

parliament's shortcomings as a truly democratic institution, nevertheless it remains the closest we have to a representative body; and it is impossible to make a reasoned choice about electing those who will form a government if it is against the law to tell anyone what skullduggery they have been up to. The government should not be allowed to hide the fact they were trying, on a small scale, to subvert democracy, and Ponting must be congratulated for refusing to go along with it.

3. We should not expect too many Pontings, however. In MOD terms he was not 'one of the boys'; a high-flyer, but not one who had absorbed the Oxbridge ethos that gentlemen don't sneak. He was an early recruit to the SDP from those middle class 'political virgins' who were attracted by its 'clean' image. Finally, rumour has it that after the cost-cutting exploits which brought him to Thatcher's notice, no one would work with him (no-one loves a smartarse), and he was shoved sideways. So in many ways he was a maverick in the MOD, with less than the average institution-alisation, and in Whitehall such people are not that common.

4. Many liberals are saying that this is the ideal time to 'reform'

the Official Secrets Act. What we want, however, is not the "Armalite in place of the blunderbuss", as the by now aged cliché has it, but freedom of information. There is a great risk that the government, having had its fingers badly burned, might be happy to amend the Act, with a great deal of support from those who naively think the law is being liberalised. We cannot seriously expect this government, of all governments, to introduce a Freedom of Information Bill. Rather than helping our enemies give us what we don't want, we would do better to rely on the jury, 'the safeguard of English liberty' as it has proved once again (using another old saw), and defend that against the judges and politicians who want to reform it out of existence.

5. Those who live by their image die by it, too, and the resolute, indomitable, 'Iron Lady' easily turns into the shrill, hectoring bully, never a popular figure in British political life. Perhaps the jury was more representative of popular feeling in Britain than Mrs. Thatcher cares to realise. If so, her days as leader of the party may be numbered. Could this be the beginning of the beginning of the end? Let's hope so.

S.K. FRENCH

## INDUSTRY

# Notes on the miners's strike

Solidarity has until now held back from commenting directly on the miner's strike. We could not have anticipated such a protracted conflict. Below two members explain the group's attitude.

## No comment for comment's sake

Criticism has been levelled at us by some of our correspondents for our failure hitherto to comment on the miners' strike. An explanation

of this lack of comment until now is therefore in order.

No one imagined when the strike first started that it could possibly go on as long as it has done. Consequently, we felt it advisable to wait until the end of



Life on strike — Striking miners from Easington Colliery pick up their children from their local school. Pickets, union organization and the national negotiations are only one aspect of the miners' strike. Away from these widely publicized events the daily life of the miners' families has been adapted, even transformed, in order to maintain the strike.

the strike before making general comments and seeing what lessons could be drawn. We saw no advantage in 'tailending' the numerous leninist groups in commenting in general terms on matters which we knew only through the mass media. Because of the regrettably large gaps between issues of the magazine we were not in a position to make topical comment, and we had no 'inside information' with which to astound our readers.

Over the months the issues have clarified themselves considerably. Several of us have spoken to miners and their families, and while at this stage we do not see much point in printing our own 'Interview with a Striking Miner', we are better able to put forward the substance of the numerous discussions which we have had within our group during the months of the strike.

Inevitably, this remains fairly general.

We hope, however, that none of our readers thought that because Solidarity had not talked about the strike therefore the group was not keenly concerned about it. Uninformed comment produced out of ignorance impresses no-one.

S.K. French

## Autonomy wagged by its tail

The ten-month-long struggle of the miners has been a staggering expression of combativity, solidarity, and sheer bloodymindedness. The battles on the picket lines have been reminiscent of medieval warfare, particularly in respect of police tactics. The government has taken on far more than the NUM; it is

fighting a whole subculture. There have been thousands of injuries and thousands more people arrested, of whom substantial numbers have been victimised by the NCB.

A notable feature of the dispute has been the emergence of powerful autonomous forces, organising flying pickets and other more informal and very effective methods of resistance. There has also been the growth of networks of women's groups playing an essential role in the 'infrastructures' of the local strikes. It is an ironic fact that the legal offensive against the NUM, by handicapping the national leadership, has had the effect of strengthening these forces and their capacity for independent action. In the pit villages today the true spirit of socialism is alive and well.

Our admiration for the miners should not blind us to a number of less positive features of this dispute - for example, the way in which NUM officials initiated the strike, and many of the methods and tactics they have used. We are not at all interested in constitutional niceties, but we are in favour of the direct domination by workers of their own struggles, even if they do not do things the way we would like. Nevertheless, the bouncing of the men into the strike has, in our view, contributed significantly to both the divisions between miners and the isolation of the strikers from other workers; while the remarkable sight of a trade union leadership taking a fighting stance has mesmerised many radicals into taking a completely uncritical position of their actions. Arthur Scargill has become their new pope, criticism of whom is heresy. In their inability to distinguish between the living face of a movement and its bureaucratic tail the 'left' has at least one thing in common with Mrs. Thatcher. Moreover, we do not share the willingness of

the macho left to fight to the last drop of other people's blood. An industrial dispute is not waged with the gonads; a rational assessment of timing, tactics, and a recognition of the need to create unity are all important parts of the equation for winning struggles.

Radical bureaucracies fighting for their own interests are in fact nothing new (for example, the CIO in the USA during the 1930s was very militant). They behave in fundamentally the same manipulative way as their less militant brethren, but instead of perceiving their role as labour brokers for the existing order, these trade unions radicals see themselves as a sort of government in exile on the Eastern European pattern. For our part, support for the miners in no way implies any sympathy for the junta running the NUM.

The miners' fight is entering a critical stage. It may yet last for many more months. A defeat could be catastrophic, with the workforce divided and many militants victimised. Such a defeat could set back job organisation for many years to come. But all is not necessarily as it appears. While defeat could be snatched from the jaws of an apparent victory - by the miners wringing further concessions from the NCB but returning to work so divided that the balance of power is returned to the hands of management - yet conversely, even if the men are defeated, a determination to heal the wounds opened up by the long struggle could deny the government the full fruits of success. There will still be life after the strike.

We hope the miners will win a total victory, and that they will use the fighting organisation they have created to continue the fight for complete rank and file domination of their own future.

KEN WELLER