

BLACK FLAG

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MINERS STRIKE

3-DAY WEEK ?

The Nottinghamshire scabs are repeating history. During the 1926 lockout they split from the national union - ostensibly over tactics, in reality because they had negotiated better conditions and were not prepared to put themselves at risk for the sake of fellow miners in other areas - and formed their own moderate union under Henry Spencer. The Spencerites are at it again. They were helped by the introduction, under Labour, of the new Incentive Schemes in 1977/78. Overnight over fifty years of hard fought struggle to achieve a national basic pay rate was lost. The scheme thus made it easier for management to pit one area against another and to localise disputes. Local productivity schemes meant that one area would be earning more than another. Last year the South Wales miners tried to get national support for a strike to prevent pit closures in their area. They failed, partly as a result of the localised bonus scheme, partly because the NUM only wanted strike action if initiated by the national executive. In Scotland mineworkers have been involved in industrial action for almost the last 12 months. During that time 6 pits were closed down. It took the NUM several months before national action was sanctioned. Even then a much criticised overtime ban was the only solution put forward by the executive. The ban was having no effect whatsoever and it was inevitable that sooner or later a national all out strike would have to be called.

With the strike now in its 7th week only (some) Nottinghamshire miners are holding back from all-out strike. They are producing around 200,000 tonnes of coal a week. If this supply were cut off, then domestic supplies for Scotland, the North East and Yorkshire will have run dry in a matter of days,

while the power stations reserves will be empty (apart from any imported fuel that gets through the NUS blockade) within a month. But if the Nottinghamshire miners still work on regardless, then the NUM will have to rely on the active support of the power workers themselves.

The power workers support is far more crucial than the support needed from the steel workers. Even selective strike action from power workers would more or less guarantee the start of a 3 day week. The support of the power workers would almost certainly mean that the government would be forced to declare a state of emergency and bring in troops and technicians to strikebreak. So far the governments strategy has been to avoid the use of troops in any strike breaking capacity at all costs. Troop deployment, like the use of the employment legislation, is guaranteed to harden the resolve of strikers and therefore would only be sanctioned as a last resort. It is rumoured, however, that paratroopers were used in a limited capacity against pickets at Dawmill Colliery in Warwickshire, while it is known that the army have supplied barrack facilities for use by police reinforcements at Grantham, Ollerton and Newark.

Railworkers, for their part, have consistently provided secondary support and in many parts of the country the movement of coal by rail has been completely blocked. In Merseyside all rail traffic was brought to a halt one night when two rail workers were sent home for taking part in secondary action. Train services on Merseyside were, as a result, brought to a standstill. Latest news is that the NUM has now called upon the NUR and ASLEF to bring about a national stoppage.

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COLLECTIVISE THE MINES

The steel union executive has swallowed whole the lie that closures can be instigated unilaterally without recourse to the needs of those who will be most affected. Bill Sirs' withdrawal of active support for the miners, together with the continued obstinacy of the Nottinghamshire scabs, means that the NUM may have to seek an alternative strategy to win through. Imports are still getting through, despite the seamens blockade and support from the dockers. For the moment time is on McGregors side, at least until the steel workers disown their official union policy or until the power workers are persuaded to come out too. There is still a long up-hill battle ahead and there is still a possibility of intervention from the troops if the miners get the support they so badly need.

Thatchers policy has been to rely on dissension within the miners own ranks to break down morale. Also the threat of closure of steel works to crush solidarity from the steel workers. The irony is that the steel workers, like the power workers, are immune from prosecution (BSC and the CEBG both have commercial contracts with the NCB, with the latter as supplier) under the 1980 Employment Act: any secondary action they decide to undertake is actually lawful. The threat to close down steel works, made un-productive by the shortage of coal supplies, could be a bluff, but further closures in the steel industry may well be on the cards and the miners strike may be just

Up and down the country people are resorting to direct action to express their frustration and anger at the way things are going. Merseyside is no exception. Recently things have come to a head after a series of sabotage actions and interventions, culminating in the use of physical violence on a leading local Liberal Party councillor. Sir Trevor Jones was set upon by a gang of youths; he was stoned, clubbed and called a fascist. A few days later Liverpool's deputy council leader was next in line for abuse: Derek Hatton found himself portrayed in a leaflet, distributed around the city, as a 'fascist militant'. Since then Hatton has been forced to seek a minder.

But if in the end offensive actions don't succeed in tipping the scales and if the mineworkers gradually become isolated from wider solidarity and support, then government and management - who supposedly have time on their side - can only be effectively challenged by a complete rejection of all negotiations and the forcible takeover of the coal industry by the workers (and communities) who do the producing.

The main issue in the dispute - the closure of pits and the implementation of cutbacks - could certainly be reconciled to the mineworkers advantage if a policy of nationalisation were to be replaced with one of collectivisation. Many mines

The ten days prior to the attack on Jones witnessed a series of offensive actions by local people. On March 30 a fleet of buses was stranded in their depot after their ignition keys had been stolen and a bus had been deliberately crashed into the depot gates. Apparently the depot workers had refused to take part in a local day of (industrial) action. Also shifting machinery was sabotaged, engines damaged and diesel fuel contaminated at the dockland premises of Banbury Ltd, Birkenhead, not long after the building had been besieged by flying pickets. There were other, similar, incidents reported.

Source: ASDNN (Liverpool).

ised, with each pit under the control of the local mineworking/community syndicates. If a few, such as the Nottinghamshire, miners wish to stay with their bosses, let them. That's their choice.

Of course the government or the NCB are not going to let collectivisation happen just like that. For them collectivising the mines will be a revolutionary act. For this reason they will use everything in their power - police, troops, imprisonment, etc - to prevent it. With the escalation of force, whole communities will need to act in solidarity to defend their interests. The local authorities - whatever political persuasion - will only settle for compromise

industry may well be on the cards and the miners strike may be just the excuse BSC and the government are looking for to commence more cut-backs.

The mineworkers union is not as strong as it was, say, 60 years ago when industry and domestic consumption relied on a far larger labour intensive industry to keep things going. Today, with nuclear power and North Sea oil, the mineworkers have to be more tactical in their choice of industrial action. Now more than ever are they dependant on the support of workers in other industries. When that support is lost then other, more radical, measures are necessary. Blockading the highways by the mineworkers in retaliation of the police blockade was a new tactic in this country that took the authorities by surprise. Sabotage actions, which are by no means new and of which there is a long and varied tradition amongst workers and jobless in all industries, have been reported throughout the dispute. In Cresswell, for example, a metal bar was placed across an electrified rail line, the line short-circuited and coal trains were delayed. In Cannock NCB vehicles were sabotaged at a road transport depot. In Stoke-on-Trent a weighbridge was sabotaged at one pit and a winding belt cut at another; at the nearby Trentham Workshops a coach taking scabs to work was attacked and windows were smashed with crowbars.

ion were to be replaced with one of collectivisation. Many mines form the economic heart and soul of whole communities. When the pit dies, the community dies. Overnight most of a township experiences unemployment. Others go to the wayside too as the community loses its spending power. It is in the interests of the community, therefore, to make sure that the pit stays open whatever anyone in the NCB or Whitehall says. Collectivisation is not the same as forming a cooperative, which has to compete with cheap imports, etc. Collectivisation means that the community takes over the mines completely. They are expropriated and reorganised, with production geared to need rather than profit only.

The occupation and takeover of the mines by mineworkers and the mineworking communities as a whole would be the first step in permanently preventing any further closures from taking place. The bosses and the government should, of course, be excluded from having any say in the matter. If a decision to collectivise is taken then those involved may as well go on and get rid of management too. Let them help in production work if they wish; alternatively a rotational duty scheme could be worked out. Also there is no reason why collectivisation should be restricted to those mines in danger of closure. The whole industry could be collectiv-

- whatever political persuasion - will only settle for compromise solutions, while the TUC leaders will intervene, as they have always done, only so as to keep things as they are. In the end collectivisation, if it is to succeed, will need to be supported throughout most of the industry and with the full cooperation of the communities involved.

Except where the quality of life is to be improved for all, job-losses can never be justified. It is a con-trick to suggest that cut-backs and job-losses can be enforced anywhere, anytime, at the drop of a hat - providing, of course, that there is the right economic excuse at hand to back up the decision. It is deception because it is never government or employers who provide jobs and resources for work, but workers who provide their labour and who enable bosses and the state to exploit them. The mines, the steel works, the docks...they are not the property of anyone, nor do they belong to the state to be 'managed' on our behalf. The decision as to whether an industry should progress or cut back or how that industry is organised and how its resources are distributed is the sole concern of those who make that industry work and not the parasites who leach off their toil.

T.H.

LATEST NEWS: As we go to press, there are reports that troops are being used on picket lines to gain policing experience in readiness for strike-breaking activity should a state of emergency be declared.

On two separate occasions army personnel have been spotted outside collieries in police uniforms by relatives (a father and a brother) who work in the mines. One of the soldiers had been stationed in N.I.