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THE RED MINER

№1 APRIL 1985



**workers
power**

Bulletin for miners and their families 5p

WHAT IS THE RED MINER?

The red miner is produced by members and supporters of WORKERS POWER. We are a revolutionary organisation that has set itself the task of building a new revolutionary party in order to overthrow capitalism - nationally and internationally.

The miners' strike gave us tons of evidence of how far the bosses are prepared to go to defend their wealth and break up working class organisations. On their side is the enormous machinery of the police, the courts and the press.

The miners' strike also showed all too graphically just how inadequate the traditional workers organisations were in the face of such an enemy. The NUM's traditional trade union militancy proved no match for the bosses set on waging a political war against the miners. British trade union officialdom isolated and then betrayed the miners. They were desperate to keep themselves out of an all out fight with the Tories that would have threatened their salaries and cosy chats with the bosses.

The Labour Party leaders hated the miners' strike like the plague. It challenged their basic lie that workers could only defend themselves and advance their interests through advancing the Parliamentary careers of Kinnock, Hattersley and co. To their careerist minds it threatened Labour's electoral credibility against the Tories. It threatened to rip the veil off all the institutions that these traitors, along with the bosses hold up as neutral and sacred - Mother Parliament, the police, the courts, the judges. No wonder they stabbed the miners in the back. It challenged the myth of harmony between workers and bosses that these traitors daily try to peddle to us.

However it was not only the Labour Party that was found wanting. The Communist Party prides itself on its leverage within the NUM's officialdom. Yet how did it use it? It is politically committed to securing and holding on to any official position at any cost. It uses these official positions to court people they like to dress up as "alies" of the working class. These "alies" come in many shapes and sizes. But most usually they are the sort that a good picket, rolling solidarity action or the fight for a general strike would send scuttling for cover. In the miners' strike their darling "ally" was the clergy. The bishops and vicars were supposed to possess supernatural powers to sway 'public opinion' to the side of the miners....as long as the miners did not offend the opinions of the clergy. As a result - mainly in Wales, but also in Scotland - the miners were evermore forced to trim their sails so as not to offend an imagined bunch of "allies" ranging from farmers and nationalist teachers right through to bishops and folk singers! The South Welsh leaders thought it better to march back with the blessing of these characters than to stand firm against Thatcher. 'Unity' is a marvelous thing if it is between the right forces. But the working class has no need for unity with those who seek to deny us full victory or the right to use the militant tactics necessary to secure it.

The miners' strike found the traditional politics of the British workers movement wanting. But it also showed quite how useless were the offerings of the many would be "revolutionary" groups within the labour movement. Throughout the dispute the Newsline, Socialist Action and Socialist Organiser heaped nothing but praise on the tactics and strategy of the NUM leaders. They may not have liked each other but they all sang the same song whatever they claimed. Militant was fixed on its own project of transforming the Labour Party which is controlled by the Parliamentary gang and the TUC bureaucrats, into the instrument for passing a resolution in favour of socialism through the 'Mother of

Parliaments'. As a result for most of the strike they raised their heads no higher than asking for the TUC to call a one day general strike - and logically a next day return to work - in support of the miners!

All these failings were, in the opinion of the Red Miner political failings. None of these groups fought for the building of a party that would be organisationaly (SO & SA are Labour Party buildrrs) or politically (the WRP had no essential differences with Arthur Scargill and the Labour Left during the dispute) separate from the Labour Party.

The SWP claimed to be made of different stuff. They occassionally criticised Arthur Scargill and, more often, criticised his lieutenants. Yet throughout the dispute they had no political strategy for winning the strike except to collect more levy money and strengthen picket lines. In the name of building a "mass" party they offered up warmed up versions of what was already being done by many of the best militants.

Alone on the left WORKERS POWER fought for:

- *a national strike ratified by a show of hands at mass meetings against the bosses ballot AND against non-aggression pacts with the scab officials in the Midlands coalfields, that the left on the NEC had made and honoured right through the strike.
- *for the NUM and their supporters to fight for a general strike to beat the Tory Government.
- *For a national rank & file movement of miners to hold all of the NUM leaders to account, to guard against any attempt to sell the miners short, and to provide the basis of a revolutionary leadership of the NUM.
- *For the miners to take their place as the front ranks of the construction of a new communist party just as they did back in the 1920's. The building of a new revolutionary party remains the most crucial task facing militant miners. Only through its construction can the lessons of the great strike be learnt and transmitted to other workers. Only through building a new revolutionary party can we create the class army that can fight and destroy the stinking capitalist system, a system that threatens all workers with the prospect of permanent struggle or the erosion of their rights, living conditions and organisations.

The Red Miner dedicates itself to building the nucleus of that party in the coalfields. It does so with the confidence that thousands of miners have seen and learnt enough in the great strike to play a leading role in building a new party. This party will lead the working class to victory.

THE NCB IS HITTING US HARD - WE MUST HIT BACK.

"You have called me bastard right through your strike, now you're going to discover just how right you were."

So spoke the manager at Ashern pit, Doncaster. This is a sure sign of the new tough line the NCB are taking. Not only are they pushing ahead with closures, they are imposing a new regime in every working pit.

In many pits water money has been taken from us. Now shifts have been imposed. In many cases the bosses have cut our wages by making us work different jobs. Everywhere local agreements are under threat.

At Arncliffe the hard won right to night refreshment facilities is being clawed back by the NCB. At Kiveton Park the managers were refusing to recognise the NUM's right to negotiate. In Kent miners have been threatened with the sack for using time honoured words like "scab". In Scotland a massive redundancy programme is being forced through, with the likely

loss of 6,000 jobs in the area.

This offensive can be fought. Short strikes at Kiveton Park, Markham in North Derbyshire, Kent and the Phurnacite plant in South Wales have shown that the spirit of the great strike lives on.

At the moment defensive measures are vital. Every threat must be met by instant response actions. For this some form of shop steward type system is vital. Only union men actually on the job can monitor management's actions and act with the authority of the union. Any belief that we can compromise our way out of the new management regime is an illusion. As another manager, this time at Rosington, Doncaster, said; "things will not be going back to normal, things will go where I want them to go."

WHY WE NEED A RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT.

The ending of the great strike showed crucially why miners need a rank and file movement. The strike was kick-started and held together by thousands of rank and file militants. At the battle of Orgreave these militants were in the front line. In the face of backsliding by the leaders these militants held the line. When the leadership recommended collaboration with the sequestrators in December rank and file pressure stopped the rot.

Yet when it came to deciding whether or not to go back to work these militants were not organised to reject the surrender. They were outside the conference chanting defiance. But the delegate conference - elected well before the strike started - had the final word.

Many militants went back to work reluctantly, but took Arthur Scargill's words that "the fight goes on" as good coin. The hollowness of those words was revealed in the days after the delegate conference when pickets from Kent were told by officials in Yorkshire that they were not welcome. Branch officials led hundreds of workers across a Kent picket line at Cortonwood.

Far from fighting on, the leadership have told the sacked miners that there is little the union can do to help them. The sacked have been told to sign-on the dole. The 50p levy ballot reject was the result of two things. On the one hand, after calling the ballot the leadership did nothing to campaign for a yes vote. Demoralisation was left to do its dirty work. At the same time there was no rank and file movement that could have forced the leaders to act and campaign independently. Many militants were passive participants in the ballot not fighters for the right result.

The leadership are retreating even further. This explains why they have called off the overtime ban. The decision by the delegate conference to do this makes a mockery of the idea that "the fight goes on".

Arthur claims to have supported keeping the ban. The problem was he did nothing to organise his rank and file supporters to stop the retreat. Instead he is still insisting that the miners have already won a victory. He told Kent miners at the March 28 NEC that the struggle itself was "a victory". This flies in the face of reality. It does nothing to organise the militants, regroup the fighting forces and prepare the necessary counter-attack against the NCB.

These tasks must now be taken up as a matter of urgency by the militants.

The April 13 Rank and File miners conference must be a springboard to permanent organisation. The delegates must leave the meeting clear that their job is to pull together. All militants committed to holding the line against the NCB and the NUM compromisers. Regular meetings to plan work in the union at branch and area level must be held. Bulletins and leaflets must publicise the NCB's attacks and put forward the ways to resist them. The campaign to win reinstatement - lobbies, demonstrations, attempts to win pits to work to rule within the terms of the Mines and Quarries Act - must be organised by the rank and file.

If the demoralisation expressed by the ballot result is allowed to spread then it will reach the militants. Activists who were at the forefront of the strike will be tempted to opt out for the quite life of passive union members. The right wing will profit throughout the union. The left wing will counsel further retreats in the hope of saving their control over the union machine. We can only stop this if we start organising. Build the rank and file movement now!

THE PITFALLS OF BROAD LEFTISM.

Now the strike is over many militants will be working out ways of how to win the scab areas over to the left. Already Jim Colgan has fended off a challenge from the right-wing Emery, in the Midlands. Chadburn and Richardsons, however, have been replaced by the scabs Lynk and Prendergarst in the NEC.

The temptation will be to rely on the old staple of Broad Left canvassing to win elections and gradually gain control of Notts. After all this was the method that brought Scargill, Heathfield and McGahy to office. This temptation must be avoided.

Broad leftism is not what the rank and file need. The Broad Left is an alliance of convenience for purely electoral purposes. When it comes to action the Broad Left will fragment. Some of its members will betray, others will want to fight but have no rank and file to carry on the fight with. This is what happened in the strike. One wing e.g. the Broad Left around South Wales copped out. Others, like Scargill had nothing on the ground to throw into action independently.

The fragmentation is continuing. Only Kent, Yorkshire and Durham voted to continue the overtime ban. What of left-led Scotland and South Wales? McGahy and Williams no longer want to fight. Arthur makes this clear saying: "The position of Peter Heathfield and Arthur Scargill has been well known." Notice, Mick McGahy is not mentioned. He opposed the overtime ban.

The lesson is that an electoral machine is not suited to fighting anything except elections. And then the results of elections depend on much bigger things than how well the caucuses have been organised. They depend on whether the workers feel confident or demoralised.

We need to combat demoralisation and build confidence. To do that we need a rank and file movement based on clear fighting policies. Of course we should stand rank and file candidates in elections. Of course we will support the left candidate, while not hiding our criticisms. But we will not throw all our eggs into the electoral basket. We will organise in the pits and areas for a fight with the NCB and the right. That way we'll make sure we can win elections at every level in the union as well.

WHAT WE MUST FIGHT FOR.

Unless we know what our aims are we won't be able to win. A rank and file movement must have a clear programme that defend every miners interest against the NCB and the Government that lead to a struggle to destroy capitalism.

At pit level we must organise to hold the line against the NCB. This means a massive improvement in union organisation. We need elected and accountable representatives for every shift, face and part of the pit. A committee of such representatives should be the branch committee. Each committee should produce a bulletin for information and campaigning purposes. Above all regular mass meetings in work time if this can be won, to hear grievances, plan action and maintain the union as the voice of the men should become the norm.

We must maintain the NUM as a national union. After the defeat there is a clear tendency to retreat back into the areas. The federalism of the NUM and the independence of the areas is strengthening this fragmentation. For the strikers in the minority areas this spells disaster. Federalism leaves them out of touch with their striking allies. Leicester's Dirty Thirty have been told they are no longer financial members of the NUM because their dues lapsed during the strike. Only a national union can defend these lads and others like them in the Midlands. We want one union and one rule book.

The national union must be fully democratic. At the moment it is not. We want to see all officials subject to regular elections, to be accountable to the men during their term of office, with the men having the right to recall officials. We want to see all officials paid the same wages as a faceworker earns. We want to get rid of the secret ballot altogether and make mass meetings the decision making bodies in the NUM. The delegate conference was not truly representative. The ending of the strike showed this. We want a delegate conference made up of elected representatives from every pit with voting strength at conference in proportion to the number of workers they represent. We want the union to build, support and fund the wives' groups giving them representative observer status, with speaking rights at every level of the union.

A democratic union defending miners has no place for hardened scabs like Roy Lynch, Ken Toon and Jack Jones in it. These men prefer the courts to the union branch or miners meeting. They stand with the police cordon against the picket line. They must be expelled and new areas of the NUM founded in the scab regions.

The strike has left us with unfinished business. The rank and file movement must organise to finish it off. We want the reinstatement of all victimised miners and amnesty for jailed miners. A union campaign of direct action - demos, a new overtime ban, work to rules and strike action - must be launched. In the meantime we must guarantee financial support and aid to the sacked, the imprisoned and their families.

The closure of Bedwas and the proposed closures of Polnaise, Polkennet, Frances and Bogside prove that the NCB butchers still aim to close pits. We can only stop them with another national strike. But a new strike will not just happen. Hard work is needed to build for it. We must start in every area to win the position that every pit threatened with closure will strike, and every area will back that strike with area action. By committing areas to mutual support - Yorkshire supporting Kent and Scotland and vice versa - we can rebuild new strength from the regions. We did this in the strikes of 1969 and 1970.

By 1972 the national strike was possible and victorious. We must do it again now.

Against pit closures we demand new investment and the taking on of new labour. We are against all redundancies - jobs are not for sale. We want shorter hours for the same pay. To fight for these goals we need real workers' control. This is not participation with the bosses. It is a daily fight with them in which we exert our right to control manning levels, the speed and hours of work, hiring and firing and decisions in the closure of a pit. In other words we fight for a veto by us on the NCB's plans.

For 2½ years now we have not had a wage rise. We need to catch up. We want to see the end of the divisive regional productivity deals. In its place should be a national wage agreement based on the current highest average earnings with highest bonus consolidated into it. As well as any annual rises we go for we also want to protect our wages from price rises. Wives groups and miners must monitor price rises and on the basis of our cost of living index - not the management's or government's - we want a 1% wage rise for every 1% rise in inflation.

Every day of the strike was a lesson in politics. The use of the police, the courts, the anti-union laws, the press and the DHSS, was all part of politics. The scab role of the Labour Party leadership, Kinnock and co, showed that our strike had a political meaning. We must not forget these lessons. We must fight openly on a political, a revolutionary socialist basis, against all the political weapons the bosses have. This means calling Kinnock and co, and our own union sponsored MPs to account. It means building on the links we made during the strike with other rank and file workers in Britain and abroad. It means fighting all the way to make the NUM into a real class struggle union that fights the bosses every inch of the way. If we succeed then our time of vengeance on McGregor and Thatcher will definitely come.

"WE ARE NOT GOING BACK".

Thatcher started the miners' strike hoping that she could use the wives to beat the miners. The gutter press heaped enormous praise on a tiny number of 'petticoat' pickets at Ollerton. They hoped that women's domestic isolation, lack of political experience and traditional involvement in the Labour movement would set them against the NUM. The truth was quite the reverse. Wives, girlfriends and women workers rallied around the strike. It could not have been maintained without them.

Most of these women have no intention of going back to the life they knew before the strike. And no wonder. They opened up a whole new world for themselves. They discovered new skills and a new confidence. They discovered solidarity. For that reason wives' groups are rightly determined to stay together.

In the weeks and months ahead it will be vital to organise regular activities and meetings. Each group must work hard to try and draw in new recruits from amongst the miners' wives. The danger of small groups of activists becoming isolated must be countered with a vigorous campaign to mobilise wives both around issues connected with the aftermath of the strike and around wider issues.

Groups must:

*commit themselves to actively campaigning on behalf of the sacked and imprisoned miners and their families.

- *organise a programme of discussion on the political questions that were raised in the strike - how can women be emancipated, why are British troops in Ireland - these are the kinds of topics that should be discussed.
- *they must organise to rally behind all miners fighting sackings, closures and speed-ups.
- *Arthur Scargill has called for women's groups to have associate membership of the NUM. The groups must see to it that this is made operational right away. They must make sure that the groups have observer rights at every level of the union. But at the same time the decision making and policies of the groups must be entirely in the hands of the women themselves. They must put demands on the lodge to guarantee it will provide child care and travel facilities to enable women to attend the meetings.
- *they must draw up their own demands to meet the needs of the women in the communities - demands for nurseries, adequate public transport, health care etc - and organise to fight through the local Labour movement both alongside other unions and in the Labour Party to achieve these goals.
- *most importantly they must maintain the links they have built with other groups of working class women and actively expand them. They must be prepared now to support all workers in struggle as an independent force. They should establish their own funds to make this possible and in order to prevent the local lodge putting a block on women's initiatives.
- *it is vital that the wives have a national democratic organisation and that those who agree get together and organise to fight for one. A national womens solidarity conference is being planned by the Midlands Women's Co-ordinating Committee, probably in April. It could provide an important opportunity for groups to propose and discuss future plans. At the same time we must organise to force the National Women against Pit Closures to organise a much broader and more representative conference as soon as possible.

The NUM wives have given inspiration not only to the miners but to other working class women. The women health workers, the Ford's machinists, the teachers - have shown that they can fight Thatcher's attacks. With the aid of the women of the mining communities the months and years ahead could see the launching of a real mass working class women's movement.

OPPOSE THE ANTI UNION LAWS.

The NEC is discussing complying with the government's anti-union laws. These laws allow the judges to steal our funds, declare our strikes illegal and stop our pickets. Since our defeat the bosses have felt confident enough to use the laws against postment and civil service workers.

The retreat by the unions in the face of the laws must stop. Every lodge/branch should send resolutions to the NEC urging the continuation of our policy of non-compliance with the laws.

DRIVE SCAB UNIONISM OUT OF THE NUM.

Lynk and Prendergast are holding a pistol to the head of the NUM.

Either the NUM carries out the Tory policies they want or they will refuse to carry out national policy and split with the union altogether.

Along with the scab officials in S Derby and Leicester they are waging a ruthless campaign against all those who challenge their plans to turn their areas into company unions. With the blessing of the Tory judges they got rid of Richardson. Now they are declaring that union loyal strikers are out of membership and ineligible for office because they are behind with their dues.

Lynk and his scabby crew want to establish an NCB loyal company union. And they are out to do so with the full backing of top Tory advisers like David Hart. Every move they have made has been cleared by a gang of lawyers that have been put at their service. Every move is calculated to break the strength of the NUM.

Lynk is relying on the NUM leadership to give him plenty of opportunity to organise his forces. He recently said in a newspaper interview that Arthur wouldn't expel him. All the signs to date suggest he's right. Militants were offered rule 51 as a means of disciplining the scab officials. It was never used. There are no plans to discipline the scab officials even now.

The NUM nationally should immediately expel the scab area organisations. To do otherwise is to allow a company union to organise in the name and with the blessing of the NUM. Its poison will spread into the other areas as the scabs link up with their miserable counterparts in the other areas. Union loyal militants will be left to their mercy. So too will the union loyal waverers who - in Notts for example - are opposed to a break with the national union.

Only immediate and decisive action can stop Lynk, Prendergast and co. If they are expelled then the NUM in the scab areas can be put in the hands of union loyal strikers. In turn they can recruit to their ranks from those who want a national union and a leadership that stands up to the bosses.

The cry will go up - "you can't do that it would divide and weaken the union". It is perfectly true that expulsion would divide the NUM. We don't want 'unity' with the bosses own agents. But this move would not weaken the union. By firmly breaking with company unionism and fighting to build a class struggle union against Lynk, Prendergast, Tron and Jones, the NUM would have strengthened its ability to defend its members against the NCB. It would recruit and organise all the best elements. That is the precondition for turning the scab areas of 1984/5 into fighting units of a national class struggle union.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SPENCERISM.

The NUM's defeat will strengthen the hands of the scabs as it did back in 1926. After the 1926 lockout non-unionism as well as company unionism spread throughout the industry. The MFCB had 804,236 members in 1925. By 1929 that figure had dropped to 521,345. Labour MP George Spencer established his own Notts scab union. In South Wales Gregory's scab South Wales union set up 107 lodges.

The betrayal of the TUC and the defeat of the miners in the 1926 lockout left the coal owners free to dictate the terms of employment and union membership. In the ocean combine in South Wales "scab unionism" was a condition of employment. Despite a 1929 TUC ballot of Notts miners voting 32,000 for the MFCB and only 2200 for the Spencercrits the Notts

Mine wners recognised only Spencer's MN. Small pockets of extremely brave militants kept the union alive in the harshest of conditions.

Defeat also strengthened the hand of the Right wing leaders who stayed within the MFGB. In Leicester, for example, the Miners Association accepted the coal owners conditions as to who could, or could not, negotiate with them. They dumped Jack Smith who had been the areas most militant leader. While they did not set up their own "non-political" union they simply refused to pay any donations to the union's political fund. Between 1928 and 1937 the Right wing Leicester area made only one small donation.

On a national level the MFGB Right adopted their own "new realism" adopting a policy of working with the existing regional agreements imposed by the owners at the end of the lock out. The Right took a particularly tight grip on the Yorkshire area.

This same Right wing leadership never challenged Leicester's undeclared Spencerism. And when the rank and file were poised to destroy Spencerism in Nottingham the MFGB leaders - and the Labour Party in the form of Emmanuel Shinwell - accepted George Spencer MP back into the bureaucratic fold on his own terms.

The crucial fight against Spencerism in Notts was waged in Harworth. In 1935 Notts MFGB membership in the pit was increased from 7 to 157. They were sacked when they fought the owners over dirt deductions with the support of the majority of the workforce. In April 1937 the MFGB recorded an enourmous ballot majority in favour of a national strike to secure recognition for the Harworth men. Spencerism could have been destroyed. Yet the MFGB - under considerable pressure from the Labour Party - agreed to merge their forces with George Spencer.

They did so on shameful terms. Gerrge Spencer was to be President and National Excecutive member of the new fused union. Five full timers were appointed for life - three of them Spenceritss. The new union guaranteed a no-strike deal for five years and agreed that "politics" would only be discussed at specially convened meetings.

Meanwhile only 350 of the 1000 Harworth strikers got their jobs back. Jock Kane - CP member and leader of the strike - was sent down for two years hard labour.

In the name of 'unity' the scab officials were welcomed back into the union while the best militants were left out in the cold.

IT MUST NOT HAPPEN AGAIN!

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X                                     X
X   'WHERE NEXT FOR THE NUM' a pamphlet X
X   from Workers Power explaining X
X   the case for a miners' X
X   rank and file X
X   movement. X
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X   Also read:- WORKERS POWER (monthly newspaper) 25p X
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