..."

In fact, of course, such proposals would merely give legal sanction to existing police practices. They would thus provide a new base-line for further infringements on civil liberties.

Organisers of marches would have to give seven days notice to the police. Failure to do so would result in a £400 fine.

There will be provision to challenge police rulings, but as even the Observer commented, "What court, especially in the current political climate, is likely to set aside police recommendations on public order, even if there is time?"

The basis for limiting demonstrations would be much broader. As well as existing grounds – 'fear of serious public disorder' – the White Paper says that possible disruption of traffic and shopping (!) should also be considered.

The White Paper specifically singles out such actions as the miners' strike, the Southall riots and protests at nuclear weapons as 'causes for concern'.

The Tories stop short of giving the police the power to ban 'static demonstrations' – meetings or pickets. But they would give the police the power – in advance, or on the spot – to interfere with the time, place and numbers of people involved in such actions.

An 1875 offence, 'Watching and Besetting', used in the miners' dispute, would be kept, with increased penalties.

Meanwhile, the Met have set up a 'Central Intelligence Unit', run by Scotland Yard's new public order branch, A8, and working closely with Special Branch, to gather information on political protest.

The CIU will have a network of local informants. Where Special Branch deals with organised political groups, the CIU will be concerned with lower-level local, less formal kinds of political protest. The beat officer will be the main source of information.

Labour MPs responded vociferously to the White Paper. Much of it was weak-kneed: Gerald Kaufman complained that it would turn the police into 'reluctant agents of this Government's policies', as if the police were not by their very nature the agents of the ruling class.

But it is good that Labour opposes the White Paper. The Labour Party, and the whole labour movement, should launch a campaign to prevent the White Paper proposals ever reaching the statute books.

Picket of the Old Bailey in support of the Newham 7. Photo: A.Moore

Why the tube strike failed

By Gerry Bates

THE NUR have called off their London underground strike, after an unsuccessful start on Monday May 20.

Thirty per cent of workers struck – threatened with High Court action for non-compliance with Tory anti-union laws. Many scabbed.

A central problem in the strike was the failure of the NUR leadership adequately to prepare for the action they called on railworkers to take.

By the day of the strike, it was clear that the union, though it called on workers to walk out, was preparing to do a deal with management. Many workers lacked confidence as a result of similar 'Duke of York' operations by the NUR in the past.

Worse, many London Transport workers only knew about the strike at all from reading the bosses' press. There had been little or no publicity or campaigning for the strike from union officials.

Some areas were solid, however. At Turnham Green, police moved in unprovoked to arrest pickets.

The strike was called against London Transport attempts to extend one-person operation (OPO) without agreement with the NUR. The principle of OPO had been accepted as long ago as 1968 as part of a productivity deal; the NUR leadership is prepared to accept OPO in return for a pay and productivity agreement.

The failure of the strike puts the NUR in a weak position for negotiations this week.

Amnesty for Hancock and Shankland!

By Paul Whetton

There may be those in the Labour movement who believe that the two South Wales miners jailed for life for the murder of the taxi driver got what they deserved. I don't accept that for one moment.

They were the same as every other miner who went out on the picket line. They were fighting to defend their jobs and communities. The fact that they went beyond the pale should not detract from the fact that they were prepared to stand up and fight.

There cannot be the least shadow of a doubt that those three miners did not go out with the intention of killing someone. In other murder cases we have seen people walk free because of extenuating circumstances. I think the judge went over the top. Given that this was part of an industrial dispute, I think we should continue to fight for an amnesty for them, just the same as for every other jailed or victimised miner.

There was some bitterness in Notts when the life sentences were announced, but it had been expected that the courts would deal with them in that way. There would be no mercy, the book would be thrown at them.

It's something we have come to expect from the courts and so we have become accustomed to it

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Class war prisoners

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was going to.

The police superintendant wanted to know where the march was going to, and we said we didn't know in which direction it would go. We just walked.

The natural place to go to seemed to be the Eistedfodd field where there were four or five impromptu speeches by people without notes, and a great message came out of those speeches and it was this: Our boys are not guilty and they are not murderers.

From there the cry went up: Where do we march from here? Spontaneously we shouted: To the bridge! The Rhymney bridge is where the incident happened.We marched for miles – pensioners, handicapped people and so on, 1,000 people or more.

We got to Rhymney bridge and stood there and the verdict again was not guilty.

Then we marched into Rhymney where the police barricaded off the street where the scab who was being driven to work in the taxi that day lives.

It was no good the police trying to stop the people of Rhymney because the people of Rhymney were determined to go down that street. They pushed past the police and sang 'I'd rather be a picket than a scab'.

It was a very peaceful demonstration but there was a very strong message coming out: We'll leave no stone unturned until we have reversed that scandalous court decision of murder and win justice for our boys.

Justice

And in winning justice for the two Rhymney boys we are going to win justice for the valley, because the valley will be reactivated again. The activists will come back onto the streets because, with a loud boice, the people of Rhymney said: Even though we feel despair, even though we feel pain, we're going to push that pain right down into our stomachs and let it fuel the campaign to free the boys.

The campaign is organising a petition and a demonstration in Cardiff which will be the biggest the Principality has ever seen. It will take place right in the middle of Cardiff, not a mile away where most demonstrations start, and I have no doubt it will bring Cardiff to a complete standstill.

We will then march to the Welsh Office which is where the Tory secretary of state normally stays when he is in Cardiff and we shall post a letter through the door holding Margaret Thatcher responsible for David Wilkie's death and for the violence which has been perpetrated by the closure of Bedwas colliery and the proposed closure of five other collieries in South Wales.

The campaign will go on and we will demand that the NUM give their total support for the campaign and for the two miners. From there we will go to the TUC and again demand total support and atonement for their betrayal of the miners by giving their support to the two boys. And we will call on the next Labour government to give a full pardon to the lads on the grounds that they were fighting to save jobs and communities – that's the reason they were on the bridge that day. The only reason they did what they did was because they were frustrated by the police who prevented any of the pickets speaking to the scabs. They were herded away like cattle and that day the stone was dropped as a warning.

The cab was doing 60 mph and the chances of hitting the cab were small. Our boys didn't deliberately kill or want to kill anyone. All they wanted was to save their pits and their jobs.

The campaign will go on to win justice for those boys, for the miners and for the valleys.

DEMONSTRATION
Saturday May 25
Assemble 10.30 outside St. David's Hall, on the Hayes
March moves off at 11 am

There was one strike in the coalfield, but throughout South Wales miners downed tools in shock and horror at the verdict.

Everyone in South Wales realised it was a political decision by the courts

We've seen many manslaughter verdicts in cases of women being murdered in their homes or pensioners being murdered. So it was not unnatural for the sort of reaction that took place throughout South Wales.

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