

Victory for the Miners

By Any Means Necessary

Jack Conrad

THE MINERS' STRIKE is undoubtedly historic in its importance. On its outcome hangs the balance of forces between labour and capital in the period ahead. Its strategic importance is well recognised by a state which has thrown into the struggle the full power of its courts, its police force, and its mind bending media machine. And such has been the determination of the Tories to secure victory that they have been prepared to see the social peace which has characterised Britain since World War II shattered in their efforts to crush the NUM.

Against the concerted offensive of the state, the NCB, and the Tory government, the usual methods of trade union struggle have proved woefully inadequate. Even the militant flying picket tactics first developed by the miners themselves in 1972 have come off worst against the dogs, batons, riot shields, cavalry charges, and snatch squads, of the newly organised national police force.

As a result of this the miners have been forced to look to new tactics, they have even had the temerity to reply to state terrorism through organising their own violence including guerrilla actions. And how the assorted misleaders of the working class above all Kinnock and Willis have berated them. These lovers of parliamentary rhetoric, these parsons of class collaboration, these lackies of the bosses, who have utterly failed to deliver the promises of solidarity passed so resoundingly at the TUC and Labour Party Conference now have the gall to sit in pompous judgement over the miners as they desperately and alone fight for their jobs, communities, and indeed the entire working class.

The killing of taxi driver David Wilkie provided both the bosses' media an opportunity for a new propaganda assault on the militant miners and the Kinnocks and the Willis with a new justification to stab the strike in the back. Because of this some revolutionary posers, so-called champions of the rank and file, like the Socialist Workers Party, have come out against what they moronically call "individual attacks". They declare that fire bombing, beating up scabs on their way to work or in their homes, and the dropping of the three foot concrete block onto Wilkie's taxi, lets the TUC and the Labour Party off the hook when it comes to delivering genuine solidarity.

But do these Labourites need an excuse to scab? The truth is that the Labour Party carries out the same policies when in office as the Tories. Remember *In Place of Strife* and Labour's attempt to chain the unions, the Social Contract which saw workers' wages fall by an unprecedented extent this century, and how they deployed troops to break the firemen's strike. And what about foreign policy? As with the Tories Labour has pursued undeviatingly the interests of British imperialism: from calling British workers to kill their German brothers on the fields of Flanders and Verdun,



NEWS LINE

to sending troops into the Six Counties in August 1969. And didn't they back Thatcher's Falklands/Malvinas War and celebrate British imperialism's victory? So it's Neil and the Labour Party tops who play "Maggie's game" not the miners. No wonder militant miners have been tearing up their Labour Party cards in disgust, no wonder tens of thousands are looking for a revolutionary alternative to the Eurocommunists' favourite Labourite.

In class war as in war between nations there can be deaths. Innocent victims we regret. But as to death or injury amongst the enemy, the bourgeoisie, the lords of finance capital and their mercenary army of hirelings, we shall lose no sleep. Let's be brutally frank. Taxi driver David Wilkie regularly drove scabs. He supported them, he knew the risks, and was well paid for taking them. Those who languish in gaol accused of his "murder" are soldiers of the class war. Far from distancing ourselves from them, condemning them, treating them like pariahs, the working class has a sacred duty to give them full moral and material solidarity. Not to do so is to commit a contemptible act of cowardice.

In the past we praised Arthur Scargill for what we said was his "refusal to condemn miners' violence". Unfortunately this can now no longer be said. Under pressure of a sanctimonious Kinnock, a virulent media campaign, a TUC which could starve the NUM of vital cash, and perhaps in order to court the bishops, he caved in and "disassociated the NUM" from the guerilla action which killed Wilkie. This is as much a folly as it is unforgivable.

Scargill, having failed to organise Workers' Defence Corps to protect miners' picket lines and mining

communities from police terror, forced militant miners to take matters into their own hands and organise hit squads and fighting formations themselves. Of course this has had its cost. Violence is inevitably misdirected, blunt, uncoordinated. But the fault for this must not, cannot, be placed at the feet of the militant miners. The fault lies at the top! And not just with Arthur Scargill, Mick McGahey, and Peter Heathfield, but those who falsely claim to be the leadership of the proletariat.

The Executive Committee of the Communist Party stands exposed. They have made no move, no call, to organise miners' counter-violence. And what goes for them goes for the petty bourgeois pretenders like the already mentioned SWP, as well as the Trotskyite entrists into the Labour Party like *Militant* and *Socialist Action*. And hasn't Scargill's retreat on violence shown up the tailists and the scabbers. Following it those who had been for so long dumb suddenly found the power of speech. The Welsh Congress of the CPGB voted for a motion denouncing the attack on Wilkie's taxi as "senseless" and having "no place in the legitimate struggle of the miners"; while *Morning Star* editor comrade Tony Chater discovered that for nine months the "Tory media" had been focusing "on violence no trade unionist would condone"; and the Young Communist League General Council decided to by 13 votes to 11 to "express its condolences" with Wilkie's widow.

It is these charlatans who must be condemned not the militant miners who have, against great odds, heroically, audaciously, and trail blazingly, fought fully trained scabherders equipped with the latest anti-personnel

gear.

In his statement attacking miners' violence Scargill went out of his way to make it clear that his condemnation did not apply to picket line violence, he refused to go the whole hog and condemn all violence as Kinnock insists he must. If this is the case we would ask Arthur what's the difference between violence on and off the picket line? If violence on the picket line is justified when does it stop being so? Ten yards from the picket line? 100 yards? One mile? It's like asking how long is a piece of string.

When the capitalist state sets in motion its monstrously repressive machinery to destroy the NUM, when pickets are mercilessly clubbed down, when whole areas are turned into virtual police states, and when the police invade miners home, isn't it fully justified to use any means to resist? We say yes! And to make resistance really effective, to give the thugs in blue a taste of their own medicine, to ensure that violence is well aimed with the minimum of mess, we yet again call for the formation of Workers' Defence Corps.

We are the last to counterpose one form of struggle against another. We say all forms must be considered, taking into account the concrete situation and its demands. We must learn from the successful general who combines the strategic tank thrust with air strikes, black propaganda, artillery bombardment, and assassination and sabotage behind enemy lines. So while advocating the organisation of violence through Workers' Defence Corps we do not counterpose this to leafleting, mass picketing, reasoned argument, blacking, national demonstrations, let alone the general strike. For us they are complementary.



THE LENINIST

Looking back, looking forward

1984 — WHAT A YEAR. A year dominated by the miners' strike, a strike which has already changed the face of British politics. A year in which over 8,000 miners' pickets were arrested, 3,000 injured, and two killed, as the methods learnt in Ireland have come to Britain. A year which saw the TUC and the Labour Party Conference resoundingly carry resolutions giving "total support" to the miners and their cause. But it was also a year when the leaders of the Labour Party, the TUC, and many unions, attacked militant miners because of their insistence on resisting police terrorism. When the TGWU's Ron Todd called for a "big bang" in support of the miners while the TGWU's National Docks Officer John Connolly negotiated the end to two dock strikes and agreed to allow scab coal through ports. When Bill Sirs of the ISTC cynically organised strike breaking by accepting coal deliveries despite NUM pickets and when Eric Hammond of the EETPU made sure his members gave absolutely no solidarity at the power stations. And it was a year when after the bosses courts bankrupted the NUM and Arthur Scargill pleaded for words to be turned into action, Neil Kinnock — the leader of a party directly financed by miners through the political levy — slammed the idea of a general strike floated by Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn. A year when those "ultra leftists" of the Socialist Workers Party, *Militant*, and *Socialist Action*, also opposed the demand for general strike and the formation of Workers' Defence Corps. A year when the split in the Communist Party between the Executive Committee and the *Morning Star* became unbridgable while both sides claimed fidelity to the utterly reformist programme the *British Road to Socialism* and both acted as nothing more than cheerleaders for the NUM leadership. A year in which *The Leninist* went monthly and found itself the only trend in the Communist Party capable of putting forward a revolutionary lead in the miners' struggle. What a year.

All this means that 1985 must be a year which sees the working class as a class for itself striking alongside the miners in a strike wave of general strike proportions. This means rejecting TUC "compromises", new *Plans for Coal*, it means fighting to create an alternative centre to the TUC traitors — a new National Minority Movement. It means fighting to transform the Miners' Support Committees into Council of Action type bodies. It means forming Workers' Defence Corps out of the existing hit squads, and other miners' fighting formations, by expanding them with those with military training, the unemployed, and the militant supporters of the miners. Above all it means fighting to give the working class struggle a revolutionary direction. And this means expanding the influence, circulation, and support, for the voice of the revolutionary proletarian trend in the Communist Party — *The Leninist* and its *National Bulletin*.

The Editor

CORRESPONDENCE:

BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

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Errata: We apologise for the confusion caused at the beginning of Part III of the Ireland supplement in the last issue; this was due to the incorrect transposition of a number of paragraphs.

LETTERS

Mistaken Liquidationism

Dear comrades
 Early in November the Yorkshire District Committee of the CPGB decided to expel me; the grounds on which they made their decision was that I distributed copies of the *ILWP Bulletin* amongst members of my branch for them to study and offer opinions/comments on.

At no time have I breached democratic centralism as is defined by the Party's Constitution; for merely encouraging comrades from my branch to take a look at the material of the Workers' Party I was expelled. There can be no greater sign that the anti-communist opportunist and Euro leaders of the CPGB are running scared of any type of opposition within the remaining husk of what once was a Communist Party until they got their petty bourgeois claws on it.

I wish *The Leninist* success but can't help thinking that you are doomed to failure, and that maybe now is the time for taking the course of action to build a new revolutionary party which is unfettered by petty bourgeois bureaucracy and politics and which is free to address itself to the class and not the class enemy within our own ranks.

I would encourage you to read the material of the Workers' Party and study its manifesto carefully. I feel you may agree that it does honestly represent the revolutionary traditions of the early Communist Party in this country far more than the CPGB can ever hope to; besides, the WP is carrying on those traditions of correct Marxist-Leninist analysis and interpretation and putting them to the working class.

Comradely
 James M Conway
 Ex Leeds CP

PS I have a meeting with the Appeals Committee at St John St on Sat. 8th at 12.00 noon. I trust you oppose my expulsion though I am no longer an associate of your journal, because any division in the face of the attacks by the opportunists only weakens the case for Leninism.

Ron Timpson replies:

Jim Conway can expect no support from *The Leninist*. By his actions in support of the International Leninist Workers' Party (ILWP) of Royston Bull he has placed himself in the liquidationist camp of that organisation. Like numerous bodies of putative revolutionaries on the fringes of our Party, some Trotskyist and some (like the ILWP) not, their denial of the need to battle inside the Party against opportunism and liquidationism brands them irreparably as defeatist liquidators of communist revolution.

We are especially astounded that Jim Conway has become a partisan of the ILWP since the reasons he gave us many months ago for ceasing his tenuous relation with us were personal and that he had no political disagreements;

he refused to meet us to discuss his differences.

Brighton Bomb

Whilst agreeing with your condemnation of the Party leadership and the *Morning Star* regarding their attitude on the Brighton Bombing, the position of *The Leninist* in giving "unconditional" support to the IRA also warrants criticism.

The cause of the IRA is legitimate, and it is clear that it has considerable support within the nationalist community in the Six Counties, on which support its existence depends. Furthermore, communists must support liberation struggles against their own bourgeoisie: however, in the present context I cannot accept that this means giving unconditional support to the IRA, with all that this implies.

A distinction must be drawn between legitimate targets of our present Bourgeois State — political, military, economic targets — and those crass actions affecting ordinary working people. Indiscriminate pub and street bombings for example, whether in the Six Counties or mainland Britain, would fall into this category. Such actions create a backlash against the Irish community, alienating British workers — the very people communists are seeking to win over in support of the ideological struggle not only in the context of the 'Irish problem' but also for socialism.

It is insufficient merely to criticise the IRA ideologically on the grounds that it is a petty bourgeois nationalist organisation, there is also justification for criticising individual actions where working people are affected, and is a position which does not contravene the principle of supporting struggles against one's own bourgeoisie. Your response might be that the British working people are equally indictable, as culpable as the Ruling Class in their collaboration in maintaining the status quo by voting in governments and supporting British capitalism and British colonialism. This is not a realistic argument since the majority of working class people are duped into collaboration, and as such are absolved from responsibility.

A socialist revolution in Britain would depend on the support of a large section of British workers, 'our class'. The position of *The Leninist* in giving "unconditional" support to the IRA by implication accepts the sacrifice of unlimited numbers of British workers in pursuit of petty bourgeois aims. This, in the peculiar and unique circumstances of the Irish Liberation Movement, cannot be the true Leninist position.
 Fraternally
 Neil Robinson
 London

General Strike

With the miners' strike now approximately ten months old, it is clear that there may either be victory or defeat of the miners and the working class (or in other words a shift towards labour or towards

capital).

However, one problem for the rank and file miners has of course been the role of the NUM and Labour bureaucracies which have, as could have been expected, refused to call for industrial action throughout the whole of British industry which could lead to a general strike. Indeed all that the TUC can offer are seven basic guidelines (which only add up to normal solidarity action), and the importance of collecting more food and money (which is precisely what the Women's Institute does!).

Clearly the above measures are appallingly inadequate against finance capital and its political representative the Tory party, which are required to step up their attacks on labour as a result of the deepening crises within British and world capitalism. It is an indication not of the strength but of the weakness of monopoly capital that for really the first time it has had to coordinate its forces nationally and use mass, open violence against labour in its attempts to secure the victory over labour that it may temporarily achieve and desperately needs.

It is so often said that industrial action or major political action of one sort or another serves a purpose in that it exposes the positions of all the parties of the left. For if the miners are defeated we shall see the reformist and petty bourgeois parties sink into depression and despondency, a position that will mirror perfectly their subjective analysis of the just-ended struggle. Conversely, we shall see the healthy elements of the left correctly stating that yes, there may have been a short term defeat for the working class, but concretely it is not solely the subjective that is of premier importance but the objective conditions that as the capitalist system moves towards total collapse it will bring a workers' victory. This will be realised when the political representatives of capital will again be forced to launch major offensives against labour, but as capital becomes still weaker in the face of a rising proletarian revolt, it (capital) will "produce... its own gravediggers."
 Mike Bourne
 Stafford

Tragic

Since November 24 the duly-elected North-West District Committee has in effect been suspended and London District Committee is to have appointees foisted upon it in order to change its political complexion. This is from a leadership which has more than once taken to task the comrades in the socialist countries for their use of administrative measures. This hypocrisy would be comic if its effects on our Party were not so tragic.

Roy Webb
 Manchester

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed names and addresses, and certain details.

London District Congress

A rising tide of revolt



Mike Hicks: the immovable object



Gordon McLennan: the irresistible force

The London District Congress of the Communist Party was undoubtedly a decisive landmark in the inner-Party struggle. Following it, not only were 22 leading London members suspended by the Executive Committee, but such was its impact that highly respected Party members like Andrew Rothstein, Robin Page Arnot, and Bill Alexander, former Assistant General Secretary and current Chairman of the Appeals Committee, have voiced their profound misgivings about the bureaucratic practices and political opportunism of the McLennan/Euro leadership. What is more, the suspended 22 have defied the leadership by still attending Party branch, borough, and advisory meetings, and except for the hardline Euros and scab Straight Leftists this has been with the full support of their Party comrades. But has the opposition a clear-sighted strategy? From our report by a Congress delegate it appears not.

THE groundswell of revulsion against Eurocommunism in the Communist Party reached a new level at the 1984 London District Congress. Refusing to have the democratic principles, procedures, and rules of their Party trampled on by the bankrupt Party bureaucrats and Eurocommunists on the Executive Committee, 125 delegates stayed to be counted when comrade Gordon McLennan led a walkout during the Congress. In staying and voting for the resolution condemning the General Secretary and the National Executive Committee for their walkout, these 125 delegates took a *historic step*. But, as we shall see, as this step was only taken under the greatest provocation in the shape of a concerted campaign of bureaucratic strangulation of Party democracy by the Euros and in view of the lack of either ideological unity within the opposition based on key communist principles or a coherent political strategy pursued by its present leadership, there are grave dangers confronting us.

McLennan's diktat

Following the humiliating defeat of the Euros at the North-West District Congress a week before, when Arthur Adlen, fellow EC member Dave Heywood and 16 other pinko-communists were not re-elected to the District Committee, the EC decided to attempt to stem the growing surge of revolt.

Using the most thinly constructed pretext of alleged malpractices in the recruitment of members to certain branches in Hackney, the hard-core Euros on the EC managed to push comrade McLennan into action. After the hand-picked Euro snoopers comrades Dave Green and Liz Shackleton had reported straight to the Political Committee on the Wednesday preceding Congress (bypassing completely the District

Secretariat who had actually commissioned the investigations) the EC met on the Friday night before Congress and rubber-stamped the PC's proposals.

Though Congress had been preceded by the now customary ripple of rumour before a major Party event, there were many delegates who were nevertheless quite shocked by the EC's ultimatum delivered by comrade McLennan. After the chairperson, comrade Mike Hicks, had introduced the political ornament comrade McLennan had bought along, in the shape of comrade Mick McGahey (who never uttered a word), and spoke in remembrance of comrade Bill Dunn for whom Congress stood in a minute's silence, McLennan threw down the gauntlet: the EC had decided that: 1) the Congress would not elect a new District Committee; 2) the present District Committee would continue with comrade Ian McKay acting District Secretary; 3) a "future" Congress would elect a DC; 4) ten delegates from Hackney were out of order, could only attend as visitors, and would not be allowed to speak in their defence; 5) comrades nominated for the new DC were under investigation; 6) discussion would last for only 1½ hours and there would not be a vote on these proposals; and 7) Congress would terminate if these instructions were not complied with.

The gauntlet picked up

After the uproar that followed, speaker after speaker ripped into the EC's disgraceful attempt to deny Party democracy. In stark contrast to the 38th National Congress when substantive allegations of gerrymandering by Eurocommunists in pre-Congress meetings were dealt with (and dismissed) by a Euro dominated Congress Credentials Committee, this time the CCC was pushed aside completely. As comrade Bernie Steer

pointed out, the dictatorial way Congress was being dealt with was not simply because of some alleged anomalies involving a mere 10 delegates from two branches in Hackney. Of course not. The simple truth is that the Euros knew they were due to suffer a similar humiliating defeat to the one at the North-West District Congress. For all their much vaunted distaste of administrative methods of dealing with political differences, and their love for 'pure democracy', when it comes to those with political differences with them the Eurocommunists are prepared to use the most factional, cynical manoeuvres, the most dishonest and hypocritical cant and underhand undemocratic procedures to keep their stranglehold on the Party.

The Congress adjourned following 1½ hours debate for 30 minutes during which time it was apparently negotiated that the second session should consist only of a debate around the rule book. For 2½ hours a wrangle around the rules ensued: Rule 25 vs Rules 10c and 6b; Rule 3b vs Rule 3d.

Naturally, the rules of any organisation are important, but since this whole Party crisis is around *political* differences, albeit still largely undeveloped, a debate around the Rules can *never* resolve those differences; the only way they can be by the most open expression of those differences, the only way Eurocommunism can be beaten is by an open ideological struggle waged in print rather than in pubs, a struggle in front of the class-conscious workers.

Formal adherence to the letter of the Rules rather than the Leninist principles on which the Bolsheviks and subsequently our Party were founded, has led not only to political paralysis in the struggle against opportunism, it has actually resulted in part of the opposition *aligning themselves with the Eurocommunists!*

When comrade Fergus Nicholson and his servile minions slunk out of Congress behind comrade McLennan and the Euros after a vote on next business had been moved, many of those delegates who had stayed in Congress and registered their disgust at the Euro's dictatorial antics were equally appalled at the Straight Leftists' shameful *scabbing*. Because of their formal, mechanical attitude to the Party Rules the Straight Leftists appear to consider the EC quite entitled to crush the right of London communists to continue with their Congress. Presumably they do so on the basis of Rule 25, which states that "The Executive Committee shall have the authority to interpret these Rules and lay down procedures in all matters not specifically covered by them." And given the track record of these hypocritical schemers we can be left in no doubt that they would do precisely the same as the Euros if in a similar position. The scabs of *Straight Left* have yet again shown themselves incapable of uniting with the rest of the opposition against the Euros on the most basic level. Their continued political isolation (even many of their sympathisers did not follow them out), their impotence, and their decline are all thus assured.

Prospects and dangers

The principled stand of the 125 delegates shows that the possibility of a united fightback by all opposition forces against liquidationism does indeed exist. However, some of the dangers threatening such a prospect were to be seen soon after Congress had resumed after the Euro walkout.

Initially, the chairperson comrade Mike Hicks would not accept any

amendments to comrade Tom Durkin's resolution condemning the EC's action but following protests from the floor an amendment from comrade Bill Freeman for the Congress to be reconvened within three months and another declaring against disciplinary action were accepted by the chair and then Congress. Nevertheless, the resolution was still marred by the presence of "Congress expresses full confidence and support for the existing London District Committee and officers..." Full confidence in the Euros? Full confidence in that nauseating little Euro hack, Tom Bell? And when an amendment proposing the insertion of "elected" before "officers" was suggested it was rejected by the chair! Full confidence in that hatchetman McKay, imposed on the District Committee by the EC? But what was equally disturbing as the lack of debate on the resolution was the summary 'adjournment' of Congress. Surely here was an opportunity to debate the Party crisis, to debate the *politics* behind the wrangles over rules and procedures.

What the opposition forces desperately need to do is to relate the central guiding principles of communist theory and organisation, the vanguard role of the party, proletarian internationalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and democratic centralism to the living, breathing class struggle itself. It is from the heroic miners' strike that communists can draw confidence, can for example gain confirmation of the correctness and profundity of proletarian internationalism. It surely gladdens the hearts of communists to see the food convoys from CGT workers in France as much as it saddens our hearts to witness the disgraceful scabbing of the Polish leadership — a stain on the name of socialism.

For the opposition to avoid an ideological struggle of this kind, for them to hide behind 'positive interpretations' of the *British Road to Socialism* will neither stay the hand of the Euro executioners nor win the Party back to a revolutionary position. Moreover, the Euros cannot be fought to a successful conclusion by attempting to ignore the considerable differences among those supporting the pro-*Morning Star* faction.

It should be obvious by now that the Eurocommunists' campaign of disciplinary measures and the widely rumoured purge of members during card exchange are designed to provoke a split. Already many oppositionists are canvassing the idea. We believe a split in the present circumstances would be a *serious blunder*, precisely because the present opposition forces are themselves ideologically diverse and, except for the Leninists, have totally neglected the essential task of debating the ideological differences that exist *within* their ranks.

The 1984 London District Congress has opened the door to a fightback by all opposition forces against the class enemy within our Party — Eurocommunism. The way forward is to refuse to accept *any expulsions* by the Euro faction, for it is *our* Party not theirs; to wage a fierce ideological struggle around the basic principles our Party was founded upon and to link these with the miners struggle; and to unite on those principles without attempting to obscure or hide the differences among the opposition, but seeking to resolve them by a comradely and open ideological struggle. Only those who fear the future and are unsure of their ground will fear that struggle. Leninists welcome it.

"To say that the strike has opened our eyes is an understatement"

Fighting for the Future



Kent women: determined to keep on fighting after victory

Women's Support Groups have been an outstanding feature of the miners' strike. In the course of this historic struggle women have taken a leading role and as our interview shows are determined to continue the process. Jean Davis is treasurer of her Women's Support Group in Deal, Kent; she is also a striking member of the NUM, working as assistant canteen cook at Betteshanger pit.

The Leninist: How did your group get off the ground?

Jean Davis: There was an open branch meeting of the NUM, Betteshanger branch, and we were asked if we would consider forming a group. Twenty women stopped behind and we decided to hold a meeting and we formed ourselves into a committee. One of the other reasons was that when we were originally on strike the miners' wives in Nottingham and Leicester were on the picket line urging their husbands to carry on working. We started off by going on a rally in support of our husbands fighting for the right to a job, and that's really how the group started; that was seven weeks into the strike...

TL: Have you been able to set up a kitchen?

JD: Yes. When the children's Easter holiday came up we decided to cook meals for the children while they were on holiday. We had a group of women coming forward and volunteering their services in the local welfare club for the cooking of the meals at lunchtime. When the children went back to school we carried on with the meals, this time in the evening.

Now, because of the situation in the Kent coalfield, pickets receive a cooked breakfast in the morning and a cooked lunch at dinnertime and then they cook in the evening for the children. So in total it's between six and eight hundred meals a day.

TL: What have been the major problems that you've faced?

JD: The major problems have been the gas and electric bills for especially the younger wives who didn't experience the '72 and '74 strikes and have just come into this very very difficult dispute in 1984. The younger husbands go away picketing and the wives are left at home and don't know where to start to cope with the bills. So we've got two retired members that have been dealing solely with DHSS problems — gas, electric, telephone, rent. Also, on a Saturday afternoon we have two people that come from London, who for the duration of this strike have given their services free on

DHSS problems and strikers' problems. So we've had a lot of help, and it's been good help.

The Labour Party

TL: When you began did you have help or any hindrance from the local labour movement?

JD: The local Labour Party, the membership, have been very good; several of our own members are members of the Labour Party, many are actively involved.

TL: Do you have representation on the strike committee?

JD: Yes, I'm the representative on the strike coordinating committee. I give any information on the women's group: there are six women's support groups in the Kent area, and so I sit in on the meetings with the men every morning. As a member of the NUM I'm entitled to air my views anyway, so although I go out and speak as a miner's wife I always make the point that I'm a woman member of the NUM out on strike with the men.

TL: What do you think of the national leadership of the Labour Party?

JD: I met Neil Kinnock during the General Election when he was down here canvassing for our local Labour candidate. I not only spoke to him when he came into the canteen I also spoke to him in the town; I felt sure and very confident when speaking to him and hearing what he had to say. I didn't think he would sit on the fence so long as he has done.

We voted him there, let's face it, the Labour Party is the party of the working people, and after all is said and done he is not airing the view of the wide variety of Labour Party members. That is proved by the Labour Party support groups that I've visited, the support that they've given us is tremendous, so obviously he doesn't speak for the rank and file, which is the ordinary working person such as ourselves.

Miners' Support Groups

TL: What contact have you had with Miners' Support Groups?

JD: We've now got in the town a Miners' Support Group, so that is very good. We've also got several support groups around the country without whose help we would never have survived. Three of us, from the Women's Support Group, have been all over the country doing meetings and raising funds to feed the children. You can imagine with the amount of meals we do a day the cost is quite big because it is all fresh vegetables, fresh meat, and the children have squash and a sweet.

We are very well organised, in some cases more organised than the men; that's something women are famous for. You've got to be very well organised; we got ourselves organised within a matter of weeks; from then we've gone from strength to strength. Originally, at our first meeting we had thirty to forty women, now we've got a hundred plus.

TL: We've heard about the recent Women Against Pit Closures delegate conference. Were there any problems with this, and what is the national organisation and coordination of work like?

JD: The coordination and organisation is an excellent one really. I went up, on behalf of the Kent area women's groups, to a steering committee meeting. And to actually meet other wives from different areas is tremendous because the different areas have got such different problems; to hear it first hand is excellent because we in Kent area are cut off from the rest of the mining community.

TL: Would it have been better therefore if it had been a bigger conference?

JD: To limit it to start off with was a good idea; to have a lot of women together when you're first organising is wrong, you've got to take a step at a time and learn how to make it bigger and better the next time.

Politicisation

TL: Unlike before, the women have given much more political (as well as soup kitchen) solidarity. What sort of reactions has this provoked among the women themselves and among the miners?

JD: I can say on my own behalf I'd never spoken publicly to anybody and at the beginning I was very, very nervous. Through this strike I've learnt quite a lot politically, the women have learnt a lot politically. I think that to say the men are proud of us is making an understatement. The attitude of the miners is so totally changed, I don't think they ever believed, even now after nine months, that the strength of the women could be so strong. I think the rank and file membership of the NUM will be the first to admit that without the women's support there would be a lot more cracks in the membership than there is.

We could never go back, never; we couldn't turn the clock back nine months to being just housewives and working women, because nearly all the miners' wives are working women: now our goal is forward. The thing I do say to people when we're asked about this political thing is that what we've learnt is by meeting other people. To say that the strike has opened our eyes is an understatement. I didn't think myself that I'd ever become so involved, but we've all become so much more politically aware.

In fact more wives started coming to the meetings when the scabs went to work; people didn't like the idea that they were living in a police state, especially the women — their husbands were getting beaten, arrested and no charges being made, and their husbands and sons being locked up.

TL: What has been the experience of picket line violence in this area?

JD: We're absolutely horrified about it. We had a case the other day at Tilmanstone. A girl of sixteen whose father is a miner at Tilmanstone and who's been on a picket line for many weeks: the police caused a bit of a shove and got their batons out and started laying into the lads and she got pushed over, one policeman held her by the arms and another hit her over the head. The lads weren't prepared to stand by and see that young girl hit. Really and truthfully the violence is caused by the police. ...

You see the police with helmets on, riot shields and boots, there is no comparison. No-one is going to stand on a street corner and let fifteen or twenty police get out of a van and knock hell out of us without defending ourselves in some way, and they wouldn't think twice about doing it to women or children — if they're going to arrest you and take you away to give you a good hiding they'll do it to the women and the children. Even murderers and rapists get treated better than our lads.

TL: With the advance of the strike we have seen increasingly planned tactics by the pickets to prevent scabs and lorries getting through. For example, recently we saw a case where an earth mover had been placed across the bridge to prevent the scab from getting through and when the police went to remove it they were forced to retreat by a barrage of bricks being hurled at them from behind the earth mover. What is your opinion of that, because some people have shrunk away from such organised protection of their picket lines?

JD: Well the key to an effective picket line is organisation, and like any form of defence you have a strategy and a plan. Now the scabs have had a very cushy time of it, in and out and that's your lot, and we don't like them living in our communities and laughing at our men, with police protection.

TL: So would you say that whatever these lads do in defence of their picket lines is justified?

JD: Of course it's justified. It's justified what any of us do including the women. It's justified in protecting what belongs to us and what we're fighting for. The tactics are that you put pressure on them by standing on a picket line and watching them cower and run for the bus hiding their faces. To actually be identified.

TL: How are the scabs going to live in these communities after the strike?

JD: Well they've made their decision and after this strike there will be a committee set up which will deal with them; they'll have to pay the penalty.

The Future

TL: What about the future of the Women's Support Groups after the strike? We've argued that these groups should remain after the strike, and that they should participate in other strikes and struggles particularly those concerning women workers and a woman's right to work.

JD: That's right. As a national group of Women's Support Groups I can assure you that all groups will stay together after the strike, that has been agreed. The first priority is obviously women in struggle: we must support those that have supported us.

Messages of solidarity and donations to the struggle should be sent to: Women's Support Group (Deal), 83 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent.

THE MINERS
MUST NOT
STAND ALONE

THE LENINIST

FIGHT
FOR THE
GENERAL STRIKE

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THE MINERS' STRIKE

From the Jaws of Defeat

The miners' strike is on the defensive. Thousands of miners have returned to work not because of class treachery but because they don't believe the strike can win. Some areas have refused to back the strike and now Notts — the second largest NUM area — has decided to both end the overtime ban and take measures which would in effect give it autonomy from the NUM leadership. What is more, the TUC tops who so enthusiastically welcomed resolutions passed at Congress giving the NUM "total support" are now doing their best to get the NUM to accept a Nacods compromise deal and along with it pit closures and job losses. Faced with this bleak picture and the heavy hand of the bosses' courts some in the NUM leadership, most notably those representing Scotland, have talked of what could only amount to "honourable surrender"; they even proposed going along with moves to cooperate with the sequestrators. Jack Collins and the Kent NUM challenged this and with the backing of Arthur Scargill rallied the militant majority at the NUM Special Delegate Conference in defence of the "no surrender, no compromise" position previously adhered to.



In the light of waverings amongst the leadership and treachery by the TUC militant miners have been demanding action in order to achieve total victory.

For them the old "gothic" structure of the NUM stands exposed as inadequate.

For them the routine methods of running the strike favoured by so many NUM branch secretaries must be replaced by the democracy of the rank and file. Only through this can the failures in getting money, food, and effective picketing be overcome. But more is needed. The strike must again be placed on the offensive. For us what is crucial in this is the programme of revolutionary politics and a vision of socialism. With this key the door is opened for the active involvement of militants from other industries and the fight for a general strike. With this perspective, *Jack Conrad* argues, it not only becomes possible to confront the

burning task of making a fighting appeal to those miners now at work but the impending disaster of a NUM defeat can be turned into a militant political strike wave that can sweep away the Thatcher government and open the road to a new economic and social order where human need not capitalist profit is the economic motive of society.

AS THESE LINES are written the miners' strike could be said to be facing the jaws of defeat. It is already in its ninth month and yet analysts say power cuts will not be necessary until late 1985 or early 1986. Although the Tories are set on a course to destroy the NUM, the TUC has refused to deliver "total support" or even any meaningful action. Indeed, Judas Willis and the TUC tops have been doing their damndest to get the NCB and the NUM around the negotiating table on the basis of some rotten compromise over jobs and pit closures. The Labour Party statesmen have proved, if anything, worse. The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the leader of a party directly financed by miners through the political levy, has repeatedly kicked the strikers in the teeth, even telling reporters in Moscow how miners and their families were not starving and that a defeat for the miners would not affect the prospects of the labour movement in Britain. Scab Kinnock as richly deserved the Ramsay MacKinnock handle given to him by militant miners as Judas Willis deserved the hangman's noose waved in front of him at Aberavon.

In the light of this treachery and the defensive stage of the strike, Arthur Scargill retreated from his principled refusal to condemn miners' violence. Much to the glee of Kinnock, Scargill

"disassociated the NUM" from the attack on a Yorks scab in his house and the dropping of a three foot concrete post onto a taxi carrying a scab to work in South Wales.

Pressing home their advantage the Tories adopted a crude carrot and stick approach in their bid to decimate the NUM. On the one hand police violence reached new levels: over 8,000 arrested, pit villages in Yorkshire virtually occupied, and strikers and their supporters subjected to savage beatings. The courts handed the NUM's funds to a Tory party official. And having robbed strikers and their families of social security payments through deducting £15 supposed to be given by the penniless union in strike pay the government hoped to increase the suffering in the mining communities by docking a further £1 by arbitrarily assuming that the mythical strike pay had been increased to £16.

As to the carrot: during the autumn the prospect that the strike would go on well into the winter months of 1985, lack of courage, and sheer poverty led some strikers to vacillate and return to work. In order to make this trickle a flood the NCB offered a fat Christmas bonus and a £175 special payment — a veritable king's ransom after nine months on strike surviving on slashed SS payments and food parcels from the Welfare.

Thousands took the bribe but the vast majority remained defiant and determined as ever to preserve their dignity and see the strike to victory. Their resistance to state terror has seen them organise workers' violence. Barricades have been erected, Molotov cocktails hurled, hit squads formed. Whole communities have risen to take on the hated police in scenes instantly recognisable to the nationalist people of Derry and Belfast.

Acting as an auxiliary to the police reign of terror, court injunctions, and NCB bribery the media propaganda campaign reached new depths. Hourly BBC and ITV Battle of Britain type tallies of returning striking miners were given venom by the press which pumped itself up into an explosion of vindictive fury. Mixing accused political metaphors with heady abandon they indignantly screamed "Nazi", "jackbooted bullies", "red fascists" at the militant miners, branding them a "gangster class" who through naked intimidation prevent the majority returning to work. In cartoon jokes and chat show wisecracks Arthur Scargill is equated with Hitler or Gadaffi while in leader articles the NUM is painted as a mafia organisation. And with each week that has gone by the propaganda war becomes ever more spiteful, each lie feeding off the other in an intoxicated

frenzy.

Although Britain has known many campaigns of hate and persecution — something we communists know all about — surely there are few which have surpassed in noxiousness the one being directed against these miners.

But behind the BBC and ITV distortion, the mendacity of *The Times*, *Mail* hysteria, *Guardian* humbug, the *Sun's* sewer gas, and the *Mirror's* Trojan horse "support" is fear. The bourgeoisie knows that a victory for the miners would endanger their system of profit and exploitation. So while now crowing that it is all over bar the shouting the bourgeoisie senses a threat to its very existence. Colin Welch voiced this fear in *The Spectator* when the strike was on the offensive. If the miners took the battle honours "power would have passed from Westminster to the soviets" he solemnly declared (August 4, 1984).

1. Testing times

This strike is rightly feared by the ruling class. Already the social peace which has characterised Britain since World War II has been well and truly shattered by the miners' determination to save their jobs and communities. Thus the strike is a historic turning point on a par with 1926 in its significance. But there is one crucial

difference. 1926 marked the desperate end to a period of working class militancy in Britain which stretched back to 1910; 1984 is, whatever the outcome of the miners' strike, the explosive beginning of a new wave of sharp class battles which will not only transform the face of British politics but pose point blank the question of 'which class rules?' Because of this the miners' strike ruthlessly exposes all that is weak, all that is rotten, in the theories and programmes of all shades in the workers' movement.

●**The Labour Party:** While its "lower orders" have staffed the Miners' Support Committees and done the donkey work of collecting much needed food and money for the miners the grandees have proved — if proof were needed — that they are open class traitors. Apart from all the expected claptrap from the Labour leader denouncing the government's "betrayal of the national interest" we also found him calling on them to intervene in the dispute. But this misleader of the working class showed his palest pink underbelly when the miners showed their determination to win by fighting back against police violence. Equating the violence of the oppressors with the violence of the oppressed, Kinnock "condemned the use of violence by either side".

It was at the TUC that he delivered his outright condemnation of workers' violence. "Violence" he whined "disgusts union opinion and divides union attitudes. It creates a climate of brutality. It is alien to the temperament and intelligence of the British trade union movement" (*The Guardian*, September 5 1984). Of course violence only disgusts Kinnock and Co when it is violence against scabs, scabherders, and other friends of the establishment. For in contrast to his denunciation of miners' violence this hypocrite supported Britain's Falklands War which cost the lives of 1,000 servicemen. And of course when the Labour Party has been in office it has pursued fully and consistently the bloody interests of British imperialism from breaking strikes at home to World War, Korea, Malaya, and Aden. It was the Labour Party which sent troops into the Six Counties in August 1969, the Labour Party which introduced the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1974, and it is the Labour Party which today supports Britain's continued occupation and war against the forces of national liberation, a war which has now come home with a vengeance as the methods learnt in Belfast have been used in the mining areas against pickets and whole communities.

The Labour Party's attitude towards the police has always been classically reformist and was illustrated par excellence by Shadow Home Secretary Gerald Kaufman, who at the beginning of the strike moronically stated that: "The police force is not an arm of the state but the servant of the community, whose confidence they must secure" (*The Times*, April 11 1984). As well as churning out such typically reformist trash the Labour Party has exerted might and main to get talks going. This is of course precisely the role of the Labourites — to dampen down the class struggle and conciliate workers to capitalist rule — a role they have played to the full during the miners' strike.

There is however little doubt that the likes of Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn back the miners. Benn has even called for a general strike, also declaring that "No one need wait for permission to begin. Trade unionists in a whole range of industries and services should plan to take industrial action where they work" (*Financial Times*, June 26 1984). Such calls contrast strongly with TUC and Labour Party anodyne platitudes, but because the left reformists are bound hand and foot to the Kinnocks, Hattersleys, Healeys, and the 'next Labour government' their calls for militant action are rendered impotent.

●**The Communist Party:** If the miners' strike has proved one thing and one thing alone it is that the CPGB remains at the heart of the working class movement. It is still a party which includes in its ranks a major, in fact a strategic, section of the vanguard of the working class. Since the beginning of the strike well over 100 miners have joined the Party as well as large numbers of others in the mining communities. Party members have played a leading role in the NUM: Mick McGahey, George Bolton, Malcolm Pitt, and Jack Collins to name a few. What is more, CPGB members have taken a lead at grass roots level organising picket lines, running the Welfare, and serving as lodge chairmen and secretaries. As well as this, Party members have been in the forefront when it comes to winning solidarity from workplaces and collecting money on the streets. They have also been responsible for a tremendous amount of work in the Miners' Support Committees; in short, the Communist Party is involved with every aspect of the strike.

But the CPGB is no longer one party, it is riven with differences and divided by tendencies. Thus when we look at the CPGB and the miners' strike we have to deal with not a single view but numerous ones.

On the extreme right of the CPGB are the Eurocommunists. Now while these petty bourgeois dilettantes assailed the summer riots of '81 for having ruined their 'experiments in community policing' they have by and large kept a diplomatic silence as to the violence of the miners. This is dictated by their alliance with the right opportunist machine, which includes not only General Secretary Gordon McLennan but comrades McGahey and Bolton. True a few have broken ranks: Bea Campbell, doyen feminist, has warned about the danger to the "left" the miners are causing through some of their tactics and Janie Glen has insisted that if the NGA v police picket line violence should be denounced due to "maleness" then so should the miners v police today. Of course most Euros would agree with comrades Campbell and Glen 100% but the inner-Party struggle dictates dumbness.

We did find the Euros attempting to impose their petty bourgeois pacifism on the militant miners in the first few months of the strike. But the floppy lessons of Greenham haven't gone down well, not least with the women involved in the support groups. So while trying to draw parallels between the Greenham women and the Women Against Pit Closures, when actually confronted by working class women who do not consider themselves feminists and who do participate in and certainly defend violent action against the police and scabs the Euros for the moment bite their tongues.

This strike allows no clowning, no stunt, no frivolity. It is deadly in its seriousness. Having discovered this to their cost the Euros have turned away from the great questions of the strike in embarrassment; they now sit on the sidelines raising money for "presents, turkeys, Xmas puddings, and other seasonal trimmings for miners' families" in the manner of Sunday virgins and congratulating the NUM for involving the bishops. Indeed such is the recognition of their own irrelevancy that the *Euro Marxism Today* has only carried two articles on the strike preferring instead to deal with more 'important' matters like "fashion in the '80s" and "liberation theology."

But no matter how many times the Euros, mantra-like, chant to themselves that the miners' strike confirms the correctness of the peaceful, milk and honey *British Road to Socialism*, the reality of moribund capitalist society, strikers armed with Molotov cocktails, and class war booms otherwise.

It is not only the Euros who dream of a peaceful capitalism evolving into socialism. Every other trend except that around *The Leninist* has similar

hopes. These reformist illusions have ensured that none of the opportunist trends have proved capable of providing communist leadership during the strike.

In a sense the McLennan leadership has constituted itself as an adjunct of the NUM. Comrades McLennan and McGahey have toured the country putting the NUM case, and 16 St John Street has frenetically produced CP leaflets which can only be distinguished from those of the NUM by the London address.

The *Morning Star* and its new breed of centrist followers, the positive interpreters of the *British Road*, have also considered it their "communist duty" to tail the NUM, following every twist and turn of the NUM executive like a shadow. Thus in the wake of Arthur Scargill's declaration that "the NUM disassociated itself" from the attack in which taxi driver David Wilkie was killed, the *Morning Star* editor came out with the following statement: "Throughout nine months of warfare against the pit community the Tory media has focused on violence no trade unionist would condone." (*Morning Star* December 1 1984). This is of course a foul attack on the justified, heroic, and audacious resistance of rank and file miners who have been forced to organise their violence against police terror. But more than that it is utter hypocrisy, for this was the first time the *Star* has come out with any condemnation of miners' violence.

The Straight Leftists have been no more use when it comes to communist leadership. They have denounced police violence in the pages of *Straight Left* but nowhere have they called for the establishment of Workers' Defence Corps. And as to the treachery of the Labour Party tops Straight Leftist comrade Andrew Murray moronically wrote in the *Morning Star* that "the Parliamentary Labour Party did its duty to those who sent them to Parliament" (June 11 1984). Such is the Labourphilia of the Straight Leftists that they insist on lionising scabs like Kinnock ascribing the treachery of the Labour Party not to its loyalty to the capitalist system not to the fact that it is a bourgeois workers' party, but to mere "mistakes". Where the Straight Leftists have had some influence they have blocked all attempts to go beyond the official structure, blockheadedly denouncing all such moves as "Trotskyite". Such knee-jerking myopic conservatism marks out all aspiring bureaucrats, or at least those aspiring to the giddy heights of sitting in the council chamber in Camden or Wandsworth as Labour Party councillors.

And if the Straight Leftists' love of the Labour Party leads them into excusing treachery these tailists have excelled themselves when it comes to the scabbing of the Polish government. In *Straight Left* they got Elsie Watson the National Organiser of the National Assembly of Women to justify Poland's actions in the following sanctimonious way: "Poland has already received credit for this contract and hence feel they must supply this year's quota... The Polish people and government have every sympathy with the British miners" (October 1984). And in *Communist*, their internal factional bulletin, they assure their supporters that "coal described as being from Poland was, in fact, South African" (May 3 1984). They now even blame the British working class for scabbing, i.e. allowing coal into Britain, in a desperate attempt to excuse Poland's export of coal to Britain.

Against this parody of internationalism we have demanded the end to this disgraceful trade. Paul Whetton rank and file leader of the Notts striking miners interviewed in *The Leninist* No 12, echoed this and agreed that Solidarity was counterrevolutionary. Comrades Jack Collins and Malcolm Pitt of Kent NUM were also like-minded with us on both questions comrade Collins declaring that he did

not accept "the reasoning that says 'we have got contracts that must be honoured'. I do not accept that reasoning. That's the same sort of reasoning that people use when they are trading with Chile and places like that" (interview in *The Leninist*, No 13)

●**The Labour Party's entrists:** *Militant*, *Socialist Organiser*, and *Socialist Action* have sought to channel the power of the miners' strike into their futile battle to transform the Labour Party into an instrument of socialist revolution. These 'revolutionaries' have proved a dynamic force in the Miners' Support Committees and have, what is more, succeeded in winning relatively large numbers of recruits to the Labour Party, but because of their loyalty to Kinnock and Co they have acted as an objectively conservative force.

Militant views the question of tactics in a mechanical fashion. In putting forward the demand for a 24 hour general strike they considered they were demanding what was realistic. But for communists what must be demanded is what is realistic and what is necessary. A 24 hour general strike is a protest gesture, suitable in the case of, say, a racist murder or to celebrate May Day, but useless when it comes to winning the miners' strike, which requires the mobilisation of the class not for one day but until victory.

Socialist Action has been little better. On the Mineworkers' Defence Committee they have opposed the call for a general strike along with the Socialist Workers' Party. They also stridently stood against proposals from supporters of *The Leninist* that Miners' Support Committees be transformed along the lines of Councils of Action and that they be coordinated by a national leadership of elected and recallable delegates.

●**Some of the others:** The most important revolutionary group outside the Labour Party is the Socialist Workers' Party. But although priding themselves on their militancy and rank and file the SWP have passively tailed the NUM leadership even more loyally than the Trotskyite entrists and the CPGB opportunist trends. They have opposed calls for a general strike (putting themselves far behind Tony Benn), opposed calls for Workers' Defence Corps, opposed the transformation of the Miners' Support Committees, and attacked miners' guerilla actions as "individual acts" (*Socialist Worker* December 7 1984). This craven position is dictated by the SWP's economism and its belief that the miners' strike will never win. The SWP's leading member Tony Cliff even dismisses the strike as "an extreme form of the downturn"! Thus the job of the SWP is to expose the bureaucracy by not challenging it. SWP members must get miners to buy the *Socialist Worker* but never fight to go beyond the NUM leadership. Thus, while police soundly defeated mass flying pickets at Orgreave the SWP keeps chanting for more mass picketing — without the protection of Workers' Defence Corps. And after denouncing Miners' Support Committees for eight solid months they decided to join them only to be the most vociferous advocates of tin rattling and baked bean collecting — certainly they had no perspective of moving towards Council of Action type organisations let alone a strike wave of general strike proportions.

The Workers Revolutionary Party does call for a general strike but the WRP lives in a theatrical world of fantasy and make-believe. It likes to imagine the Tory government as "Bonapartist", that we live in a semi-revolutionary situation, and that the WRP is on the verge of power. This keeps the WRP's green recruits on the boil and in the "party"; indeed so fearful is the WRP leadership about its ordinary members being infected that it cocoons them from the real world. Thus, even when they control trades councils WRP members don't go near the Miners' Support Committees, let alone fight for their line with other

shades. Fantastically, while calling for soviets, or "Community Councils" as the WRP liberalistically calls them, it shuns the very organs which could be so transformed.

For the 'SWP with hair gel' the Revolutionary Communist Party the central *strategic* question in the first six months of the strike was the need for a national ballot. Without this the strike was doomed, it declared. The RCP denounces anything in the workers' movement that is not organised by itself — it denounces and equates everything from Miners' Support Committees to Norman Willis, in fact it denounces the workers' movement lock stock and barrel, preferring to seek cheap publicity in front of the TV cameras than fight with the working class where it is.

Before the miners' strike the Revolutionary Communist Group attacked *The Leninist* for supporting the "labour aristocracy", the prime example which it gave being "the miners". We accepted the "charge" about supporting the miners, we still do, but today we hear very little from the RCG about the miners being the labour aristocracy. And other than slamming Kinnock and drawing parallels with the violence suffered by the miners and the nationalist population in the Six Counties etc. (both absolutely correct) the RCG has nothing to say.

As to groups like the Spartacist League and Workers Power our main differences over the miners' strike stem from our approach to building the revolutionary vanguard party the unfolding struggle so obviously demands. True, the Spartacist League has engaged in its usual abstractions rather than dealing with what exists. Thus instead of calling for Workers' Defence Corps, outlining as we have how they can be formed from the existing hit squads by drawing upon the bravest pickets, those with military training, and including unemployed youth and militant supporters, it has trotted out its ready made formulae about "joint trade union defence guards" with no reference to the actual real situation. In the same abstract way the Sparts declared from the beginning of the strike that a demand for the TUC to call a general strike would be to invite a stab in the back, and having no perspective of building something along the lines of the National Minority Movement of the 1920s they insisted that the likes of Ron Todd and Ray Buckton lead a substitute mini-general strike, and of course they wouldn't sell out the working class, would they?

We will now outline in some detail the position of *The Leninist*. This can be done best by first examining our view of the historical context in which the strike is being fought, secondly looking at the conduct of the strike itself and the platform of the NUM leadership, then finally presenting our programme to achieve victory and what lessons this battle has for the future.

2. Historical context

While the purpose of this article is to map out the way victory for the miners can still be achieved it is essential for us to have a broad historical sweep if we are to see the strike in context, if we are to fully appreciate what lessons to draw from it.

In our writings in *The Leninist* we have opposed the doctrinaire view that capitalism has uninterruptedly been in general crisis since 1914; we have also argued against those who insist that Britain's present woes are due to long term mistakes in economic and social policies, capped by what they are wont to call the "Thatcherite" madness. For us the world is neither so mechanical nor so cerebral. Our world view rests on Marxist dialectics, which looks at everything in its context, everything in its movement. Using this approach and with extensive study of the concrete situation we have concluded that a new general crisis is looming over the capitalist horizon. It will, we believe, produce economic stagnation of

greater duration than even the last 1914-1948 general crisis; it will also see an economic crash which could make that of 1929 look Lilliputian.*

Now, what is essential to understand is that although Britain was to a considerable degree able to escape the full impact of the last general crisis it is not going to get off so lightly under contemporary conditions.

When Britain possessed a massive empire it was able to fall back onto empire protectionism when the world economy collapsed. Britain was thus able to avoid the fate of Germany, which having been stripped of its empire in the aftermath of its defeat in World War I found itself plunged into a revolutionary situation which only the imposition of fascist terrorism could negatively resolve.

So although the years 1910 to 1926 saw a period of working class militancy which approached revolutionary heights, the truth was that having disposed of the political challenge this threw up with the defeat of the general strike British capitalism did not have to force down the living standards of those in work as was the case in Germany. In fact living standards of those in work rose steadily in the years following 1926, this being the key to why Britain managed to escape the revolutionary turmoil experienced in Germany.

Although World War II saw Germany's plans to smash Pax Britannica again come to pieces it also saw the USA emerge with a vengeance from splendid isolation, and impose its hegemony over the threadbare British lion, and indeed the entire capitalist world. Redivision of the world economy was carried out by the all-conquering greenback where the German blitzkrieg of blood and iron failed.

While Britain's growth during the "American century" was sluggish compared with its rivals, its loss of empire had no important effect simply because this was a period of general growth. In these conditions social peace ruled. Class itself was declared to be a relic of a dead past, Butskillism was born as the major parties converged, and celebrated economists proclaimed that the boom of SuperMac's "you've never had it so good" years was permanent and unemployment would never be seen again.

Not only of course has the boom come to an inevitable end but Britain faces the prospect of the new general crisis as perhaps the weakest, most vulnerable of the major capitalist powers. Because its capital now has to compete with other more dynamic capitals in a relatively open world economy it is forced to turn to the exploitation of its own working class to a degree never so when it possessed a vast empire.

This is why British capitalism is forced to take up the cudgels of class war; why it attacked workers' living standards under the Wilson/Callaghan Labourite government; and why today the Tories are forced to not only chain the trade union movement but to crush it. While Thatcher's psychology is perfectly suited to these confrontational tasks it is clear that it is not a matter of this or that individual or even party. Thatcher and the Tories are not only driven by class hatred but also by capital's demands for increased rates of exploitation and profit.

In the coal industry capital's need for cheap coal and electricity necessitated a rationalisation of the NCB's operations long before Thatcher came to office. Under Wilson's government Tony Benn was responsible for overseeing the closing of large numbers of "uneconomic" pits and also the introduction of the notoriously divisive productivity scheme which has proved so damaging to the miners' struggle today.

What changed with the coming of Thatcher was the method used to attack the working class. Under the impact of a rapidly deteriorating world economy, cosy 10 Downing Street chats over beer and sandwiches between trade union leaders and

government officials went, to be replaced by the frontal assault of the anti-trade union laws, riot police, and the arrogant union-busting Ian MacGregor.

Steelworkers, GCHQ civil servants, and printworkers have already had a taste of what is in store. But in order to reduce real wages — as Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson bluntly states must happen if British capitalism is to compete — a strategic defeat must be inflicted. It is to achieve this goal that the government has taken on the NUM — the most powerful section of the organised working class. With them down the bourgeoisie hopes that other sections will follow domino-like.

A victory for the miners which left alive the capitalist beast, while it would act as a magnificent example for all workers, would not prevent future attack. Indeed the bourgeoisie would be forced to become more vicious, more violent. A capitalism in crisis has no choice — but we do. We can fight to give the miners' struggle a revolutionary, anti-capitalist direction. We can fight to push the strike not only to victory but from it we must see born the fighting working class organisations, above all a mass revolutionary party which can put down the capitalist system once and for all. Not to have this perspective, to positively fight against the politicisation of the strike like comrade Pete Carter the Euro-communist Industrial organiser, is to invite attack in the future even to invite British capitalism to take that path towards fascisation to the point where it ends up like Nazi Germany — as it ultimately will unless we succeed in killing it.

But while capitalism is forced to become more combative so is the working class, and in this lies the promise of our victory. Because capitalism must attack the working class, the unfolding struggle today carries with it the prospect of a sustained period of militancy like the Chartist era and the years 1910-1926 where revolutionary politics becomes the property of the mass of the working class. Because of British capitalism's weakened state, its lack of freedom to manoeuvre, we can say that even if we have to suffer another 1926 this would not be the end of the story: the British revolution would go on to have its '1912', its 'February', and its 'October'.

3. Backing Britain

For many in the workers' movement the miners' strike must be painted in patriotic red, white, and blue if it is to win. Many of these elements believe that "public opinion" not class solidarity is the key question. Thus Eurocommunist Peter Carter demands that the strike must be "aimed at... the defence of miners' jobs and the coal industry as a valuable national asset." CPGB General Secretary Gordon McLennan declares that "A victory for the miners will be a victory of the British people. To help the miners is to help Britain" (*Morning Star* May 19 1984). This is echoed by comrade Tony Chater "Every citizen has a stake in a miners' victory. Coal is a vital basic resource for the whole of our industry" (*Morning Star* May 1 1984). The Labour Party NEC declared their "full support for the miners" because "if we are to safeguard Britain's future, coal production must be expanded — not contracted" (*The Times* September 28 1984). Even Arthur Scargill says that the strike is aimed at "safeguarding a national asset" (*Morning Star* September 3 1984).

But this road of saving "our" industry is the shortest road to the abyss. By maintaining that the coal industry (or for that matter any industry) is a national asset in the sense that it belongs to the British people, that it is somehow the property of those who work in it, equates the interests of British capitalism with those who are exploited by it and sows the dragon's teeth of sectionalism and social chauvinism. By championing

the defence of "our" industry British workers are not only set against each other — steel workers against miners — but against workers in other countries. A major cause of the lack of solidarity from other sections of workers with the miners' strike must be put down to loyalty to "our" industry, and surely the magnificent assistance that has been given to British miners by workers across the world, in particular those in France and the Soviet Union, shows the healthy results to workers being loyal to their class not their capitalist country.

Where has patriotism and loyalty to "our" industry got the miners since nationalisation in 1947? Even during the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s swingeing closures and redundancies took place. From a level of employing over 700,000 miners in 900 pits the NCB rationalised their operations so that by 1970 700 pits had closed and 500,000 jobs had gone. By seeing the interest of the miners and the NCB as complementary the leaders of the NUM were prepared to see their members jobs sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and allow miners' earnings to slip to the bottom of the wages league.

With the drying up of the boom and the increasing difficulty in obtaining employment outside the coal industry overt collaboration became increasingly unpopular with the rank and file. Such was the feeling that in 1972 96.5% of miners voted for industrial action. The 1972 strike and the one two years later saw the miners haul themselves up to become the highest paid manual workers in Britain and in the process rock the British establishment. Heath went to the country asking "who rules?" and was defeated by a Labour Party offering a return to social peace. The Wilson government acted swiftly to defuse the class war by imposing the Social Contract (or by tricking as the workers called it) in co-operation with the trade union bureaucracy. Specifically in the coal industry collaboration was re-established with the *Plan for Coal*.

Not only did the Wilson/Callaghan government preside over an unprecedented fall in workers' living standards but the *Plan for Coal's* promise of an expanding, dynamic industry proved worthless. Having been signed under the impact of the so-called energy crisis and fierce class struggle, as soon as energy crisis gave way to economic stagnation and class war to class peace its promises were broken. The plan to expand deep-mined coal capacity to 120 million tons was abandoned in 1975 — a mere year after the government, the NUM, and the NCB had put their signatures to it. In fact from 1975 output was cut along with manpower, while productivity (the rate of exploitation) soared.

That the NUM leadership has fought for solidarity using the *Plan for Coal* has been a fundamental weakness. The capitalists, the bourgeois state, know full well that the coal industry, whether it be nationalised or not, is THEIR industry, and they are determined to run it in THEIR interests. The simple fact of the matter is that the proposals and promises outlined in the *Plan for Coal* no longer conform to THEIR interests. No arguments from the NUM research department will convince them that workers' interests should come before the interests of profit.

As to other unions. Well, they often have their own versions of the *Plan for Coal*; certainly all the reformist trade union leaders, left and right, because of their loyalty to their "own" industry have shown that they are not prepared to deliver meaningful solidarity with the miners. Even leaders of unions like Aslef, the NUR, and the TGWU have confined themselves to tokenism, though they fear that the attack on the NUM is nothing but a prelude to an assault on the entire trade union movement — such have been the fruits of sectionalism.

* For a full analysis of this and related questions see the extensive articles in *The Leninist* Nos 2-5.

And sectionalism has proved to be a poison inside the NUM itself. The federal structure of the union; the divisive productivity scheme imposed against the membership's wishes by the silver tongue of Benn, the High Court, and the bureaucratic heavy hand of Joe Gormley in 1977, as well as traditions of conservatism has produced mass scabbing, particularly amongst Notts miners committed to their "own" Area of the NCB and its viability.

Against loyalty to "our" industry, "our" capitalist nation and its state Leninists have always advanced the slogan: **BEGIN WITH WHAT THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS, NOT WHAT CAPITALISM CAN AFFORD.** Workers have no interest in sacrificing their interests to a tottering capitalism. We have every interest in seeing that system destroyed and replaced by a socialist one which can guarantee all workers ever improving conditions, socially useful work, and a real future. While capitalism lasts we must put forward economic and political demands expressing the immediate needs of the working class for decent pay, jobs, and social services, regardless of whether they are compatible with the continuation of capitalism or not. On this political platform sectionalism can be overcome and workers' unity forged. This is why miners should see their strike as political, for while the path of loyalty to "our" industry points to defeat, the path of revolutionary politics points to victory. With revolutionary politics victory can be snatched from the jaws of defeat.

4. Fighting to win

Tragically, the tactics of achieving a national strike against pit closures through rolling area by area strikes and rule 41 not only failed to win over the majority of Notts miners but intensified sectionalism. The unwillingness to use a national ballot over national strike action after such attempts had been ingloriously rejected in 1979, January and October 1982, and 1983 was understandable. But clearly the lack of a ballot to call the overtime ban, the lack of a ballot over strike action (even when the vote required for national action was reduced from 55% to a simple majority, even when opinion poll after opinion poll showed that well over 60% of miners favoured the strike), the area by area approach showed that the leadership of the NUM trusted bureaucratic manoeuvre more than their arguments for solidarity, and this had its costs.

Of course to have caved in to demands for a ballot from the NCB, the Right Hon. Peter Walker, and right wing elements in the NUM could have proved fatal. But undoubtedly a majority could have been gained on the basis of a concerted, imaginative, Fiery Cross campaign which stressed what miners need not what the NCB or the "country" (i.e. the capitalist system) can afford. Those who suddenly discovered the "un-proletarian" nature of ballots, those who used the fatuous argument about "no man having the right to vote another out of a job" threw out a potentially powerful tactical weapon because of lack of trust in the rank and file, intuitive recognition that Notts sectionalism could not be fought with sectionalism, and lack of tactical flexibility.

This said, the fact that around 80% of miners 'voted with their feet', that they faced a bourgeois state determined to crush them, meant that what was required was not only flexible tactics but a clear-sighted revolutionary strategy. For all the Fleet Street assertions that Scargill is a Marxist — this was lacking. The NUM leadership has fought on the basis of a reformism enshrined for them in the *Plan for Coal* and have unsuccessfully sought solidarity from fellow reformist trade union leaders on the basis of

reformism. Because of this the leadership have had to rely almost entirely on the sheer guts and determination of the militant rank and file even though everything shows that in order to win massive solidarity is essential as well. Thus the NUM has been forced to fight trench warfare, a war of attrition alone, against the awesome power of the capitalist state, when with allies the tables could be turned and a blitzkrieg employed. Indeed the fact that the bourgeoisie as a class stands against the NUM necessitates the mobilisation of the working class as a class — a general strike — this is vital especially considering how well the state has prepared for this struggle and its strategic importance.

Ever since the working class victories of the late 1960s and early 1970s, above all the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, the state has worked systematically to ensure that it never suffered such humiliations again. With Saltley Gates engraved on their minds government officials carried out extensive logistical preparations.

The mix in energy production was shifted away from coal, the old Home Office Emergencies Committee was replaced by the Civil Contingencies Unit, and plans were developed for deploying the police, the use of troops, and if the rails were blocked an armada of lorries to move coal. And the state has other weapons in its armoury. Anti-trade union laws passed under Prior, Tebbit, and King were given muscle by organising a national police force which took on all the lessons of the Summer '81 riots and the tactics of the British army in the Six Counties.

Against the police armed with steel helmets, body armour, and riot shields, trained in the use of snatch squads, cavalry charges, and ancient Greek style phalanxes the NUM leadership relied on the tactics of 1972 and traditional trade union solidarity. The rank and file have showed themselves audacious and imaginative in their fight against the scabherders. Molotov cocktails, street barricades, hit squads, and ambushes have all been developed independently of the leadership. In contrast to the splendid fighting spirit displayed in the mining communities the trade union and labour bureaucracy have delivered little more than hot air at best and a knife in the back at worst. These functionaries have no stomach for the class struggle; their reformist politics, life style, and outlook is that of the negotiator, the compromiser, not the class fighter that our times demand.

The NUM leadership's reliance on the official structure has proved a central weakness. Yes, it has provided funds, but this has been in order to ensnare the NUM, control it and its rank and file militants. With the NUM reliant on the drip feed of TUC and big union cash, 'misbehaviour' can be curbed and those perpetrating it brought to heel; Arthur Scargill can even be persuaded to "disassociate" the NUM from miners' guerilla actions and the 'Red Army' of pickets turned into an army of tin rattlers.

So while militants quite rightly admire Arthur Scargill for his single-minded determination to see victory, his refusal to bow before anti-communism over Poland, his near revolutionary politics compared with the run of the mill fat cats who sit at the top of most unions, we must not lose our critical faculties. Scargill for all his fighting talk demanding that the TUC gets off its knees and that resolutions be turned into action is still a reformist (albeit with a syndicalistic colouration) who is tied to scabs like Willis and Kinnock by a thousand strings of ideology, tradition, and social position.

Recognition of an objective need might well be half way to achieving it but there still remains the practical methods and tactics needed to be employed if we are to achieve what the class struggle demands. For this reason we

have shunned the approach of the grand proclamation, the ready made abstract formulae, as well as the shortsighted art of the possible. Instead we have sought to combine what is needed with squarely facing up to what exists. We have thus attempted to take full cognisance of the psychological mood of the class, its feeling of impotence in the face of Tory laws, assertive bosses, and the spinelessness of their leaders, but also its smouldering anger against the Tories and their system.

It is because we recognise that the miners' strike can only be won against the Kinnocks and Willises' through breaking their hold over the working class and building a new leadership committed to class war not class peace, that we have called for the formation of a NATIONAL MINERS' SUPPORT MOVEMENT. Such an organisation should not only draw upon the existing Women Against Pit Closures groups and the Miners' Support Committees but all working class organisations committed to "total physical support" for the miners. With such a body it would be possible to call, over the heads of treacherous leaders, directly to the militants of unions such as the EETPU, the AUEW, and the ISTC, to organise independently of their leaders.

With such a perspective it would be possible to see a broader body like the National Minority Movement of the 1920s evolving with great speed. Such an organisation could break the isolation of the militants, unite them into a powerful national force and challenge the stranglehold the class traitors have over the TUC and the working class movement. So while we make demands on the TUC we must look to creating an alternative centre if it does not comply with demands for action.

Because we recognise the Tory backed NCB plans to slash jobs in the coal industry are not just an attack on one section of the working class but the whole, because this attack has the full backing of the state machine, because of its strategic importance, we have declared time and time again that **THE MINERS MUST NOT FIGHT ALONE.** If we content ourselves with pious resolutions, not only will the miners fall under the Tory boot but all workers will come to feel its imprint as they mercilessly grind us down.

Moral appeals to action, however inspiring, are no substitute for a determined, imaginative strategy. For us, the fact that all sections of the working class have suffered under the Tories represents a massive reservoir of pent up energy which must be unleashed for the miners. As part of this we must seek to win those sections now prepared to fight against their own employers to fight alongside the miners. In this way a united workers' offensive can be developed. Struggles must be coordinated and be given a common purpose. The key to this is, we believe, a fight against the feared and hated anti-trade union laws. A united strike wave against our own employers, against the savage attacks on the miners, and against the anti-trade union laws could send the now brimming with confidence establishment reeling onto the defensive.

For such a rolling strike wave to be really effective, if it is not simply to exhaust itself, it must go to the level of a **GENERAL STRIKE.** It would of course be equally as foolish to think that we must not demand such a call from the TUC as to think that unless it does there can be no such action. That is why we have raised the slogan for a **GENERAL STRIKE WITH OR WITHOUT THE TUC.** If the TUC refuses demands for general strike action we must look to alternative organs like a National Miners' Support Movement to play the role of initiator and coordinator.

As an essential building block to this strategy we have looked to the Miners'

Support Committees. Already they have organised under their umbrella the best activists and militants from all political shades in the workers' movement. Transformed into **COUNCIL OF ACTION** type organisations they could become the most important organs of struggle for the working class. That is why we have argued that the Miners' Support Committees should consist of recallable delegates from: trade union branches, unemployed workers' groups, trades councils, shop stewards organisations, and all working class political organisations.

In order to give this strategy a cutting edge we have also made the call for **WORKERS' DEFENCE CORPS.** Already in the most militant mining areas, especially those which have had to cope with substantial but not mass scabbing and virtual police occupation, fighting formations have come into being. First, small groups organised hit squads for guerrilla attacks, then larger bodies were established which could take on the police in set piece engagements, such as in Yorkshire when miners placed an earth mover across a bridge in order to prevent a scab going to work. When the police, who were escorting the scab in five police cars, got out to remove the obstruction, sixty miners appeared from cover pelting the scabherders with iron bolts — the police were forced to retreat and the scab failed to arrive at work.

But Workers' Defence Corps should not be confined to miners or mining communities: all Miners' Support Committees should consider it their duty to establish them. With them not only can vital physical aid be given to the miners but our own meetings, collections, and demonstrations can be protected from the thugs in blue. What is more, a general strike that proceeds without the protection afforded by fighting squads is vulnerable to intimidation and would be forced to stop halfway in its struggle to halt the Tories in their tracks and bring the arrogant Iron Lady to her knees.

In the course of a general strike the demand will be rightly made to finish not only the Tory government but the system which gives it sustenance. It is to this end that the building of a **MASS REVOLUTIONARY VANGUARD COMMUNIST PARTY** is essential. For us, Leninists of the CPGB, this strike is throwing up the raw materials for such a Party. From the Miners' Support Committees, the hit squads, the Women's Support Groups, and of course the militant miners we look to forging this Party.

Marxists do not indulge in futurology but look to the class struggle itself to provide us with answers as to what the future will look like. Marx was vague or even silent about what form socialism would take until the Paris Commune concretely provided the answer; likewise for Lenin the short-lived Soviets of 1905 indicated the shape of things to come. The miners' strike has we believe given us a glimpse of the future of the British revolution.

In the Miners' Support Committees — bringing together as they do militants from different industries and political groups — we see embryonic councils of action, themselves embryonic soviets. The Women Against Pit Closures movement provides the model for a Working Class Women's Movement; and the hit squads and larger fighting bodies already arming themselves with pickaxe handles, Molotov cocktails, and organising along semi-military lines point towards the armed Workers' Militia.

With such organs we could smash the existing state machine, send packing the Tories, the militarists, the plutocrats, and the exploiters, lay the firm foundations of the proletarian order and a new world free from the inhumanities of war, oppression, and unemployment.

Marxism and the Church

The Unholy Alliance

Geraldine Duffy

AND SO IT came to pass that on November 15 1984 the miners' executive voted to meet Church leaders to seek sympathy and support. Euro cheers resounded — the broad democratic alliance in practice! The Eurocommunists had been pushing for this sort of move ever since David Jenkins's inaugural speech as Bishop of Durham when he spoke out for the human aspects of the strike. At last the Lord had given the strike some respectability and in homage to his generosity the October issue of *Marxism Today* was daring enough to feature a four page interview with His Eminence. The Euros may be the loudest cheerleaders for the Church but they are not the only elements in the Party to gleefully trail on the bishops' cassocks:

"... the Bishop of Durham is to be congratulated on his sermon and the courage it must have taken to make it. It shows the potential breadth of support which exists for the miners and for a saner way of managing the country's affairs. The key is to mobilise this reservoir of support into political action in a broad democratic alliance led by the organised working class." (*Morning Star*, September 24 1984).

These views base themselves on the premise that any opponent of the Tories is a potential ally, and to justify this view its protagonists point to the way the clergy have got numerous Conservatives foaming at the mouth about 'Scargillism' being preached in the Churches. Tory rhetoric aside, it is certainly true that during this strike the Church has not been behaving like the Tory party at prayer, but it has not travelled far; it can now more accurately be described as the SDP at prayer. The harsher face of capitalism which Thatcher represents has been a little too much for the Church liberals to stomach and they hark back to the halcyon days of consensus politics.

Like the SDP the brethren of the Church are not concerned for the miners, they are concerned that without a more conciliatory attitude on the part of the government the strike may advance working class solidarity to revolutionary proportions. Anyone who doubts this obviously failed to note the 'balance' in the bishops' contributions on the strike. Much was made of the Archbishop of Canterbury's cautious criticism of the government but much more important was the less publicised aspect of his message in which he accused Scargill of being committed to a "Stalinist type of Marxism" and denounced Scargill's "refusal to organise a ballot and readiness to organise intimidation".

Given this 'balance' in the Archbishop's argument the *Morning Star* billed it as "A moderate sermon" and urged Thatcher to heed its message. The editorial added: "Thatcher may want to wage class war but the miners' case is decent, humane, and makes economic sense — that's the archbishop's sermon." (*Morning Star*, October 9 1984.) In his rush to present the strike as 'respectable' the editor of the *Morning Star* necessarily presents a totally uncommunist argument. As communists we are in the business of class war, not of forming alliances with these charlatans, nor of presenting their arguments in the best possible light thereby encouraging any illusions the working class may have about the church and religion. The argument



Runcie Archbishop of Canterbury: the good

that the miners and the working class in general 'need all the allies they can get' is a false one. The Church has made it clear where it stands and it is not with the miners, it is for a return to the status quo, to 'social peace'. Hence any offers by the bishops to "act in a mediating or reconciling role" must be rejected by the miners if they are to win, and it is the job of communists to expose these false allies as the foes they really are.

A Marxist View

Religion, Marx said, is "the opium of the people", and taking up Marx's analogy Lenin described it as "a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man." The essential point that both Marx and Lenin were driving at is that religion teaches the 'have nots', the working class, to accept their lot, to be patient and submissive on earth and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. Meanwhile those who live off the labour of the working class, the 'haves' of the capitalist class, are offered justification for their role as exploiters in the form of charity — a very cheap price for straight passage to heaven. It is in this light that we should regard John Selwyn Gummer's comments against the clergy's interventions on the strike: "When churchmen have controversial things to say, they must not say them in a way which wounds. They must not insult the beliefs of the faithful..." As far as Gummer is concerned the Church has overstepped the mark, has bitten the hand that feeds it, but in reality all the bishops are advocating is a little more charity to ensure that the exploiters are able to continue their stock in trade. A leopard does not change its spots; the Church's role is the same as it was in Marx's time.

In contrast to the deception and fog of religion, Marxism is based on science, on truth. It frees workers from a belief in an afterlife and weds them together in fighting in the present for a better life on earth. Religion and Marxism are therefore incompatible; Lenin made this absolutely clear: "We must combat religion — that is the ABC of all materialism, and consequently of Marxism." This certainly should be the position of all communist parties, although, as Lenin also stated, as far as a socialist state is concerned religion should be considered a private matter. In the party, religion should certainly not be seen as a private concern but as something that Marxists fight to combat. Thus the Communist Party should be working to win the working

class from any religious prejudices they have by propaganda, by exposing the role of the Church in the class struggle. It is the duty of the Party to teach workers that the root of modern religion lies in capitalism.

Poland is a good example of what can happen if the Communist Party fails to take a sufficiently strong stand against religion. In Poland the Church was allowed to flourish and as a result was able to foster hatred towards the government, posing itself as the defender of workers' democracy. It has been one of the most active forces in encouraging the counterrevolutionary trade union Solidarnosc. This is not because the Church is any friend to trade unionism but because this yellow union was set on destroying socialism in Poland.

The Party view

As we have seen, the British Party has been anxious to construct alliances with the Church. This has led it to take positions totally alien to genuine communists. Thus on the question of Solidarnosc it failed to defend the PUWP, critically or otherwise, and instead lined up with the Church and reactionary governments in support of Solidarnosc. Not so surprising perhaps when you consider that Party policy not only advocates alliances with



Gummer: the bad

religious groups but considers religious beliefs among Party members a private concern.

The Euros have proven themselves to be so anxious to form alliances with bourgeois forces that they shun basic working class militancy. This was never more clear than on the People's March for Jobs; the objective of this march in 1983 was, according to Pete Carter, industrial organiser of the CP, to build the "broadest possible alliance... from bishops to brickies, from non-Thatcherite Tories to revolutionary socialists." (*Morning Star* March 25 1983.) This philosophy led to the expulsion of youths from the march for shouting anti-Tory slogans. But this should not be too surprising to those who remember the 1981 People's March for Jobs about which Pete Carter stated that one of the most impressive features was "the political contribution that the bishops made", whose contribution to the march was "better, I think, than a lot of the Left politicians who addressed the rallies... they [the bishops] were tuned into what the Peoples March was all about." Yes, it was about Christian charity, a begging bowl march concerned about the evils of widespread unemployment without looking to the cause, a message so innocuous that Tory wets could support it.

This is the type of liberal politics that goes hand in hand with alliances with the Church. It is not the Church that is transformed by such alliances; on the contrary, it is the Communist Party.

Uncompromising Materialism

Communists can make no compromises with religion. Consistent materialism is essential if Marxism is not to become befuddled with religious ideas: all modern religions are instruments of bourgeois reaction. To ally with these ideas is to dilute the power of the working class. Socialism will not be achieved by the working class lining up with the Church and other liberals and begging reforms from the ruling class. This was the type of illusion the Russian working class of 1905 had when it followed a priest, Father Gapon, who set up a union to alleviate the misery of the workers. He organised a march of workers to present a petition to the Tsar. As these peaceful marchers proceeded, singing hymns and the national anthem, the troops shot them down, killing many. The Church can only lead the working class to defeat; you cannot appeal to the good nature of the ruling class when it is in crisis, you cannot ask them to hang themselves. The only way to defeat the ruling class is through being guided by a materialist analysis, by knowing the rules of the game.

To some the uncompromising materialism of Marxism seems too scientific, too cold, without humanity. Such is the position of Tony Benn, who admits his socialism owes more to Jesus Christ than to Marx. Well Tony, looking at your practice rather than your words, what is human about participating in a government committed to a system that exploits the vast masses of the working class for a tiny minority of the population, engendering poverty on a mass scale, and in fact continues the process in the name of 'socialism'?

Those who would condemn Marxism for its lack of humanity are living in some sort of utopia, they are often those who declare a 'moral' objection to violence and killing of all kinds. This has certainly been the case in the miners' strike especially since the first victim fell to the miners. This effectively equates the violence of the oppressed to that of the oppressor. Moral objections to such actions will only ensure the continued oppression of the working class; whether it intends to or not it always leaves the ruling class with the winning hand. The working class cannot afford to turn the other cheek.

Far from not having enough humanity, communism secures for every member of society by means of socialised production an existence not only sufficient materially but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties. It is in communist society that "for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones." It is only under communism that we can become truly free, truly human.



Carter: the ugly

The Morning Star Crisis

The rift becomes unbridgeable

John Mann

THE RIFT between the Eurocommunist/McLennanite Party EC and the Chater group at the *Morning Star* has reached the point of no return. In October the latter faction refused, along with the Straight Leftists, to attend the PPPS Special General Meeting, and has promised to hold an alternative SGM in January. In the light of this, of the more recent closing down of the London District Congress, of the subsequent suspension from Party membership of leading Chaterite supporters by the Euro/McLennan EC faction, and the fact that Chater's supporters are again agitating for *Morning Star* Readers' Meetings as an alternative to the Party branches, the stage is now set for a complete split.

The Communist Party is therefore confronted by an extremely dangerous situation. A split by the Chater group would seriously undermine the Party and hasten its demise towards becoming a neo-Fabian rump. The Chater camp on the other hand would rapidly disintegrate, having no real ideological cohesion, and would thus not even 'enjoy' the ossified sectarian stability of the New Communist Party. Such a split would be a serious blow to the Leninist fight for reforging the Communist Party through open ideological struggle, as the mass of potentially healthy Party activists would become atomised and the natural focal point of a mass Party with at least an historical and partially intact link with the Leninist tradition would be lost.

It is because Leninists strive to defeat Eurocommunism and all forms of liquidationism by consolidating and reforging our Communist Party that we totally oppose any split at this stage of the inner-Party struggle. We therefore look to the January SGM as an opportunity to dissuade Party activists from supporting a split and of further exposing the truly liquidationist nature not only of the Euros but also of the pro-Chater group leadership. We are self critical of the fact that we failed to effectively campaign for comrades to use the October SGM as a platform for opposing the Eurocommunists and we will endeavour to make greater efforts for mobilising our supporters to the January SGM. Yet the fact that both the Chaterites and the Straight Leftists will be attending the January meetings, having failed to do so in October, will mean that the possibility of making a major political impact in January will be less than the lost opportunity which was available to us in October.

In requisitioning the October SGM, the Eurocommunists and McLennanites cited the "undemocratic manoeuvres" of the Management Committee at the June AGM of the PPPS (*Morning Star* September 25 1984). While this was true, it carried very little weight coming from a faction which used every trick in the book to gerrymander its 'victory' at the 38th Party Congress and has since verified bureaucratic centralism as its trade in hand with the closing down of the London District Congress.

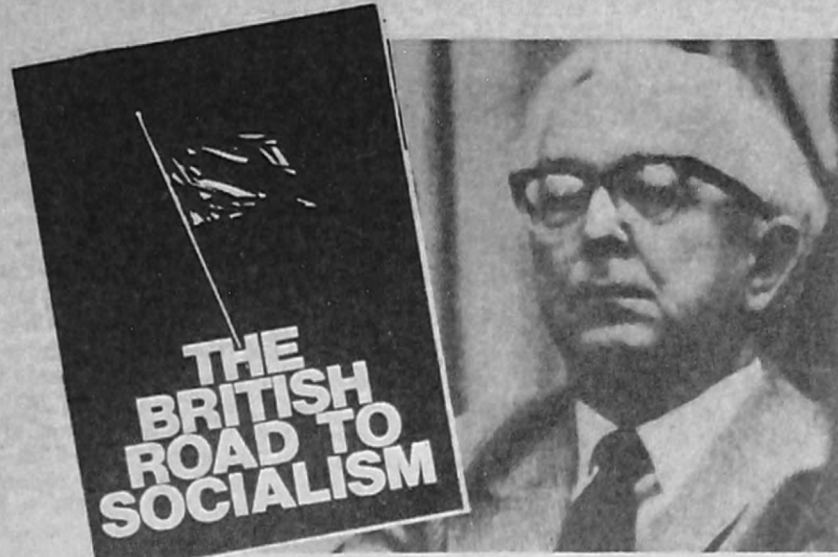
Yet the Chater faction has proved itself to be equally bureaucratic and totally incapable of fighting out in the open. It suffered a moral defeat in October by ruling the SGM 'out of order' on the most spurious excuse and demonstrated its true reason for backing off from any confrontation as being fear of losing the vote at any such meeting. Chater only just scraped through by the skin of his teeth at the June AGM, actually losing two resolutions which amounted to votes of confidence in himself and the 'Survival

Plan', and only avoided total defeat at the hands of the Eurocommunists by the fact that the Glasgow meeting was bureaucratically disenfranchised.

The Chater group is losing support as time progresses because of its headlong retreat from Marxism and from the Party. Its claim that the 1300 votes cast in favour of removing Chater as editor at the October SGM fell short of the Chaterite vote at the June AGM expresses a great deal of wishful thinking. It assumes that Chater can maintain his support, while at the same time conducting an ignominious retreat, and it assumes that Chater can continue to rely on the support of the Straight Leftists, who meanwhile are becoming ever more disaffected by the cowardly bureaucratic antics of the Chaterites as well as the lack of principled leadership coming from their own faction, such as their instruction to 'scab' and join the Eurocommunist walkout at the London Congress.

By calling their own Special General Meeting in January the Chaterites hope to gain some enthusiasm and momentum from their own supporters, having by January installed the new printing press. As for comrade Mary Rosser's feeble excuse that the October meetings would have disrupted support for the miners' strike, this is both stupid in assuming that the strike would be finished by January as well as assuming that a January meeting would not be equally disruptive, if not more so, in the event of the strike being still in progress.

Despite these organisational considerations, we still come back to the Chater camp's fundamental weakness — its unwillingness to engage the Eurocommunists in an ideological struggle. The Chaterites are in a tight corner, having committed themselves to a January meeting, and are absolutely desperate to win a majority in order to save their credibility in the face of the Eurocommunist offensive. It is clear to all outside observers and honest communists inside the Party, despite the protestations of comrades Rosser and Gill to the contrary, that the Chater group is taking the *Morning Star* out of communist politics; Tony Benn and Ernie Roberts have openly admitted this to be the reason for giving their own partisan support to the editors of the *Morning Star*. Yet because many Chater supporters feel an instinctive loyalty to the communist cause, the Chaterites refuse to confess their true intentions, and attempt to disguise the *Morning Star's* drift from communist politics by repeatedly declaring their loyalty to the *British Road to Socialism* as formal proof of a continuing link between the paper and the Party. Yet the Chaterites do not see any true alternative to Eurocommunist liquidationism which they themselves



Should we follow Tony Chater and his BRS bible?

aided, abetted, and nurtured for years and merely pose a more amenable 'working class' path to liquidationism. The Chaterites are incapable of fighting the Eurocommunists because they are unable to fight liquidationism; they are, in fact, simply another version of it — period.

As shown by the October SGM, the mass of Executive Committee supporters fall into two categories. The majority are those comrades distinguished by their grey hair and bald heads, are the mainstay of the McLennanites, and bear witness to that faction's inability to recruit youth and to secure for itself any long term future. The minority consist of those younger, trendier comrades like Nigel Kelsey of Hackney, who boasted of having been recruited to the Party by *Marxism Today* and of having always considered the *Morning Star* as "boring and turgid". This point of view, while quite justified in relation to the *Star*, openly admits the fact that the Eurocommunists have always operated and are still operating on a factional basis.

Since the 38th Party Congress the real, dyed in the wool, Eurocommunists have constantly agitated for disciplinary measures and expulsions to be taken against all oppositionists. At most of the October SGMs at least one Eurocommunist, like comrade Jim Endersby of Newham, called for the bourgeois courts to be used against Chater and the Management Committee. However the dominant strategy of the EC up till now has been the 'softly, softly' approach of comrade Gordon McLennan, who has definitely put the option of court injunctions on ice for the time being, especially since comrade Nina Temple has been quoted as saying that there is no guarantee such an action would restore EC control over the *Morning Star* and that court costs of £600,000 would be at stake. Furthermore, both the Euro/McLennanite and the Chater factions are reluctant to resort to the courts at a time when these are being used extensively by employers and scabs against the miners in particular and the trade union movement in general. Yet there is little doubt that such reluctance on the part of either faction has no principled basis and that with both sides twisting the rule book to suit themselves the *Morning Star* dispute seems very likely to end up the subject of a court case.

For Leninists and all genuine partisans of the working class movement the use of the bosses' laws and courts by one working class organisation against another is as much an act of class betrayal as Eric Hammond's compliance with anti-trade union and ballot laws. We oppose it on principle and alternatively advocate the use of a workers' tribunal, both sides committing themselves to

abide by the decision of the tribunal.

The true litmus test of any workers' organisation at the present time, however, is its ideological and organisational role in conjunction with the miners' strike — the most important class struggle in this country since the 1926 General Strike. Therefore what has been the role of the Party EC and the *Morning Star* for the past nine months?

If we measure the quality of leadership, not by the yardstick of the NUM, but by the standards of communist tactics and strategy, then we see that it is not only the Party EC which has fallen far short of its historic tasks. The *Morning Star* has fallen into the same opportunist trap. Not once has the Editor advanced the demand to develop and coordinate the miners' support committees, and as for police violence, this merely raises for comrade Chater "the need to control the police and democratise the state" (*Morning Star* October 20 1984), in exactly the same reformist manner as it does for the Eurocommunists. Neither the EC or the Chater group have raised the demand of mobilising the working class in support of the miners up to and including a general strike or of calling for Workers' Defence Corps but, on the contrary, have denounced both as ultra-leftist. Yet the situation confronting the miners and the working class today is in many ways far more dire than the situation in 1926, and a defeat for the miners today would have far more serious consequences for the working class as a whole than the defeat of 1926.

Contrary to the claims of the Chaterites and their supporters, the main problem facing our Party and class is not the Euro-dominated EC's campaign against the *Morning Star*. The real problem lies with the failure of both these factions, which command the greatest resources and influence of the Party within the working class movement, to provide a genuine communist and revolutionary lead in the miners' strike. Comrade Chater's championing of the "leading role of the working class" is worthless when in practice all it means is that a communist daily paper completely subordinates itself to the role of cheerleader and most faithful supporter of a trade union — a very militant, combative trade union — but still a trade union all the same.

The *Leninist*, despite its meagre resources and influence in comparison, is the only tendency in our Party to give a consistent communist lead in the miners' strike. While we oppose any threatened split by the Chaterites, we do not consider the inner-Party struggle a destructive diversion. Open ideological struggle is the only means to defeat the Eurocommunists and all other forms of opportunism. This must be more so the case during the miners' strike, for this is the time when the working class especially needs the most advanced revolutionary leadership, and as such the greatest efforts must be made to relinquish the opportunist and liquidationist death-grip on our Party. This is the reason why Lenin hotted up the inner-Party struggle in his own Party in 1905, precisely at the moment of revolutionary offensive. To consider the struggle against Eurocommunist or even Chaterite liquidationism as a "diversion" would be to consider Lenin's struggle against Menshevism as also having been a diversion. The only way forward for reforging our Communist Party, for saving the *Star*, and for strengthening the chance of a miners' victory is not to call a halt to the inner-Party struggle at the January Special Meeting but to intensify it!

REVIEWS

Class Politics

Ian Mahoney

Fine, Harris, Mayo, Weir, and Wilson *Class Politics: an answer to its critics*, pbk, pp64 £1.50.

THIS pamphlet is currently being touted around various centrist circles as, it seems, almost the theoretical platform of the Chater/Morning Star faction of the Communist Party. As such it is probably a far more eloquent statement of the liquidationist course that this tendency is set on than anything we could ever hope to print, and the fact that communists (as opposed to left trade unionists) even begin to take its politics seriously is a measure of the depth to which the Party's theoretical level has sunk.

Having said that, however, we do welcome its publication as part of the general process of opening up the ideological battle inside the communist movement in Britain. We certainly agree with the pamphlet's healthy initial premise:

"We recognise that the newer left [i.e. the Eurocommunists — IM] is itself formed out of changing economic, political, and ideological circumstances as these changes have to be accounted for and responded to." (p.7)

Unfortunately, the authors of the pamphlet appear to see the explanation of this particular form of opportunism as a matter firstly of income bracket and secondly of geography:

"... socially the newer left is predominantly drawn from the white and white-collar middle class professions, although contributions from academics have been foremost. It is this which helps to explain the course taken by Marxism as it has been modified and appropriated by the newer left." (p.3)

Also:

"Slowly but perceptibly, the Marxism of the classics assumed the mantle of a new orthodoxy which was to be attacked and subverted as an inadmissible body of work. And the location of the evolving Marxism within the academy opened it up to the influence of bourgeois social science..." (p.10)

None of this is necessarily factually incorrect, but it hardly captures the essence of the political phenomenon that is Eurocommunism. After all, Marx, Lenin, and not to mention Engels, were all hardly horny-handed sons of toil. The key question surely is the content of a political position. In this context, the pamphlet reveals its own particular opportunist bent — that of *economism*.

The worship of the spontaneity of the class and the refusal to set tasks in advance of what the labour movement may throw up is characteristic of many of the opportunist sections of the left of the Communist Party — in this sense the pamphlet's main pillars are not that far away from the Eurocommunist tendency that they purport to oppose.

What do we mean by this? Well, first it is necessary to answer the question: 'What is Eurocommunism?' We define this political tendency as *the ripest form of opportunism* — the one closest to going over lock, stock, and barrel to the side of its 'own' bourgeoisie and becoming fully social-imperialist. Characteristic of such a drift is the concern for 'our' industry and a desire to outdo 'our' rivals. This is a concern

and a platform that the Eurocommunists share with the authors of this pamphlet and which defines both as opportunist. Once this premise of defending British capitalism's interests is accepted a whole Pandora's box of opportunism is opened.

Concretely then, let us look at the pamphlet's analysis of 'our' economy and then specifically examine one area — women — to see how the revisionist analysis of the economic base is translated into reformist practice in the political arena.

The pamphlet wheels out the hoary old chestnut that has been so beloved of all the editions of the *British Road to Socialism*, that the 'Multinational Corporations' (MNCs) that 'dominate' Britain are somehow not patriotic enough or are not quite playing cricket with the British economy:

"In other words, the UK is only getting US investment because it is conveniently located next to continental Europe, where the cream of US investment is taking place... into continental Europe goes the high wage, high investment, and high productivity production and the British economy gets whatever is left." (p.16)

The multinationals, instead of presumably rushing to the bedside of the ailing British economy, have at best responded "passively" (p.17). The pamphlet goes on to counterpose this multi-national-induced plight of the British economy to the 'prosperous' financial institutions of The City.

Now let's get back to basics, shall we? Imperialism represents the highest form of capitalism precisely because it is characterised by the merging of bank and industrial capital to form *finance capital*. Thus to counterpose the avaricious and prosperous City to the poor run-down ghettos of British industry is simply anti-Marxist.

For this pamphlet, imperialism becomes a "policy" which has led to Britain becoming "the weak economy in the advanced capitalist world" (p.19). The very fact that the pamphlet does not mention the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, the law which Marx called the most important underlying development of capitalist accumulation, should be enough to discredit it as a serious Marxist analysis of the British imperialist economy. From our point of view, that is from the stance of Marxism, Britain's crisis is not the result of mistaken "policies", but of innate *laus* of capitalist accumulation which have begun to affect all the world's capitalist economies. Britain's relative decline is thus explained by its position as the *oldest imperialist power*.

The authors, however, advocate that workers should tie their interest to the solvency of British imperialism and to protecting 'our' industrial infrastructure (presumably against the prosperous and unpatriotic City). The poisonous consequences of this become clear when we look at the section on women.

Class Politics... first sets out to rescue feminism from the feminists:

"... feminism is in danger of being captured by a new reformist orthodoxy which is subverting its potentially revolutionary character." (p.34)

It is of course the committee room feminism of the TUC that the pamphlet endeavours to excuse and justify. Thus in arguing against the "male trade unionism" thesis of the likes of comrade Bea Campbell, it presents a smugly complacent apology for the role of trade unions *vis-à-vis* women:

That is not to suggest that sexism is non-existent in the union movement, only that advances have, can, and must be won." (p.32)

In actual fact, the trade union movement has an appalling record of fighting for women's rights — ask any militant woman. This is hardly

surprising. The leaders that dominate the movement are all for the very institution which enforces women's subordination — the bourgeois state. Implicitly, by failing to make the link between the struggle for women's liberation and socialist revolution, the authors suggest that women's oppression is not rooted in the existence of capitalist social relations but in the "sexism" (see above quote) of male members of the working class.

Such publications as this are to be welcomed as they legitimise the type of open ideological struggle conducted by *The Leninist*. However, it is not possible to fight revisionism with revisionism. The cancer of Eurocommunism in the Party has been the result of a whole process of *historical opportunist degeneration*, not as this pamphlet claims, geography.

The Kent Way

Alec Long

Malcolm Pitt *The World on our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike* Lawrence and Wishart, pbk, pp217, £3.95.

FIRST published in 1979, comrade Malcolm Pitt's account of the 1972 confrontation between the miners and the Heath government has become something of a 'mini-classic' of NUM history and deserves a much wider readership in the light of the lessons of today's struggle.

The Kent area of the NUM has over many years established a record of outstanding industrial militancy and has long been associated with communist leaders such as Jack Dunn, Area General Secretary and Communist Party councillor for Deal in the 'fifties, and comrades Jack Collins and Malcolm Pitt today. Why has this been so? The reasons lie partly in typically harsh conditions of the pit which facilitate high levels of union organisation and partly in the conditions and history peculiar to the Kent field.

In its first section, comrade Pitt's book details the appalling working atmosphere of the pits and the general social insularity of the pit villages, both of which encourage highly developed union organisation and solidarity. This strong social identification within the mining communities has been in the past and remains today the bedrock of strong and militant trade unionism. In Kent in particular the first miners were outsiders shipped into a region which catered largely for middle to upper class imbibers of the South Coast's medicinal airs and the seasonal petty bourgeoisie that sprang up to serve their needs.

A key factor in the evolution of the militancy of the union was the type of men who migrated to the Kent coalfield. The area attracted men from coalfields where the union was already established and possessed a rich history of struggle:

"Among the first timbermen and colliers were the agitators who brought the experience and inspiration to build the organisation of the Union in the pits. After the debacle of 1926, the stream of trade union militants and political activists into the Kent pits became a flood as the coal-owners purged the coalfields of 'red agitators' and 'union troublemakers'." (p.83)

The miners in that sense 'imported' advanced organisations of class action into the area. This combativeness matured and grew and each pit developed its own unique and dis-

tinctive history of militancy and struggle. By the time of the 1972 dispute the largest pit in Kent, Betteshanger, had a claim to be "the most militant pit in the British coalfield".

The '72 strike became the focus for the anger of men who felt betrayed as they had watched what they had regarded as 'their' industry run down and the miners treated not so very differently from the days when the mines were privately owned.

The key task that emerged for the Kent miners in the strike was to prevent the movement of fuel to the power stations of London and the South East. The Kent miners, with help from other sections of workers, eventually brought 21 power stations under picket as well as important coal depots at West Drayton, West Ham, Dagenham, Neasden, and Fulham. It was an innovative and dynamically fought struggle — the heyday of the flying picket and the mass picket. The Kent strikers responded imaginatively to the problems that picketing London's power stations presented them with:

"The Thames was a major inroad into the picket cordon around the power stations. The majority of London power stations were designed to receive their supplies from the riverside and are provided with wharves and cranes. Joe Holmes, the Kent Area president, therefore decided to put a picket on the river, and on Monday 24 January the Miners' Navy was launched from Westminster Pier." (p.161)

Today's struggle has also thrown up new forms of action and organisation and there is a general need for a commensurate level of adaptability and imagination to that shown by the Kent miners in 1972. One of the most positive features of the strike as far as we have been concerned has been the semi-spontaneous development of Miners' Support Committees. As comrade Malcolm Pitt himself pointed out in an interview given in *The Leninist* no 13:

"... it's fairly obvious that the sort of Support Committees that would come into existence, particularly if they were clearly based on the trade union movement would take on more and more the character of Councils of Action."

We have pointed to the importance of regional and national conferences of Miners' Support Committees to give militants a less parochial outlook and to build towards a National Minority-type organisation. Once again Kent has been in the forefront of the development of the movement. At the October 18 Kent Conference of Miners' Support Committees, attended by over 120 people, many contributions to the conference stressed the importance of continuity of organisation after the strike and the need for a permanent organisation of Kent militants. At this conference a County Committee was set up to coordinate the county's support work.

The Kent example is a model. Unlike the example of Wales, where unfortunately under the influence of right wing elements of the Communist Party the equivalent organisation, the Wales Assembly, has very much the appearance of a tame "bishops to brickies" Popular Front-type bloc, the Kent model is unquestionably a *labour movement body*. The Kent Miners' Solidarity Committee has delegates from trades councils, Labour Parties, Wives' Support Groups, trade union organisations, youth organisations, unemployed and other groups, and the NUM itself. This type of body is a useful model for others and illustrates how Kent, as in '72, is in many ways blazing a trail both for the miners and the working class movement as a whole.

Alec Long

MANY people who contributed to the debate at the December 2 Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference in London (attended by well over 1,500 delegates) complained about the fact that it had taken nine months to organise such a gathering. This is a worthwhile criticism. *The Leninist* has agitated for some time for a national conference of Miners' Support Committees in order to develop a national movement capable of breaking the Support Groups' rather narrow, parochial outlook and developing a movement truly able to give "total physical support" to the miners.

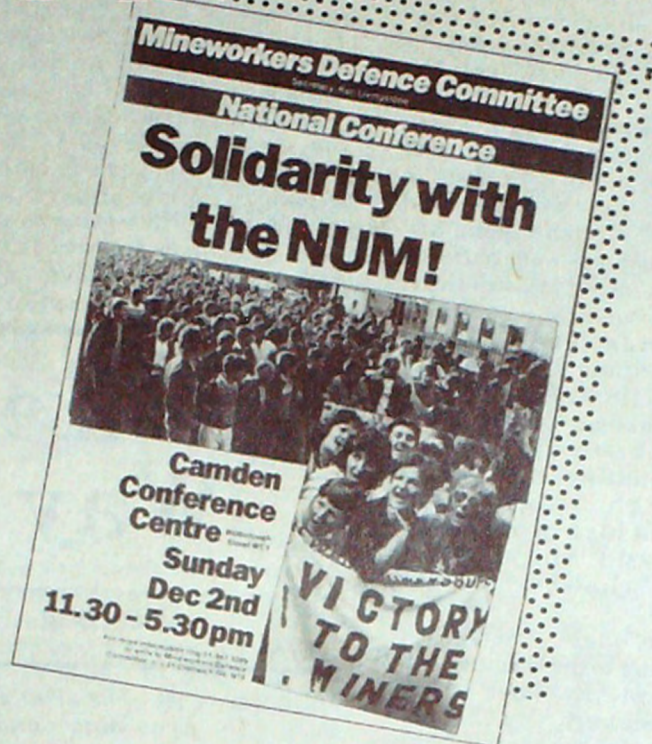
Paul Whetton, the Notts rank and file strike leader, expressed at the beginning of the day the hope of many militants in the audience when he said that the conference should be a "working conference, not a talking shop..." Unfortunately, the organisers of the conference had other ideas. The bulk of the time allocated to debate was taken up by platform speeches or heavily edited report-backs from the 'workshops'. A resolution submitted to the conference beforehand from Keresley miners and the Coventry and Reading Miners' Support Committees was blocked by the conference organisers and despite vociferous protests from the Coventry delegates on the conference floor the resolution was effectively censored. Readers may be interested in knowing some of the political shenanigans behind the scenes of the Mineworkers' Defence Committee and the organising meetings which led up to the December 2 conference.

The Mineworkers' Defence Committee was originally set up at the last Labour Party conference, the actual initiative coming from the *Labour Briefing* fringe meeting. Its nucleus consisted of John Bloxam (a supporter of *Socialist Organiser*), Valerie Coultas (*Socialist Action*), Jane Stockton (the *Chartist* tendency in the Labour Party), Chris Knight (*Chartist*), and its titular head, Ken Livingstone. As the December 2 conference approached this group began to advertise its meetings to draw other forces into preparations for this conference and to draw up a statement on behalf of the committee. As the meetings progressed, the political positions of the various groups that had turned up began to emerge.

On the extreme right there was the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) blocking with *Socialist Action*, both of whom, despite their very different attitudes to the strike, essentially ended up with the same passive, do-nothing position. Both opposed the inclusion of any mention of anything as radical (or, in Valerie Coultas's own words, "ultra-leftist") as working towards a general strike or for any perspective of mobilising the working class as a whole to win the strike through a transformed Miners' Support Movement.

From *Socialist Action's* point of view the miners can win quite comfortably alone. One of their supporters, in moving an amendment to the draft resolution at the November 27 organisation meeting, blandly stated that the miners "did not need" a general strike. In other words, *Socialist Action* is perfectly prepared to see the miners battle on alone through the winter with enormous suffering to the miners' families and communities and the strong possibility that even more miners will be murdered on picket lines. *Socialist Action's* complacency is quite criminal. Valerie Coultas wrote an article in *Socialist Action* of November 30 on the Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference that was so right wing it could easily have been penned by one of a number of our very own Eurocommunists in the Communist Party. (It really is only the prejudice of their historical origins that keeps Trot groups like *Socialist Action* and the Euros out of each other's arms.) Coultas ended her profound thoughts on the "ultra-leftism" of the SWP (we kid you not) and the way forward for the miners' support movement with three bleating

A Missed Opportunity



little demands:

1. "...a massive Xmas appeal..."
2. "...increasing the campaign around power stations to ensure the IOU's promised at the TUC... are delivered" (Coultas does not go into sticky problems like 'how?' of course.)
3. "...a massive Labour movement demonstration in the new year..."

And that's it! *Socialist Action* wanted to use the December 2 conference as a 'rah! rah!' rally both to put pressure on the Parliamentary Labour Party by parasitising the miners' strike to divert some of its militancy and dynamism into the dull labyrinth of County Hall Labour committee rooms, and to launch a call for a national demonstration under the glare of the television lights.

But why would the SWP, with its worship of rank-and-filism and workers' self activity end up with the same narrow bureaucratic outlook? Well, paradoxically, it is because the SWP has a diametrically opposed view of the prospects for the strike to *Socialist Action*. Because (apparently) we are now in a "downturn" in the class struggle (according to the SWP) the miners are not going to win. Although the SWP does not state this openly, it is implied in its pessimistic view of the character of the present period and also by its actions. Tony Cliff, the theoretical guru of the SWP, has written grotesquely that "the miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers' Party have called the 'downturn' in the movement" (Tony Cliff, *Socialist Review*, April 1984). The task at present, Cliff has assured his party's activists, is not to recruit hundreds but to pick up "ones and twos".

Thus, in the lead up to the December 2 conference, the SWP opposed any inclusion in the conference statement of the call for a general strike or to develop a genuine and elected delegate-based national committee. Its conservatism was an inevitable product of its cynicism and treacherous defeatism. In its heart of hearts, the SWP does not believe that the miners can win — so its only real perspective for the strike seems to be to get as much out of it as it can for the SWP. If Miners' Support Committees became properly constituted delegate based organisations this would limit the SWP's access to them. Under these circumstances it would have less freedom to pursue

what has practically become the SWP's major preoccupation during the course of the strike: twinning.

The SWP has been very busy twinning pits with local factories and workplaces in a very haphazard and thus very divisive and negative way. This has not really been done to build links between militants as it has claimed, but to establish links between the SWP and militants. Tony Cliff's sect evidently feels that if the end of the strike cannot see a miners' victory, at least it can see the SWP with lists and lists of NUM militants' names and addresses.

Consequently, the SWP, for all its economic rank-and-filism, actually opposed an amendment at the November 27 organisation meeting to constitute the Mineworkers' Defence Committee as an organisation based on recallable delegates from area and regional conferences of Miners' Support Groups. Instead, its representatives proposed and managed to win an amendment that stuck the NUM and SERTUC atop the movement of solidarity with the NUM! Why? In the hope of course that a committee composed of such forces would do nothing, would establish no real form of control over or unitary national organisation of local Miners' Support Committees and would thus allow the SWP freedom to continue its divisive little game of feeding off the miners' struggle.

The Mineworkers' Defence Committee produced a series of different draft statements in the run up to the conference as the balance at the organisation meetings swung back and forth between different groups and as the original committee members plotted behind the heavy wood panelled doors of County Hall. The factional battles on the Committee culminated in *London Labour Briefing* (i.e. the Chartists) walking out of the November 30 meeting, which had been stacked with the rightist bloc of *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Worker*. Eventually however everybody kissed and made up and a final 'Frankenstein' statement which attempted to compromise between the left and right positions was presented to delegates on the day of the conference.

Of course, it was all rather academic anyway, as the conference was not allowed to debate the resolution. The majority of the organisers, for their different sectarian reasons, wanted a rally not a working conference, and were determined to have a rally come

what may. Thus:

- The Keresley miners'/Coventry Miners' Support Committee resolution was blocked from being discussed, despite promises all day from the chair.
- Amendments to the final resolution were not allowed.
- At the very end of conference, as delegates were scrambling around for their coats, Livingstone from the chair sang out "Do we all agree with the statement?" There was a rumble of 'yesses' plus a few very annoyed 'nos'.
- The few people called to speak in the extremely limited time for debate were chosen to simply speak about their personal experiences, not to raise wider political issues.
- The workshops were used to bury dissenting voices by editing the 'report-backs'. For example, in the workshop on 'Mass Picketing' around half the audience came out for Workers' Defence Corps. The organisers, to extricate themselves from this rather tricky situation, simply permitted *no report back from that workshop!* This is crass political dishonesty.

The pressing task of establishing a nationally elected delegate based Miners' Support Committee still remains. The fact that this December 2 conference was so massively over-subscribed that an overflow meeting had to be hastily arranged (and which turned out to be actually larger than the main conference) confirms our view that there was both an objective need for such a conference and an overwhelming demand. As it turned out, the 'conference' was a rally and a talking shop — and a *disorganised* rally and a *disorganised* talking shop at that. Formally the Mineworkers' Defence Committee is committed through the resolution adopted at the conference to convening in January "a delegate based committee...", although exactly how this is to be arranged is not made clear. For us, it would have to be through a national delegate conference of Miners' Support Committees which will elect the national committee. The December 2 statement as it stands is an inadequate document. In essence it should be amended along three lines:

First — the question of the General Strike. The conference resolution talks about "the winning of industrial action in support of the miners", but does not specify the scale of these solidarity actions. A vital component of the fight to extend strike action is the need to link it to smashing the Tory anti-trade union laws.

Second — the composition of the national committee. It must be based on *elected, recallable* delegates from area and regional conferences of Miners' Support Committees. This demand is intimately linked to what exactly the support movement should expend its energies doing — fighting for miners' victory, or wasting its time pressurising the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Third — on Workers' Self Defence. The conference statement pledges to "participate in, help coordinate and strengthen such defence". Yet why not say "organise"? That is the key task as far as miners' violence is concerned. Simply bewailing police violence is worse than useless, especially when the resolution is encouraging people to build picket lines. The question is — how do we *protect* picket lines? And how do we make them *effective*? This can only be achieved by creating Workers' Defence Corps and organising our defence of picket lines and miners' communities.

The organisers of the December 2 1984 Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference had a historic opportunity to render a huge service to the working class movement — and they screwed it up, not because of class treachery, but because they are petty bourgeois dilettantes. The task they began, however, still desperately needs to be completed. We call on comrades to press for a national delegate conference in January where amendments and resolutions can be discussed and which will elect a national recallable committee. This is the way to give the miners "total physical support"; this is the way to victory.