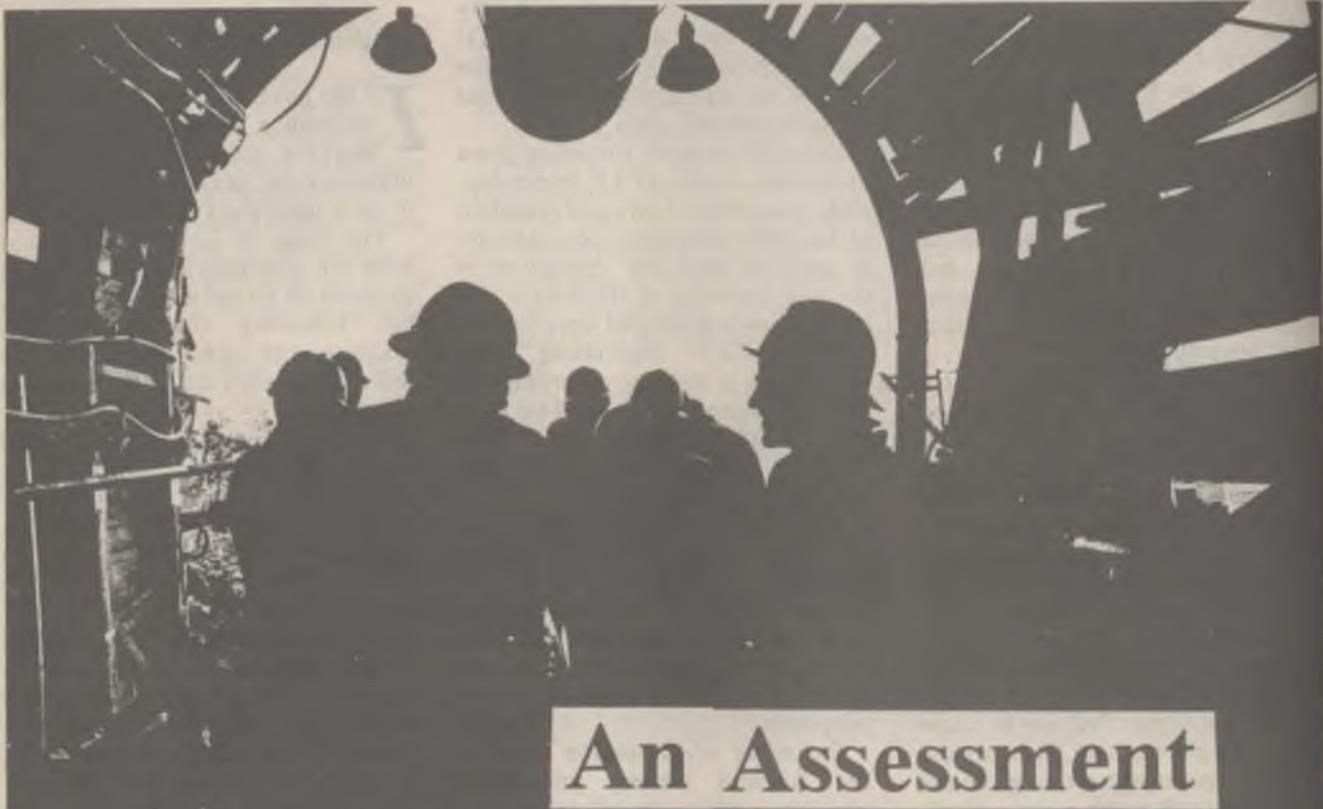


Mike Donaldson

# The British Miners' Strike:



## An Assessment

The British miners' strike had elements of a classic confrontation between the New Right and a well-organised and militant union. While no simple lessons can be transported from Britain to Australia, questions must be asked about the role of the Labour Party, the lack of support from the rest of the union movement and about the tactics of the miners themselves. Mike Donaldson asks some of the questions and discusses the issues.

A special issue of *The Miner*, the journal of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), published on 7 March, carried the banner headline, "Victory? What Victory? The Fight Goes On". In it, the NUM stated, "The (National Coal) Board wanted to close 20 pits and axe 20,000 jobs .... *They have not been able to do so.* They wanted to close five pits immediately .... *They have not been able to do so.* They wanted to commit the union to signing an agreement closing pits on economic grounds. *We have not and will never do so.* The Board did not want any independent appeal body introduced into the colliery review procedure. *They have been forced to accept such a body*" (italics in the original).

Surprisingly, given that all mass media coverage has been to the contrary, most mineworkers appeared to agree with *The Miner's* statement. A poll conducted for Granada TV's *Union World* found that less than one in four miners

believed that they had suffered defeat, and 68 percent said they were ready to take industrial action against pit closures in their districts.

And yet the miners clearly did not win. The NUM did not achieve its objectives, the closure program has not been withdrawn, and the mineworkers went back without a negotiated settlement. Over twelve months of intense struggle, 9,000 were arrested, 600 sacked, 300 imprisoned, some for up to five years, and two killed, and the union was badly divided internally.

But the NUM was not smashed, as the Thatcher government intended. As Peter Carter,<sup>1</sup> a National Industrial organiser with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), put it, the government's strategy was to isolate and destroy the best organised and most militant sections of the labour movement, and for this the Thatcher government had prepared meticulously.

## The Thatcher Government's Preparations

The Conservative Party was deeply affected by the victories of the miners in 1972 and 1974, and the Energy Minister under Conservative Prime Minister Heath was directed by the new Conservative leadership to provide a detailed report on the lessons that could be drawn from the government's defeats of those years.

According to Beynon and McMylor,<sup>2</sup> the resulting report, based on highly confidential discussions with business people and former public servants, "was a deeply sobering one for senior Conservatives". It pointed to the potential power of well organised unions in key industries, and drew attention to the concentration of industrial power caused by advanced technology, the economy's dependence on electricity and the central role of coal. The report said that the increasing complexity of electricity generation meant that the state could no longer use the armed forces to take over the running of the coal and oil-fired power stations.

It was against this background that Thatcher directed Nicholas Ridley, currently the Minister for Transport, to produce a more detailed and strategic document. This report was widely leaked in 1978, and made quite clear the intentions of the Conservative Party before it even became the government. The report, as it was outlined in *The Economist*, said, in part:

*Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher government to: a) build up maximum coal stocks particularly in the power stations; b) make contingency plans for the import of coal; c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.*

In addition, the report recommended that the greatest deterrent to any strike was "to cut off the money supply to the workers and make the union finance them". It also suggested that there should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to handle pickets and protect non-union drivers to cross picket lines.<sup>3</sup>

**"The government's strategy was to isolate and destroy the best organised and most militant sections of the labour movement, and for this the Thatcher government had prepared meticulously ...."**

The National Coal Board, with tripartite consultation, had trade union representatives on its decision making bodies and subscribed to the tripartite formulation, the *Plan for Coal*, re-signed as recently as 1980. In case senior management had been infected by this proximity to trade unionists, the Thatcher government moved quickly to install American import, Ian MacGregor, who had been responsible for managing the butchering of British Steel, Britain's government-owned steel corporation, and before that, British Leyland.

In 1981, British coal stocks stood at 37 million tonnes; three years later they had risen 35 percent to 57 million. In 1982, the head of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), the wealthiest body in England, with assets of 40 thousand million pounds, was replaced. He had been instructed to substitute oil for coal in the power stations and to accumulate coal stocks. He was reported to have thought that this view was "hysterical". In the year that he left the CEGB, oil imports increased by 33 percent.<sup>4</sup>

In 1983, coal fuelled 76 percent of electricity generation, but during the strike oil became the major fuel including the main fuel for electricity generated for industry.<sup>5</sup> During the third week in January 1985, with most of the country snow-covered and some parts experiencing the lowest temperatures for 20 years, the power stations produced an all-time record 46,125 megawatts of electricity. It was the third night that month that power supply had reached record levels. The new chairman of the CEGB, formerly head of the Atomic Energy Authority, privately boasted of his role in defeating the miners.<sup>6</sup> The cost was astronomical. Early in September 1984 it was revealed that the extra costs were of the order of 20 million pounds per week.



Michael Crick commented, "During the early part of the 1984-85 dispute the government persistently refused to intervene: most of its work had already been carried out".<sup>7</sup> Coal stocks had been built up and alternative energy sources found for the power stations. Legislation was enacted reducing social security benefits for strikers' families. Employers were armed with sanctions under the civil law and the police had in place co-ordinating mechanisms to minimise the effects of flying pickets.

On the other hand, according to Hywel Francis, chair of the Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities, and chair of the Welsh Communist Party's Energy and Mining Advisory Committee, the miners were "exceptionally ill-prepared".<sup>8</sup>

## The Miners' Response

With that remarkable clarity of vision allowed by hindsight, most commentators within the labour movement and the NUM itself now suggest that the failure to hold a national ballot of NUM miners was a tactical mistake. It was a mistake because, as one miner put it "it was like a monkey on our back" throughout the year, enabling Tory propagandists to sling at the trade union movement yet again that old, old favourite — that trade unions are anti-democratic.

The decision not to hold a national ballot was a mistake because it cut across the NUM's long established principle of national unity, national decisions and national action. The NUM general secretary, Peter Heathfield, put a convincing argument against the holding of the ballot thus,

"It cannot be right for one man to vote another man out of a job; .... a ballot on wages is a ballot which everyone enters on an equal basis and everyone is affected equally; on jobs it is a different matter, especially when jobs are at risk in some areas and not others".

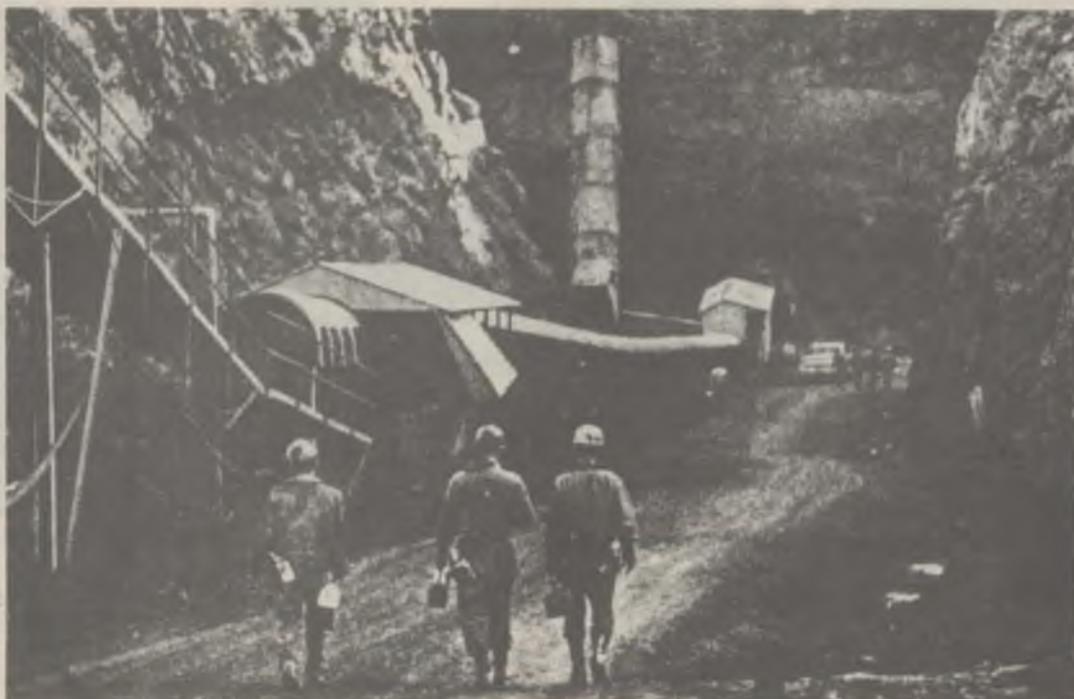
But, nonetheless, the absence of a national ballot allowed those pits which continued to work to justify their action by saying that, because no ballot had been held, they could legitimately continue producing. Beynon suggests that this, in turn, meant that many other workers refused solidarity action because "the miners can't get their own members out".<sup>9</sup> Mass picketing of working pits was also a direct consequence of the absence of a ballot. The struggle to convince the vast majority of the Nottinghamshire miners and the other Midlands pits that they should engage in a national struggle was not assisted by what they saw as their disenfranchisement. The strike became, in part, and was projected by the media as being almost

It is easy enough to appreciate why the rank and file miners did not want a ballot — Thatcher wanted one, MacGregor wanted one and the media wanted one.

A scab union had existed in Nottinghamshire between 1926 and 1937, and in the 1979 and 1983 general elections, several traditional mining constituencies had fallen to the Conservatives. The Labour Party was losing ground even before the strike and, according to some within it, continued to do so with increasing rapidity as the strike developed.

### The Labour Party Assesses Itself

The position of what is called, for reasons I don't understand, the "hard" left of the Labour Party was predictable and probably accurate — the leadership of the Labour Party "sold out" the miners. Indeed, Labour's parliamentary leader, Neil Kinnock, was widely



entirely, a moral, political and physical struggle within the working class movement.

Finally, failure to hold a ballot was a mistake because it now appears almost certain that had a national ballot been held at the opportune time, it would have been won. Seasoned communist militants like George Bolton, vice-president of the Scottish Area of the NUM and Alan Baker, a Lodge secretary from Wales, said that the NUM could have won a ballot "hands down" in April or May.<sup>10</sup>

According to Beynon,<sup>11</sup> where opinion polls had been carried out among the miners, as they had been on at least five separate occasions in different parts of the country between March and July, the results showed "support for the strike which was deeply set and surprisingly strong" — in two MORI polls, 62 percent in March and 68 percent in April, supported the strike. The *Guardian* too, suggested that, even in the closing weeks, 55 percent of the miners still backed the strike.

derided by strikers as "Ramsay McKinnock", after Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's leader during the 1926 General Strike and the Labour Party failed to raise vigorously questions of unemployment and energy policy, or to question the workings of the police and the legal system.

The Labour Party's "soft" (?) left grouping, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee published its own analysis *After the Strike*, which was also critical of the Party's leadership. *The fact that the strike was inevitable from day one of Thatcher's second term, and that the stakes being played for were so high, never seemed to be fully grasped by the Labour leadership. From the outset they acted as though the strike was an embarrassing diversion from "real politics" in Parliament and the electoral arena. They appeared to wait impatiently for the strike to end.*<sup>12</sup>

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee said that the Labour Party passed its time stating what it did not support and was able to produce only one leaflet during the

12 months. The analysis concludes, "If the strike shows anything it is that centre politics and the new realism are not adequate weapons to take on Thatcherism".<sup>13</sup>

## The Trade Union Response

**K**innock spoke, it is true, in the autumn at the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and at the Labour Party national conference in support of the miners (but, says Beynon, by implication criticising them)<sup>14</sup> and there were resolutions passed of solidarity and support at both conferences, even though the NUM had waited five months on into the strike before approaching the TUC for support.

But the "piling up of leftwing block votes" at both conferences did not mean that there was a general, concerted or dynamic lead given for industrial action or even to honour the picket lines.<sup>15</sup> With the exception of the rail unions who had supported the NUM from the beginning and some sections of the Transport and General Workers' Union, the official trade union movement was either unwilling (as were the power workers and electricians) or unable (left unions) to deliver the goods in any sustained and systematic way with industrial action at the point of production. As Francis bitterly commented, *trade union solidarity has at best been reduced to 75 turkeys from Llanwern steelworkers. At its worst, it's the army of well-paid faceless scab lorry drivers trundling along the M4 to supply foreign coke to the Llanwern "brothers" who supplied the turkeys.*<sup>16</sup>

Although every one of the hard-coal pits struck and no coking coal was produced at all, the steelworkers, whose industry depends on coke, were unable to take solidarity action. Not only did the divisions among the miners and the absence of a ballot impair the legitimacy of the strike in the eyes of steel and power workers, and become the pretext or excuse for non-existent industrial support, but the steelworkers, in particular, had been devastated by a closure program under the very MacGregor who was now attempting a similar job on the coal industry. As one miner put it, "The steel workers are shell-shocked after what has happened to them, it's like asking for a blood transfusion from a corpse".<sup>17</sup>

The British Steel Corporation came to the assistance of the Coal Board by not discouraging the widely circulated rumours that of the five steel "super mills" that remained open, one or even two, might "have to close".

In South Wales, steelworkers in the giant strip mills on the coast co-operated in the limitation of supplies of coal and coke under the close supervision of rail unionists and NUM delegates. Steel production was cut back as coal and coke deliveries were reduced to 10 thousand tonnes a week during the first few months of the strike, until the NUM declared that a complete blockage would be placed on fuel deliveries to steelworks. By October, South Wales steelworks were receiving over 20 thousand tonnes a week, twice as much as they were receiving before the blockade was imposed.

Miners, their wives and strike supporters massed day and night at the gates to prevent the deliveries, as trucks from the same haulage firms that had been used to break the steelworkers' strike four years earlier, broke through,



travelling in heavily protected convoys. Despite twenty-four hour mass picketing, and hundreds of arrests, the supplies were never halted for more than a day or two.<sup>18</sup>

The mass-picketing tactic failed, generally, perhaps because the economic situation had changed so dramatically since 1972 and 1974, when it had been employed with considerable success. As George Bolton commented,

*When you were addressing factory gate meetings ... you got support in terms of money and of food. But you got a strong feeling of "we can't come out on strike with you because our factory isn't very secure, there are 4 million (unemployed) out there, and please give us coal, because if we can't get coal, and we can't keep producing, then we lose the market for our factory's product and our factory will close".*<sup>19</sup>

**"A national movement grew which found women not only behind 'their' men but also beside and in front of them ...."**

Alan Baker added that there are "certain ideas common to wide sections of the British working class, including the power and steel workers and some of the miners who went on strike, that if you keep your head down and battle on and make your industry profitable, it will survive, that somehow the government is trying to make British industry competitive in order to live in the modern world".<sup>20</sup>

## Defending and Transforming the Communities

**"W**hen you close a pit, you kill a community" was a common slogan in the pit villages, one shortly adopted by pit communities in parts of N.S.W. It stated succinctly what the strike was about, and what the miners and those with whom they lived had always claimed it was about, the preservation of communities, households and jobs. Along with the Lodge organisation, the local committee of the Women Against Pit Closures movement became central to working class resistance.

In Derbyshire alone, 40 miners' wives groups were formed, initially out of the material need to provide food, but from this a national movement grew which found women not only behind "their" men but also beside and in front of them. "South Wales women threw off all that garbage about being 'behind' their men, and began occupying coal board offices, blockading steelworks gates and touring Europe putting the case for the defence of their communities."<sup>21</sup> As a spokeswoman from the Bently Women's Action Group declared, "We've done everything the men have, we've done more, we've done kitchens, speaking, rallying, picketing, the only thing we haven't done is go down the pit and we intend to do that when the strike is over."<sup>22</sup>

### "The failure to hold a national ballot of NUM miners was a tactical mistake ...."

The involvement of working class women in political organising and campaigning has had a profound effect on gender relations within the communities. A woman from Bently commented, "At one time I didn't care about coal, I (was) a wife, those things didn't concern me."<sup>23</sup> Women's involvement in broader political issues has been accompanied by a marked change in domestic social relations. Lorraine Bowler from Barnsley Women's Action Group told hundreds of women gathered for a Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) rally,



Women's support groups gather at a rally at Barnsley.

*I am sure that for some or most of the women here today it is the same in their homes as it has been in mine over the weeks. There are arguments now as to whose turn it is to go on a demonstration or picket, and whose turn it is to babysit. Talk about job sharing! We've seen it at its best over the past eight or nine weeks.<sup>24</sup>*

Or, in the words of another miner's wife radicalised in the struggle,

The Women Against Pit Closures movement has had, and will continue to have, a dramatic effect on the working class's understanding of itself. Betty Heathfield of WAPC told a rally on International Women's Day, shortly after the strike was over,

*Now when we're in (the) pub we sit with the men and join in instead of chatting about kids and home and things. We can sit with (them) and talk about (the) pit. We want to know about things, about what's happening in the union. Some mornings I've been picketing before him and I come home and he's done the housework. I've always thought well, men do the thinking. But I speak my mind now more than I've ever done.<sup>25</sup>*

*We have defended our union against the most dastardly government ever known in this country. We are stronger today than ever. There is a strong body of women in every pit. We can't look backwards.*

Many had seen the NUM and its members as overwhelmingly male and hence conservative in social values. This view is being challenged as men's lives are being changed. As Arthur Scargill said, the struggle "not only transformed the lives of women who, until that time, had had a narrow vision of what their role was and should be. It transformed our lives in the union."

### Creating a Resistance Movement

The most compelling feature of the thousands of miners' support groups which sprang up throughout Britain during that year was their incredible diversity and breadth. Trade unionists, ethnic organisations, women's groups, gay and lesbian organisations, individual Labour Party branches, all parties to the left of the Labour Party (though the SWP was a latecomer to the support groups) forged what the industrial editor of the *Financial Times* called a "network of new alliances" which provided "vigorous, efficient and national support".

The women from Greenham Common were quick to come "home" to the Welsh valleys whose women had initiated the Greenham protest, and food continued to arrive in West Wales from the Greenham women throughout the strike.

In Liverpool, 14 separate support groups raised one million pounds with contributions coming from most factories. The body plant at Ford Halewood give 1,000 pounds every fortnight and another Ford plant between 300 pounds and 1,300 pounds every week. Impressive support came from those areas already suffering the blight of de-industrialisation. Toxteth was one of the first places to develop a support group. The support group in Kirkby, another Liverpool suburb shattered by economic collapse, achieved a 50 percent response to its door-to-door collections. The slogan of the London Dockland Miners' Support Group was "Don't let the mines go the say way as the docks". The secretary of the Docklands Group said, "We know from the experience of what happened to us what will happen to them."<sup>26</sup>

Unemployed people were prominent in the work of the support groups and, in some places, such as the Merseyside, the unemployed staffed the centre which co-ordinated the work of the various support groups.

In Southampton, Cardiff, Manchester, York, Glasgow and Edinburgh "Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners" groups were established. In London, 3,000 pounds had been raised by December through regular collections at gay and lesbian clubs. In October, a large contingent of lesbians and gays were guests in the households of the Dulais Valley in Wales because of their outstanding financial support for the valley.

Afro-Caribbean groups, Cypriot groups, the Asian community and Turkish people contributed and organised support. When the South Wales Striking Miners' Choir entertained an entirely black audience in Walsall, one of the choristers thanked the "ethnic minorities" who had been outstanding in their support. A black spokesperson



replied. "The Welsh are an ethnic minority in Walsall".<sup>27</sup> A Nottingham miner commented "I've never been racist, I don't think, but I'd never really understood it before."

Peace groups, too, have contributed to the miners' support and the slogan "Mines not Missiles" became common at CND rallies. The Enfield women's peace group in London wrote,

*We were inspired by the women. We wanted to show them that they weren't alone, that we need each other. Our links with the women in Cannock have helped overcome our isolation and sense of powerlessness.*<sup>28</sup>

A conference convened in December was attended by representatives from 1500 support groups. This was an organisational expression of what one commentator has termed "a network of unexpected alliances"<sup>29</sup> constituting overall what Hywel Francis has called a resistance movement which sustained about half a million people for nearly a year. He commented, "even more perceptive and revealing was the simple ceremony in Italy during the strike when women activists from Coelbren and Hirwaun were made honorary members of the Italian resistance".<sup>30</sup>

### Wales: Building a State Within the State

The South Wales coalfield with over 20,000 miners remained solid and, after 10 months, only one percent had broken the strike, despite the initial reluctance of most South Wales lodges to strike. In the 14 central valleys, only 14 had returned to work by mid-January. In the two pits of the North Wales field, support was patchy and collapsed in November when most of the 2,000 mineworkers went back.

In July 1984, the Welsh miners became the first victims of the new anti-union legislation brought down by the Thatcher government. Sequestrators not only froze union funds but also money raised for food right across the coalfields. The response of the Welsh communities was overwhelming. Welsh women and men addressed hundreds of meetings each week, "twinned" pit villages with factories and working class suburbs, and organised large co-ordinating centres in Liverpool, Birmingham, Oxford, Bristol, Southampton, Swindon, Reading and London.<sup>31</sup>

The task of feeding up to 20,000 households meant the development of an alternative welfare state within Wales. Howells commented,

*Our defences were found badly wanting. The citadel was falling apart. The people of the coalfields had no choice but to create new defences and in building them they discovered old socialist and collectivist truths. They realised that by uniting and sharing all that they had, they could survive and overcome the worst that the present state apparatus could throw at them.*<sup>32</sup>

With the failure of Labour's parliamentary representatives to provide an effective national support structure for the movement of resistance, support groups throughout Wales "got on with the job" and organised an alternative welfare system, a system of distribution according to need.

The Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities is the Welsh national political expression of the multitude of tangible, cross-cutting and overlapping alliances, expressing the links with the women's and peace movements, local authorities fighting funding cuts, the unemployed, the Communist Party, Labour Party branches, Plaid Cymru (nationalist), cultural organisations, gay and lesbian groups, environmental groups and the churches.

Congress delegates continued to meet weekly to set priorities and guidelines for the development and maintenance of the new welfare system and to discuss strategy and tactics. When the strike ended, the Congress met again on 17 March and decided to continue the struggle in defence of the communities.

**"That the strike was inevitable from day one of Thatcher's second term and that the stakes being played for were so high never seemed to be fully grasped by the Labour leadership ...."**

Support for the miners' struggle transcended national boundaries. Scargill was very aware of the significance of international support and was deeply appreciative of the efforts of Australian workers. On 9 March, he told 9,000 people attending an International Women's Day rally,

*The Australian government contacted the Seamen's Union of Australia and said: 'Now the strike is over, will you release the coal and let it be transported overseas?' The Seamen's Union cabled the NUM and said they would only release coal when the NUM told them the strike was at an end. That's internationalism, that's trade unionism.*

### Can We Draw Lessons?

Thatcher is not Hawke, the NUM is not the Miners Federation, Women Against Pit Closures is not the Miners Women's Auxiliaries, the National Coal Board is not the Joint Coal Board, CRA, BHP, Shell and British Petroleum, the Dulais Valley is not the Burrayorag Valley, the TUC is not the ACTU, the British Labour Party is not the ALP and the CPGB is not the CPA.

The lessons that can be drawn, given these and other major differences, are limited. If inferences can be made



NATIONAL UNION OF MINWORKERS

**COAL  
NOT  
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they probably apply to specific tactical instances or to the more general level — the identification of tendencies and sets of issues, rather than to the perhaps more useful area of strategies.

In the first case, I am puzzled by a number of things. Why did the Yorkshire NUM not tread carefully and gently, instead of crossing rapidly and vehemently into Nottinghamshire and so driving the Notts miners into a position from which they could not shift?

Why were the pits in which a majority struck not occupied to keep the minority out, thus keeping the focus on coal and jobs rather than on picketing?

Why didn't the lodges put non-production care and maintenance crews into the struck pits to prevent the sterilisation that sometimes occurred, in so doing making the point that the coal was not MacGregor's but the people's, and would be conserved for them by the miners?

Given the intensity and significance of the struggle, why didn't the NUM leadership heed the opinion polls, or, given wall-to-wall academics and social scientists supporting the struggle, why didn't they conduct one of their own membership?

Does the isolation of the NUM within the trade union movement suggest that industry specific unions may be structurally less able to generate union support than general unions whose members are spread across industries?

More broadly, it has been fashionable of late to take the rather useful insights that the state itself is sometimes conflicted, that it does not always and everywhere necessarily act in the interests of the capitalist class, that genuine though partial victories can be won from it, and to draw from these insights an extreme position that says that the state does not represent, articulate, advance and defend the interests of the capitalist class overall.

If there is one fashionable myth that cannot survive the strike, it is that. The British miners faced a sustained militant, carefully planned campaign organised by the parliamentary executive of the state and carried through by its agencies.

That the NUM survived at all is remarkable. That the NUM was not destroyed is attributable to the massive and sustained support that it received; that it did not win is attributable to the support it did not receive, from within itself and from other trade unions.

**T**he principle lesson of the strike must be that no section of the trade union movement can face a mobilised and confrontationist state and win

without the active support of other sections of the union movement. It was this support that was largely absent, with the consequence that, while the struggle could be, and was, sustained, it was not, and could not be, won.

The failure of large sections of the trade union movement to support the miners at the point of production, the only place where people's power can be unambiguously decisive is, as I have suggested, largely a function of depressed economic circumstances which rob workers of the resources and confidence to struggle in that way.

But the lack of such support must also be laid squarely at the doors of other actors within the trade union movement, the political parties, who failed during the last decade to help trade union activists understand the class nature of union politics, and to forge relations based on that understanding across trade union organisations.

The lefts of the British Labour Party continue the thankless job of stacking and restacking branches only to find, when they finally make some ground, that the rules are changed. They continue to fail to organise around workplaces and industries and continue to encourage some of their more able members into the pleasant wilderness of parliamentary backbenchism.

**"Many people new to political involvement have become experienced and effective speakers, expert organisers and confident socialists, their confidence based on a growing understanding that the a priori equation of revolutionary politics with the margins is as unnecessary as it is destructive."**

The Communist Party, with a fixed and deliberate intent, continues to shoot its toes off, and both parties have failed to provide the political education which would help trade union activists look beyond their immediate concerns to the equally vital concerns of the class as a whole. Such schooling, said Eric Hobsbawm, "the Communist Party (of Great Britain) provided for generations of workers and intellectuals, men and women".<sup>33</sup> But it does so no longer. Nonetheless, as Massey and Wainwright<sup>34</sup> stressed, a lot has been learned.

Many people new to political involvement have become experienced and effective speakers, expert organisers and confident socialists, their confidence based on a growing understanding that the *a priori* equation of revolutionary politics with the margins is as unnecessary as it is

destructive. There has also been the learning of other new skills — how to manage thousands of pounds on behalf of hundreds of people, how to confront and overcome the real problems of building an alternative welfare system. Massey and Wainwright concluded

*in much of their work, many of the support groups illustrate in practice the kind of movement we need to build in order to achieve socialism. A commitment to change through building up democratic power at the base, in the factories and communities; a breaking down of the traditional, inhibiting boundary between trade unionism and politics; a sense of local strength and identity which at the same time is not parochial; a commitment to a non-sectarian but principled form of unity, in which different political tendencies are respected and work together; an emphasis on reaching out, a confidence that radical demands can be popular if they are argued for.*

Loretta Loach, a member of the *Spare Rib* collective, has commented, "through the links that have been established a learning process has taken place, one which has been mutually beneficial to working class women and middle class feminists".<sup>35</sup> The women's organisations continue in the communities, with the full support of the NUM, as does the Welsh Congress in Support of Mining Communities. There is not, and never was, an inherent exclusivity between class politics and the social movements, nor is it just a matter of adding them together. What is important is the recognition and fostering of their mutual interdependence and influence. As Hobsbawm points out, the broad alliance is a necessary complement to class politics, not an alternative to it.<sup>36</sup> While support groups were, in important ways, prefigurative of the sorts of organisations which socialists seek to build in a new world, and were necessary for victory to be won, they were not sufficient to attain it without the decisive support of workers organised at the point of production.



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