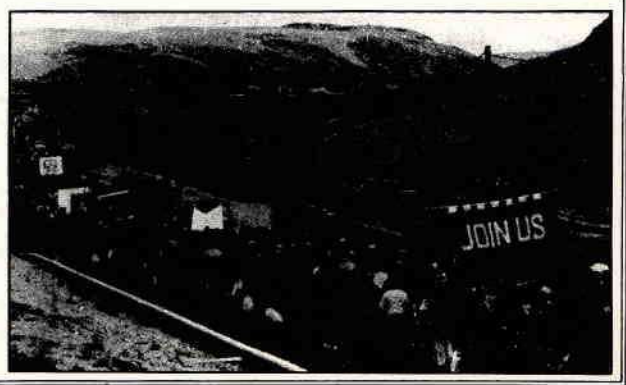
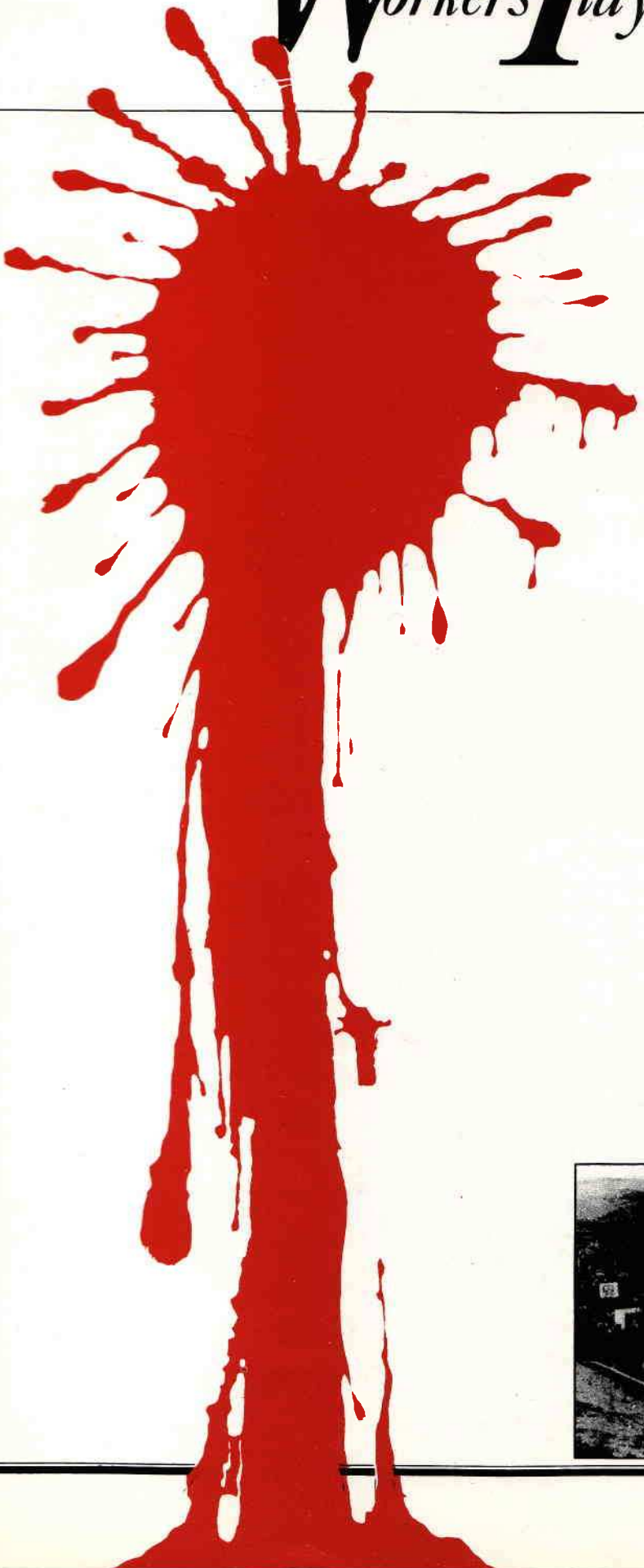


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5/12

# Workers' Playtime



*Popular Yarns of Class War*

The miners' strike has dominated political discussion for over a year. Put another way, more crap has been written about it from every hue of the visible political spectrum than about any other event.

Now *Playtime* shuffles into the marketplace after it's all over, only to find itself alongside the jackal picking over every scrap of fallen 'truth'. There's a lot about the strike in this issue, so we should say now: it's not our intention to sell ourselves using the strike as a loss-leader, just as we haven't used it as a 'cause' that we could abandon ourselves to.

Class struggle in the mining communities is about our class—and thus in a sense about us, our own struggles, our own hopes. But in a more real sense it's not about us in London, ninety miles from the nearest pit.

Finding ourselves in the position of interested but largely helpless spectators, and in the presence of so many narcissists and politicians, it's hard not to feel a bit self-conscious writing about it. Why risk looking like one of them? Others are asking the same question. The silence now about the strike in some quarters is deafening, while the absence of sound from those now talking the loudest is even more marked.

**So why? Because it is 'images' of the miners' strike which are painted on the backcloth behind every class struggle in Britain today.**

The miners' strike began as an initiative by the strikers themselves, was maintained through the initiatives of the mining communities, and only ended when a majority of the strikers saw it wasn't going to achieve its object. The strikers' aim was to force the National Coal Board (NCB)/Government to cancel their plans for the industry—a programme of rapid closures involving 20,000 'voluntary' redundancies. In this they have been unsuccessful.

Talk now is of 20 closures over the next year (4/5 in South Wales, 2/3 in Scotland and the North East, 6 each in Yorkshire and the Midlands) and 50,000 redundancies. NCB Area Directors have been told to do an 'exercise' in seeing how many redundancies could be made without affecting production targets. As this is written, the struggle over the first two closures—Frances and Bedwas—is underway.

It's been said that the most remarkable thing about the strike was that it happened at all, after years of induced recession and

insubstantial the 'realistic limits' can be.

It's no insult to the determination and courage shown by the majority of miners to point out that they still made relatively little effort to overcome the difficulties of extending the strike, as opposed to standing firm. In fairness to them, most strikers had a sensible view of what they might achieve. The aim was not proletarian revolution, but to stop the Macgregor Plan. Nevertheless once mass picketing had been defeated, it became a (very large) sit-at-home strike. It is still a tribute to them that it remained as determined as it had ever been, well after the power cuts and large-scale outside solidarity became unlikely and the lack of resolve of the non-'militant' NUM leaders became obvious.

For some 'revolutionary observers' the NUM became the focus for their private ambitions, much as Solidarnosc was a couple of years ago. On the other side some tried to cast it as

**Mr Benn, MP for the mining constituency of Chesterfield reiterated his belief that the whole Labour movement ought to be preparing for a general strike in defence of civil liberty and free trade unionism.**

the 'new realism' it has bred amongst workers. (In fact we said this in the last issue.) This truism is used by many in a patronising sense. "Jolly good show, chaps! Pretty good effort, given the sticky wicket you were playing on!". As if defeat was inevitable. Absolute rubbish. In fact, the strike provides a basic lesson in the nature of mass class struggle. That it arises from the anger generated by specific and usually local grievances, but once the ball has been set rolling it achieves a momentum of its own.

The hardline National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) leadership had been trying to get a national strike for some years, and had been rebuffed in a series of votes. They were as surprised at the development of this strike as anyone else—but knew, for all the problems (bad timing, no planning, high coal stocks, etc.), that this was the only chance they were going to get. They worked hard to make the best of a bad job.

The union didn't plan the strike, and neither was it some sort of logical 'miners next step' in response to the effects of the build-up to restructuring. (Not just the job losses through closures, but those through mechanisation and reorganisation. And the speed-ups and increased work discipline for those left. All against the background of the grievances over pay). But bad as the effects were, workers as 'militant' as the miners have stoically put up with worse. Equally the walkout at Cortonwood colliery wasn't the first local strike against a closure since the present round of restructuring began. This time, as the strikers' anger led a minority to step outside 'new realism', it gave both them and the majority of their fellow miners a new perspective on what acting realistically could mean. The way in which this struggle erupted—and was pursued—against the odds, shows how

the unique agent of the strikes defeat (up to 11½ months before the strikes end). Both views are total shit. The function of unionism is to mediate in class struggle. At least-worst they 'represent' the anger of workers to management, and 'represent' the response of management back again. The price of keeping their stake in the middle management of capitalist society has been their readiness to actively focus and channel workers' anger, and actively police the accords they arrive at with the bosses. Unionism can never be a form of organisation suitable for revolution—unionism simply means kicking out the old bosses to replace them with new ones. (The closely-related dream of sharing out the authority over capitalist society between everyone is just an impossible dream).

On the other hand, those 'revolutionaries' who saw the union as the principal Bogeyman simply developed workerist versions of 'Green' politics. The militant faction in the NUM leadership wanted a strike (on their terms). Far from going out of their way to sabotage direct action, the executive was wholly pragmatic. It was quite happy to see violence, disruption, anything you like. Objection wasn't to these, it was to bad publicity. They didn't tolerate rank and file initiative, they counted on it.

Not being responsible for disruption, but still being the body best able to sort it out, is an old union stance. After the revision to union law by the Tories it has become the norm. But this is the same as saying that all unions are interested in stamping out militancy. On the contrary for the NUM (like some others, eg the NGA), rank and file militancy and initiative is what gives the strength to their negotiating positions. Just as long as they remain in charge of negotiations, and the militant-dominated delegate

continue to give them democratic 'legitimation'. In other words, provide them with the 'orders' they were only obeying'.

The problem for the union in many areas was keeping this threat of an uncontrollable membership credible in the absence of any effective activity which it could be 'seen' to organise during the months of 'waiting for the power cuts'.

Anyhow so much for theory. In reality the union's failure to match the state's advance planning; its lack of skill in responding to the NCB's publicity and opinion-forming machinery; the inertia and active sabotage of faint-hearts and traitors, even given the limited scope for betrayal within the union's normal functioning: all were exposed during the course of the strike. What else would you expect, even from a militant union? But most of the bureaucrats genuinely wanted to 'win', and would quite happily have put up with the cost of this in terms of losing control over the direction of the strike to the strikers themselves. They would even face things getting out of hand. Dealing with that is what unionism is all about, in the last resort. And after all, the leadership—and most of the strikers come to that—saw the NUM as the best union of the lot.

Of course it's true that the control the union was allowed to retain established limits to the strike which eventually helped break it. But after mass picketing had been defeated, most of the strikers were clearly not prepared for the degree of radicalisation and violence that extending the strike would have involved. To be more exact, they had an eminently realistic sense of how far they could count on their fellow-strikers, and on other workers and proletarians. That was the crucial element in the failure of the strike to burst its limits. Had they believed otherwise, the union couldn't have kept control even if it had wanted to, and would have had real difficulty regaining it.

As for those 'revolutionary observers' who used accounts of the union's role as pornography in order to masturbate over what could be achieved in a real 'union', with real 'members' like themselves, well ... few words are necessary. The abject display of arse-licking from every point of the compass is testimony enough to the 'new fantasy' in 'revolutionary' circles that has paralleled the 'new realism' in the working class.

But this is a marginal problem. The most depressing fact about peoples' perception of the NUM's role and function, has been the difficulty they've had in distinguishing the goals of the union from those of the strikers. After all the union's actions have been visible to all. The way they have preserved their funds overseas—not in order to use them to promote the strike, but to secure the union's future. The way the upheaval of the strike was used to restructure the union's own organisation (the attempts by both 'militants' and 'moderates' to build their respective power-bases), exactly like the NCB. The way that after the return to work, the perspectives put forward by the leadership were for campaigns against Thatcherism, rather than about the class struggle which was supposed to continue in the pits. The degree to which the membership and their families were left to wage the struggle (in every sense), on their own.

Throughout there were two struggles going on. The failure to see or understand this—even among those committed to class struggle against this society—was the most sobering indicator of how far the strikers themselves were constrained. What could you say about the militants outside Congress House shouting that the NUM executive had betrayed them...and Arthur Scargill.

The exposure of the NUM's powerlessness, the way its planning was undercut by new forms of struggle by the state, the loss of credibility it suffered—all mirror the defeat of Ted Heath and Co. in 1972. The union's struggle suffered the deepest defeat—because the union itself is the institutionalisation of that defeat, in as permanent a form as is possible under capitalism.

To a degree unionism itself has suffered a real setback. Many miners won't ever trust the union to lead them into another battle. And while the strike has demonstrated that Arthur Scargill really



does walk, not on water, but on the very thinnest of ice, miners will never again believe he can single-handedly offset the inertia of the union structure.

Of course, the disillusionment with unionism as a result of the strike, felt by some miners and by many other workers, is mostly passive. All too much of it is sublimated into blaming the lack of solidarity, blaming the bosses and state, or in feeling guilty. On the other hand as we go to press we hear that a national miners' rank and file movement has been launched out of disillusionment with the reactionary activity of the NUM. We will be looking with interest to see what it stands for and does.

If the union's defeat was severe, the NCB's victory by contrast remains incomplete. It's won an opportunity to restructure fast—one that it is seizing with both hands. It is offering voluntary redundancy terms over the heads of the union bureaucrats, in an attempt to undermine threatened pits beyond the point of feasible resistance. This is an enormously expensive strategy in terms of redundancy payments. The brass face of the NCB in claiming poverty as the justification for its 'post-strike strategy' of closing pits without referring to the colliery review procedure agreed with NACODS, the pit deputies union, is quite astonishing. But the money always seems to be there for what suits the boss.

The strike has been both expensive—costs to the NCB about £1bn—and risky in a commercial sense. In recent years the coal industry's markets have been dangerously unbalanced, dominated by one monopoly customer, the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), which takes 92% of all coal sold. Coal's 80% share of electricity fuel supply would have dropped whatever happened. In the aftermath of the strike the NCB faces a tough ride commercially. Some of its smaller markets were lost to imported coal and will have to be won back.

Hopes have been raised of making British coal more internationally competitive. But the lack of sufficient deep-water

**He said : "With the banning of the trade unions at Cheltenham, the destruction of the GLC, the possibility they may put Arthur Scargill in jail, people have got to make up their minds — are we going to sit and watch it on the telly or start thinking about it."**

# The Grand Old Duke of Yorkshire...



ports which kept coal imports relatively low makes exports equally difficult, and many countries will not accept British coal which has a high chlorine and sulphur content.

It will not be seen how far the NCB has 'won' until the extent to which the strike has gone 'underground' in the pits is known. That will be fairly soon, because the most important orders the NCB has are to restock CEGB power stations, which means the NCB being able to deliver large quantities of coal rapidly.

The effect of any large-scale restructuring exercise isn't simply to break workers' resistance, it is also to break the entrenched power of senior and middle management. The disputes within the NCB executive and with NACODS were not by-products of the 'real fight' but essential elements of the NCB hard-liners' strategy for the coal industry. It's clear that NACODS members are as little pacified as the other workers.

So far the evidence is that the NCB will by no means have things all its own way. That can be seen in the spate of small local disputes since the return to work. Restructuring may not be stopped, but the price extracted for it in obstructionism and non-co-operation could eat deeply into the bosses' profits.

The fact that significant numbers of the miners seem still prepared to 'have a go' is a failure for the NCB. And in the terms the NCB themselves measure victory and defeat, all they have done is create an opportunity which they still have to successfully exploit.

Sir Alfred Sherman, an ex-Marxist who is one of Mrs Thatcher's most ideological advisers, also chose the language of the Left to attack the miners. Coal miners, he argued in *The Times* (21 June 1984) were not 'generating surplus value but deficit value, hence they exploit their fellow workers'. They represent 'sheer conservatism, attempting to preserve nineteenth century patterns of employment' and fetishise 'what Marx called "rural idiocy" in an isolated, quasi tribal, one-class society'.

Another disturbing indicator of how the strike was not biting deep enough to expose the real issues at stake is the general lack of understanding of how the strike fitted into a wider social context—the place of coal in British energy policy. While some people frothed at the mouth about the 'Tory' plot to destroy coal, the Labour Party produced alternative capitalist plans for the exploitation of coal and the communities that depend on it. The NUM circulated bizarre ideas, for example a commitment to put chimneys in new council houses. They might have added air conditioning and tumble driers to overcome the effects of the pollution this would cause. They also made great claims for the alternative technologies for exploiting coal, which the NCB has been half-heartedly experimenting with. This stream of propaganda about the role and future of the industry found no counter at all from 'revolutionary' circles (except tortured debate among the ecologically-minded).

The Macgregor Plan is about ensuring that coal will play an admittedly reduced, but still absolutely crucial role in energy policy, at least until the next century. That is what the strike was about. How to reorganise the industry to ensure this. The government, far from wishing to abandon coal, is inextricably dependent on it. They stopped the Gas Board buying bargain-price

gas from Norway during the strike precisely because it would have undermined coal's market competitiveness.

Oil has proved to be black dynamite rather than black gold. Gas faces a medium-term future at best unless alternative sources of supply are developed for when North Sea gas runs out. Now, fair enough, experiments in liquefaction—coal into oil—and gasification—coal into gas—are being conducted. But while extraction efficiency has been improved, no substantial progress has been made about economically filtering pollution. Acid rain being another Bogey over which the government is out of step with its more 'green-conscious' EEC competitors. More basically, the state doesn't have the money to develop such schemes on more than a token basis. For the Labour Party of course, this is just a problem of investment—the problem of where this investment is to come from remains deliberately unanswered. Because it is to come from a more efficient exploitation of us.

Nuclear power—the favoured choice in the CEGB for a primary energy source—is politically extremely sensitive and immensely, perhaps prohibitively, expensive. It is not even certain to what extent new capacity in energy production is required, since the CEGB, and following them the coal industry in the 70s via Plan for Coal, have proved to have based development plans on grotesque overestimates of future energy demands.

Energy policy is so politically loaded that governments of whatever party actively discourage debate about it. Combined with the NUM and NCB's self-interest in pushing coal regardless, it's not surprising that people take up the disinformation on offer. What's disturbing is how little this disinformation and the built-in presuppositions of what sort of society we want aren't effectively challenged.

But what had been won on the picketline? Among the miners themselves the limits imposed on picketing have occasioned some searching inquests. But not on the hard Left. Nor has it wondered why traditional industrial action has nowhere matched the breathtaking solidarity spanning NUPE domestics in Belfast, printers in London, lesbians and gays, black workers and Greenham women . . . sending money, food, entertainment, love and affection — and pickets. It's a relationship that has brought a cultural revolution in the coalfields.

The miners' strike reveals clearly that traditional strike strategy is ineffective against the state, particularly when it has prepared itself to meet the specific strike strategy employed. The miners took up the same tactics as in 72 and 74 because the strike started relatively spontaneously and there was little opportunity for them to plan anything different. Particularly given that many of the strikers would probably have voted against a strike if a ballot had been held a few weeks before. The tactics worked in 72 not because they were especially innovative or subversive, but because they took the state by surprise.

Revolutionaries have been pointing out the failure of the tactics used in the strike right from the start. Indeed, we've added our own fivepennyworth. There's no point in going through the failings of this armchair generalship at length—but one or two points should be made. The agreement now by so many that the NUM



should have held a ballot is particularly stupid. The NUM didn't hold one because until several weeks into the strike they thought there was a good chance they would lose it. The results of the unpublished polls conducted by the \* which have been learnt since, confirms this reading of the situation. To take up something else that has irritated us, simply calling for unity, general assemblies and generalisation is pure formalism. It says nothing about the actual content or context of struggle. And in any case, if there *is* a time to 'intervene' with this 'class wisdom' it is in the years before a mass strike breaks out, not once it is underway.

The 'national' and 'mass' dimension of the strike gave it a special significance for some militants, who seem to be suggesting that that's what real class struggle *is*, as opposed to what happens constantly throughout class society. In fact, mass strikes are just 'hot' war, as distinct from the perpetual 'cold' war under capitalism. Saying that mass struggles have a potential to spread and have effects well beyond their initial objectives is one thing. But it's hard not to conclude that these militants attach such importance to large-scale 'public' and hence visible struggle *because* it is public and visible. Intervention doesn't then mean an expression of solidarity, so much as making 'contact' with the class struggle as if it wasn't going on around us every day of our lives. Unless discussion of mass struggle is related to some attempt to understand the general level of class struggle going on all the time, it risks becoming seen as a political event, somewhere 'out there', to be responded to politically.

Those wailing the loudest about what a crushing defeat the miners suffered are precisely those who saw the strike as a political gesture. For example, the 'Eurocommunist' tossers in the Communist Party who called for a coalition of the miners with the radical forces in society—the Greenham women and CND. A theme which no less than Arthur Scargill took up in speeches immediately after the return to work, reflecting the lack of a militant role for the NUM in the local struggles going on. This revealed clearly how distant its aims were from those miners struggling for specific, concrete objectives.

Rather than dwelling on defeat, shouldn't we be saying something about the positive aspects of the strike? Here we come up against an immediate difficulty. We are as well-placed as proletarians anywhere else in Britain to comment on the overall struggle and its background. When it comes to specific initiatives by the strikers and within mining communities, especially by women, our views are second-hand at best. In addition to our geographical distance from it (one not broken down by 'day trips to see the miners'), most of our sources of information about

the dealers in political 'avant-gardes' leapt in to transform the activities of hit squads and support groups into political commodities, to be sold to the rest of the working class. It's been sickening to watch the speed with which individuals were interviewed or photographed and turned into symbols. Or the ease with which 'quotes' were picked out of what they had to say and invested with a General Significance. All to provide a background of imagery for the political commentators who presented themselves as the real actors in this theatre of struggle. Given the level of distortion, the illusions many built up about the hit squads and the 'miners wives' (as the women were invariably described) are understandable. But wholly counterproductive.

The level of the initiatives within the mining communities at all these levels is one of the things that distinguishes this fight from others in recent years. It is to be hoped that now the strike is over, more accurate accounts may emerge alongside the torrent of mythology.

The emergence of significant instances of class violence is one of the most positive aspects of this strike. For once workers could be seen acknowledging the violence that characterises our exploitation in this society, and responding appropriately. That said, the myths have to be attacked. The vast majority of miners were never prepared for the level of violent escalation that might have turned the struggle in their favour in its last months. Indeed there were a number of ironies involved. Many strikers explained their defence of their communities as a determination to avoid the divisions, demoralisation and violence they saw in the decaying urban centres. Only to suffer varying degrees of lasting division, demoralisation and violence as a result of their struggle. While the lack of sympathy with class violence felt by most workers elsewhere related precisely to the fears about violence generated by the conditions the miners were struggling to avoid.

**"WE HAVE been given a gift!"** said one delegate to the TUC women's conference yesterday on the key role played by women in the miners' strike. "The strength of these women—we must take it with both hands."

Mrs Marsland said: "We have to mobilise our women and use our women as they have been used so effectively within the dispute in the NUM."

Mrs Gilbert said: "These women are hungry to take their place in society. We would look to see positive action by the TUC to aid the education and politicisation of these women."

The involvement of women from the mining communities in the strike was also notable. That said, the fact that people take an active part in struggles doesn't mean that activity is automatically going to take a radical direction—though it certainly did for many of them. Similarly, the sort of 'community spirit' and solidarity developed in many areas is always ambiguous, and not necessarily positive. As anyone familiar with the community spirit in what remains of London's docklands will understand well. Still once again we undoubtedly suffer from hearing so much of what we have about these aspects of the strike through the use of them by entirely reactionary political groupings.

*Events don't keep pace with deadlines, especially ones as meaningless as Playtime's. This was only the latest of a whole series of articles about the miners' strike produced by different Playmates over recent months. For an alternative look by another of us, see the last three pages of this issue.*

them. This isn't an endorsement of the political analysis adopted by either group—it is a statement of our belief that money will get to where it's said it will, and that information given them about prisoners will not be abused.

*Class War Prisoners Aid* are writing to prisoners and collecting money for their families. They are open to suggestions for other activity. Contact them *c/o "Unwaged Fightback", 355 Holloway Road, Islington, London N7. (Tel. 01-607 8271/2)* Money can be sent or taken to the above address. Cheques should be made out "Max Holz Committee".

The *National Organisation of Miners, Prisoners and Supporters (NOMPAS)* are collecting information about miners facing trial and in prison, as well as money to assist them. Joint Secretaries: Geoff Coggan and Martin Walker. They will be publishing material about the situation of the miners in court and in prison, and the aftermath of the strike in the coalfields. Contact *NOMPAS, c/o Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1.* Cheques payable to "The

# About *Playtime*

## The Reality

*Workers Playtime*, the revolutionary answer to *The Face*, is collectively edited, typeset, designed and printed by a tiny clique of rich, talented and extremely glamorous people.

## The Myth

After the long illness and death earlier this year of the London Workers Group (LWG), to which most of us belonged at one time or another, *Workers Playtime* began to take on the functions of a fully-autonomous fifth-generation political life-support system (a *group*).

What happened to the LWG, which at its best was a vehicle for transectarian discussion and activity, showed the present tendency for revolutionary circles to fragment into a series of separate activist or ideological 'rumps'.

Apart from anything else, this issue of *Playtime* should reflect our dissatisfaction with this state of affairs. For us, corresponding with and talking to like-minded people becomes at the same time more difficult and more important than ever. Up to now, we have relied almost entirely on informal contacts for criticism and a wider discussion of what we were doing. Even so, there was very little useful feedback from those people who claimed to read the paper. This is one reason why we seize on almost any response as an excuse for a lengthy reply (see *Nationalism Today* and *What is Playtime Standing In?*): and why the paper sometimes seems like a gigantic wind-up, as we try harder and harder to provoke our reader to retaliate.

So the appeals for comment, criticism and contributions are not just a libertarian ritual. We are repeating it now. It makes a lot of difference to our desire and ability to continue (and no, we will not take an empty postbag as a clear signal that you want us to pack it in.) In return, we promise to try and deal properly with the letters and publications we receive. Also, we'd be happy to meet people face-to-face, formally or informally, in London or wherever you are—drop us a line.

In the near future we plan to have a readers' meeting which we hope you'll try and come to (there aren't many of you). It will not be just another boring political meeting if we can help it. Get in touch if you're interested.

If you do write an article or letter for publication, please try and make it as long or as short as it deserves to be, and that doesn't necessarily mean following the example of past and present *Playtimes*. We don't have an editorial line or political code for contributions—but that doesn't mean we won't know what's wrong with you, and we don't guarantee to print anything (you think this stuff's bad? You should see some of the things we wrote and threw in the bin.) It doesn't have to be about workplace struggle or capitalist politics either—that's just been the majority fetish of *Playmates* in the past. We don't regard these as the only sites of struggle, or as being more important than its appearance elsewhere. In future we hope that the content of *Playtime* will show this more clearly. We would particularly like to get accounts of struggles that people are themselves involved in, or close to.

We promise to interfere with contributions as little as possible, but please be prepared to discuss them before they are printed, and maybe make changes. That means letting us know how we can contact you, after you've sent us something.

This is the first issue of *Workers Playtime* for six months. Reasons/excuses are hinted at elsewhere—dare you doubt them? To our certified and committed readers, we apologise for the delay; to the rest, sorry for reappearing. By way of compounding the crime on both sides, this is a bumper double issue.

After being off the streets (well, the shelves of lefty bookshops) for so long, we've come up with what we regard as a *class* issue—this glossy stuff fell off the back of a bankrupt printshop. The articles, though, are the usual collection of space-fillers, and next time it'll be back to the usual bog-standard paper.

We aren't assisted by the GLC, CIA, or South American millions as far as we know (but thanks to Aldgate Press, 01-247 3015, for help.) You on the other hand could do a lot by:

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Please *don't* make out cheques or money orders to 'Workers Playtime', because we still don't have a bank account. Instead, leave the name of the payee blank. Send them, together with letters, articles, graphics, complaints, ideas, recruits, death threats etc. to us at this address:

**Workers Playtime, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St., London E1.**

# Aims & Principles

## Adopted from those formulated by the Calderwood 15

One of the difficulties that has beset the production of this issue of *Playtime* has been our lack of programmatic clarity. We had reached the point of wondering whether *Playtime* would ever appear again when we received a copy of the Aims and Principles of the Calderwood 15 from Glasgow. This so exactly expressed our unformalised moves towards political coherence that the invisible dictatorship behind *Playtime* has decided, in line with our views on democracy, that *Playtime* will adopt the platform as a first step in the increasingly essential task of achieving a meaningful national regroupment of the revolutionary milieu. A 100% vote to this effect will take place at the next International of our fraction. The clarity we have achieved by adopting these guidelines for communist practice has provided the POLITICAL will to complete this report to the class and to commence planning the future of our tendency.

- 1 WP rigorously oppose the fundamentalist application of the neo-essentialist meta critique to everyday life.
- 2 That meta critique is IN ITSELF merely a PARTIAL critique of the PREVAILING EXTINGENCIES observed to be determinant in the modern world.
- 3 Organisational fetishism which is the unconscious expression of this mediated social milieu REALISES this abstracted (...) in its inverted form.
- 4 Language, like consciousness, only moves from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other (wo)men (sic).
- 5 If Lenin existed it would be necessary to REINVENT him.
- 6 That the neo-essentialist meta critique has gained mass recognition is TANTAMOUNT to the PREMATURE RECUPERATION of self-activity.
- 7 This sensuous self-activity, deriving from the SPECTACULAR REPRESENTATION OF THE GLISTENING COMMODITY, demonstrates the historical development of the workers movement.
- 8 The class must IMMEDIATELY seize the means of reproduction and replace the structures of domination with their liberated desires.
- 9 The banal meta language of sport will be measured to the needs of the participants.
- 10 Capital and its NATURAL CONCOMITANT the State, having FULFILLED their historical role, have SUCCEDED, at this juncture to the IMMANENT POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS.
- 11 We reject the mystification of infantile jargonism. The revolution is realised in the clarity of programmatic analysis. Thus, we strive at all times for simplicity and directness in word and deed.
- 12 Capital's invasion of all aspects of everyday life and its colonisation of all forms of social relationships must in itself lead us to a rejection of all relationships and the establishment of a critique of all forms of human interaction under the prevailing conditions of modern capitalism in its decadent phase.
- 13 The collective self-transformation implicit in unmediated revolutionary struggle is best achieved within a structure of federated autonomous grouplets. The impossibility of collective action unfettered by the snapping guard-dogs of internalised capitalist ideology and the modified neo-essentialist critique of the damming of the free flow of human creativity under the prevailing forms of oppression, mean that the optimum size of such grouplets should be less than two.
- 14 WP does not aspire to the leadership but merely succeeds in bringing the torch of enlightenment to the class.



'Your readers have injected hope into tragedy'

# THANK GOD YOU'VE ARRIVED



## MIRAGE COMMENT

AS WE HEARD THE NEWS THAT THE MIRAGE GROUP'S MERCY FLIGHT HAD REACHED ITS DESTINATION OUR PUBLISHER MOHAMMED HUNISWAL SPOKE FOR US ALL :

"THIS IS GREAT NEWS !"

"I AM DELIGHTED WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CUT THROUGH THE BLUE TAPE AND GET THE SUPPLIES TO WHERE THEY ARE NEEDED. OUR READERS CAN FEEL PROUD OF THE PART THEY HAVE PLAYED. THEY HAVE NOT PASSED BY WITH DOWNCAST EYES - NOW LET'S ALL EYES DOWN AND MAKE IT A MILLION FOR THE MIRAGE APPEAL !"

"BUT THE CHALLENGE FACING ALL OF US IN THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONS OF THE EAST IS HOW TO DEAL WITH THE CAUSES OF DISASTER AS WELL AS ITS EFFECTS. LIVING AS WE DO IN NATIONS WHERE THE DESTRUCTIVE FORCES OF HUMAN NATURE HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED THE HORROR OF COAL FAMINE IS ALMOST UNIMAGINEABLE."

"WE MUST UNITE TO BRING AID TO THE SUFFERING PEOPLE OF THE WESTERN ISLES. BUT ONCE UNITED WE CANNOT REST UNTIL PRODUCTION FAMINE, CLASS STRUGGLE AND ALL THE OTHER DISASTERS OF HUMAN NATURE HAVE BEEN CONQUERED AND SWEEPED INTO THE HISTORY BOOKS. THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF HOPE THE MIRAGE GROUP PLEDGES ITSELF TO CHAMPION. THIS IS THE VISION OF THE NEW TOMORROW WE MUST ALL FIGHT TO REALISE."

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"Here-we-go, Here-we-go, Here-we-go...." To the dirge of a tribal brass band 3,000 frail childrens voices chanted a song of welcome and happiness. The Mirage Group's mercy convoy had arrived at the heart of Britain's Coal Famine disaster area. But that message was not just for us but for the millions of big-hearted Daily Mirage readers whose donations have brought vital food and drugs to this village of tears, where each dawn brings its new crop of bodies to swell the numbers lying at rest in the catacombs cut hundreds of feet in the rock below ground.

It was only this morning that I rode into this living hell with the first of the trucks, at the end of our gruelling 400 mile trek past the ghost towns of Shotton and Corby, across some of the worlds toughest territory. It is a region whose normal population has swelled to ten times normal size with an influx of blue robed armed nomads from the worse

From Wali Pilja in Edlington, Britain, Saturday

hit desert regions to the south. There it is rumoured many of the population are forced to survive on brown rice and lentils.

Crowds of kids ran along side our vans on spindly legs waving wildly and gleefully shouting their word for a black man. Tonight the first of the supplies are being handed out to the ravenously hungry families to whom it means the difference between life and death.

Excited urchins, some of them almost too weak to salute, gazed wide eyed as our supplies of black pudding, pork scratchings and mushy peas were unloaded in the scruffy market place.

Pushing forward, her little face eagerly uplifted, a two year old girl held up a bony hand for her bright orange mug to be filled with Tetley's

Bitter. She smiled her thanks and clutched my trouser leg tightly as she gratefully gulped it down.

"This is the kind of help we need" said a desperately overworked local official of Libya's Miners Christmas Appeal Fund, "One mug of Tetley's is worth a thousand do-good women's committees sitting around trying to make up their minds."

Yards away from us stood a young mother clutching her starving six month old baby in her arms. Suddenly in an unforgettable gesture she held her wizened and wasted baby boy high above her head, the emaciated infants sunken eyes staring out full of sadness and suffering.

That frantic mothers moving cry for help and thousands more like it are being answered tonight as our shipment is distributed - the first aid from the East to get directly through to the stricken areas.

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## AID ROW PROBE

As the Mirage Mercy Flight brought hope to the stricken regions of Britain, a new scandal erupted over the distribution of aid by the country's ruling Reaganite junta. Russian aid organisations last night confirmed reports that shipments of millions of tons of coal were being stockpiled in Government yards instead of being distributed to British furnaces. The vital shipments paid for by Polish and Vietnamese workers had been rushed to Britain to stave off the disaster that threatens as the electricity system collapses.

Off-the-record British Government sources blamed transport problems for the failure to distribute the aid, while official spokesmen refused to comment on allegations of corruption and incompetence.

Eastern aid organisations have made official complaints about the British Governments failure to deal with the civil unrest which is hampering their work.

In the worst hit areas villagers huddle around crude communal fires built using fuel from their now useless vehicles. Where this has run out there have been reports that Government buildings have been torn apart in the desperate search for fuel.

But while this tragic Rome burns the Nero's of Westminster are fiddling the books. To the hard hearted totalitarian rulers of Britain keeping their hands on the reins of power supply is more important than the ruin, despair and violence they are reaping.

# Dock Strikes '84

When a national dock strike was announced by the TGWU leadership from midnight on 9th. July, it might have seemed that, for the first time in the current miners' strike, there was the real possibility of a 'second front' being opened up in the class struggle.

The same basic issue was at stake in both industries; job security. Many dockers had already shown a degree of solidarity with the miners by blacking coal and iron ore movements. Even the bourgeois press and TV was carrying statements like "soon, no doubt, miners and dockers will be joining each other on the picket lines", and putting out dire warnings about the consequences of the strike continuing.

By the time the first strike had collapsed, it was beginning to look as though they needn't have worried.

The strike was called by the T&G's national docks committee, after British Steel used workers who were not registered dockers, to unload iron ore at Immingham dock on the Humber. The ore in question was bound for Scunthorpe steel works, and had been blacked by Immingham dockers in support of the miners. The steel corporation was directly contravening the terms of the National Dock Labour Scheme which reserves dock work for registered dockers while providing them with job security and large redundancy payments to encourage them to leave the industry.

The union's case was partly that British Steel had been asked not to bring in private contractors to move ore until the outcome of the July 9th coal negotiations was known. In other words, the union leaders had been hoping that by then some kind of deal would have been cobbled together over the miners' strike, so the dockers could be kept out of it.

The effect of the national strike call was to push the issue of how to organise effective blacking of coal and iron ore neatly to one side, turning it into a national disagreement within the dock industry between the T&G and the National Association of Port Employers (NAPE) over the precise terms of the DLS. At the same time, it played upon the dockers' real fears about the future of the scheme, which has come under greater and greater pressure from the government and employers, as the volume of port trade has declined and dockers have become less and less willing to take

voluntary redundancy, as unemployment has risen.

This pushing-aside of the blacking issue was made apparent as soon as the strike was called, when a train-load (equivalent to perhaps two road convoys) of iron ore was taken from Immingham to Scunthorpe unhindered. Furthermore, on the fourth day of the strike (July 13th) there were talks between NAPE and the T&G. British Steel — which is represented in NAPE as a port employer — said they had employed a specialist operator to load trucks with a mechanical shovel: it was just that they couldn't find dockers who were prepared

to be paid to observe the work (as was standard practice). BS were, however, perfectly prepared to square everything with the DLS by training dockers to use the equipment. The union negotiator replied to this was not to affirm that the ore was blacked in any case, but to call for a guarantee that the employers would do everything possible to avoid a breach of the scheme rather than leaving it for the Dock Labour Board to sort out.

The 13000 registered dockers in the DLS ports stopped work as soon as the strike was called, but the major non-scheme ports (around 22000 dockers are outside



*Small but feisty proletarian takes on petty-bourgeois element at Tilbury*

the scheme, such as Felixstowe, Dover, and Newcastle, carried on working. The effect of the stoppage at this stage was to hold up 75% of cargo along with over 100 container and cargo ships although there was every possibility that cargo could be re-routed through non-scheme ports.

Throughout the strike, there were almost no picketing initiatives. This is not surprising which can be put down to any reluctance to participate in the strike by the dockers or even to bureaucratic union control of the strike. The simple fact is that there has been traditionally very little reason for dockers to picket out other workers. Until recent years, they had wanted to strike first and ask questions later when their mates in other ports were in trouble and strikes were usually completely solid. For various reasons – the relative security that the dockers have against the destruction of dockland communities and so on – striking dockers can no longer rely on this sort of 'automatic solidarity', any more than the miners can.

On July 14th, Felixstowe finally voted to join the strike, but they were not prepared to interrupt passenger services. The previous evening, a ban called by the National Union of Seamen (NUS) on Sealink freight services began. This was in protest at the privatisation of Sealink, and opened up the possibility of Dover dockers becoming involved, because many of them are in the T&G rather than the NUS (although substantial efforts were to show that union solidarity remained as firm as ever.)

On Monday July 16th, Dover voted to stop all freight, but on the same day tugmen in Swansea went back to work as did 200 dockers at two oil industry supply depots. In neither case did other dockers do anything to counter this.

### TURNING THE QUAY

Over the next couple of days, the reluctant strikers of Dover were given just the excuse they'd been waiting for when lorry drivers began to blockade channel ports in protest at not being able to take their lorries onto the ferries. It began with a small number of owner-drivers using their lorries to block the entrance to a Townsend-Thoresen ferry at Calais, and quickly spread to Dunkirk, Ostend and Zeebrugge. Around 300 lorries which had been parked on the M20 for the duration of the strike began to move off in convoy for Dover, to negotiate with the Harbour Board. By the next day, the dockers' shop stewards had called off the freight ban 'because of fears of violence in the port'.

Much was made by the press and TV of the fact that many of the lorry drivers were in the T&G. While it is true that there was an almost complete absence of solidarity from lorry workers (as there has been during the miners' strike), this obscures the fact that a large number of the drivers, including the initiators of the blockades, were self-employed owner-drivers. These petty-bourgeois scum never have any sympathy towards striking workers, which is not entirely surprising, since their class interest in a narrow sense lies in pursuing

their businesses above all else. The only reasonable proletarian response is to burn their lorries.

With the precedent set by Dover, the strike quickly collapsed. The next day there were votes all over the country to return to work.

At the same time the NUS called off its ban on Sealink freight and decided to talk to Sealink's new bosses, Sea Containers, instead. Jim Slater, General Secretary of the NUS, said the union did not want to appear to be "dragging them to the negotiating table". Meanwhile, the dock employers made no promises whatsoever about future breaches of the DLS. They just reaffirmed their commitment to the existing procedure. Adding insult to injury, the T&G's national docks officer John Connolly described this as a "great victory"!

### BOLLARDS TO THE UNION

When a national strike was called again just over a month later, it's hardly surprising that it was less enthusiastically supported, with most dockers presumably adopting the fatalistic attitude that "if the T&G are running the show it must be a waste of time" and very few attempting to take the struggle into their own hands in any significant way. That the reluctance to strike cannot just be put down to the dockers' 'apathy', or unwillingness to join a 'political' strike in support of the miners, can be seen from the fact that in Northumbria, dockers respected miners' picket lines at docks bringing in coal even while they themselves were ignoring the strike call.

This time, the strike was called in response to the BSC allowing a coal ship called the Ostia to dock at Hunterston in Ayrshire, without T&G boatmen to moor the ship. They used a local contract firm instead. The T&G had blacked the ship after talks had broken down between the T&G and BSC over the level of coal and iron ore supplies to Ravenscraig steel works.

In Scotland, dockers responded immediately with solid strikes in all 12 scheme ports. None of the large non-scheme ports in England joined at any stage, and the situation in the English scheme ports was a complete mess, with dockers either unable to decide whether they were in or out, or serious splits within ports. For example, on the second day of the strike, dockers at Grimsby and Immingham voted to work, only to reverse their decision two days later, resulting in 400 striking and 260 working.

In the first week, there was a series of confused mass-meetings. In Bristol, the meeting on Tuesday broke up in confusion after shop stewards refused to allow a vote. In a vote at Tilbury on Thursday, shop



24-HOUR MINI-SCAB SERVICE –  
WEDDINGS, STRIKES, FUNERALS CATERED FOR

stewards tried to blatantly rig the vote by means of a confusing resolution which led many dockers to believe they were voting for a return to work, when in fact they were voting to strike. Two days before, 600 dockers had held an unofficial meeting and voted to return — but only 40 of Medlock Bibby's (a sort of dockland 'Silver Birch' figure) merry band of scabs dared to cross the picket line. This scenario was repeated in many other ports.

By the second week, the strike had more or less settled into the following pattern; over half the scheme dockers were out (7500-8000 out of 13000) and almost none of the non-scheme dockers were. On the Wednesday, John Connolly had said that although the strike was over "scab labour", it could be resolved through lower coal quotas for Ravenscraig. In other words, having sabotaged possible solidarity action during the first strike by shifting attention

onto the workings of the Dock Labour Scheme, this time around they could safely make a gesture to the miners and at the same time sabotage the second strike by quietly shelving the issue of the DLS.

In the second week, there were quite a few attempts to picket out the working ports, with Southampton dockers unsuccessfully picketing Felixstowe, Portsmouth and Poole, and by the third week some miners were joining the picketing of Grimsby and Immingham (several hundred of them being turned back by the filth, as were 50 Hull dockers.)

In the middle of all this, the T&G leadership declared that picketing must be stepped up providing, of course, it was within TUC guidelines. These had been drawn up between the TUC and the Callaghan government after the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978-79. Essentially what

they say is that pickets should act in a "disciplined and peaceful manner", when provoked, and should obey the instructions of union officials at all times.

By the end of the third week, a tentative deal was being patched together, involving seedy union hacks and slippery Labour politicians at the highest levels. Even Pillock himself was involved, but the talks (between the ISTC and T&G over coal quotas) were initiated by the MP Motherwell, whose constituency includes Ravenscraig (Labour Needs those votes!).

At the end of it all, the British Steel Corporation gave away nothing over the employment of non-dock labour, and the T&G agreed to meet the BSC/ISTC quotas within two months.

Another 'great victory'.

# Any Storm In A Port

## ORIGINS OF THE DOCK LABOUR SCHEME, AND RECENT DOCK STRUGGLES

From the earliest origins of dock employment until WW2 (in Britain at any rate), employers hired labour on an almost entirely unregulated basis. That is, men would present themselves at some recognised hiring point, usually the dock-gate, and foremen would call on as many as were needed for the day's business.

Men would be kept to the end of each loading or unloading operation and then paid off according to hours worked or tons moved. Not surprisingly, this system often led to chronic poverty. Figures given to the 1908 Royal Commission on the Poor Law showed that "pauperism" was three times higher among dock labourers than the national average. After WW1, when dockers were covered by national employment benefit, the industry drew three and a half times as much out of the fund as it put in, although this was partly the result of the fact that dockers were one of the first sections of the working class to systematically exploit loop-holes in the social security system. Many labourers worked "three days on the hook, three days on the book".

With the onset of WW2, the need arose for a stable and permanent dock labour force to ensure war production.

The first step was to introduce compulsory registration for dockers and to require them to accept transfers between ports (from the ports on the East coast to the now crucially important ports on the West coast of Britain.) This register was started at a time when the only other groups covered by registration were professionals such as scientists and engineers. This was not the first time registers, which had the effect of increasing work discipline and reinforcing the division between dockers and other semi-employed proletarians, had been introduced. But it was the first time they had been successfully introduced on a large scale — previously dockers had resisted them. In 1912 at Birkenhead, Merseyside, the register drawn up by the main union and port employers was only imposed after a long and bitter strike was broken by scabs brought in by the union.

This time, the registration package was unusual in that employers had to register as well. Later, a national corporation was established and ports administration was overseen by local boards, on which sat equal numbers of union and employer representatives.

Despite around 30 strikes in each war year, and rising absenteeism as the war progressed, union representatives prevailed

very valuable to the government and the bosses, by enabling them to abolish a large number of 'restrictive practises'. It was generally felt in government circles that there could be no return to the laissez-faire chaos of the pre-war years. Despite resistance from the employers, the scheme was properly instituted in 1947. Casual labour was to stay, but it was sufficiently well-regulated to provide dock labour when and where British capital required it.

### BERTH OF A NATION

The National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS) was, not surprisingly, hailed by many leftists and trade unionists as a distinctly progressive because it was a form of "workers' control". The General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union described it as a "brave experiment". The implication of this point of view being that through belonging to a strong union, the dockers had been given a 'say' in 'their' industry.

This is totally misleading. The 'dual control' aspect of the scheme was more an attempt to shore-up a rather weak trade union set-up, so that the industry could be reorganised without too much bother from the workers. Ultimately, the scheme paved the way for containerisation in the 1960s.

The historical weakness of the unions in the docks was the result of two causes ; the inherent difficulty of maintaining any sort of representative body composed of casual labourers, and the informal rank-and-file strength exercised by the dockers. Two important consequences of this were the always-high level of unofficial strikes (after WW2 the T&G didn't make any strike official until 1961, despite over a dozen major stoppages taking place), and the inability of the unions to police productivity levels. This second aspect is something which has existed throughout the history of unionism in the docks. In 1892, Tom Mann, the president of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union, had suggested to a Royal Commission that

minimum time rates be abolished, after his membership had persistently ignored his appeals to work harder. More recently, in 1967, when casual work was abolished, it was decided that an agreement based on the one reached with Dockers on the West Coast of the USA must be ruled out because British unions did not have sufficient control over their rank-and-file to deliver the goods promised at the negotiating table.

Another important result was the phenomenon of break-away trade unionism. The most important example of this was the 1920 decision by stevedores to stay out of the T&G-initiated federation. This led to the formation of the National Association of Stevedores and Dockers, which remained in existence as a minority union until the mid-70s. To a certain extent, it competed with the unofficial movement as a focus for workers' discontent with the T&G.

In 1960, the chairman of the London Ship-owners Dock Labour Committee, summed-up the situation as it then was for dock employers :

*"In the docks, there is a sense of frustration ... in short we have lost the initiative ; it rests not with us, not with the union, but with the men and the agitator."*

Indeed, in the mid-60s one third of Liverpool dockers were not in unions at all despite the high level of union control over hiring.

Decasualisation in 1967 was not brought in out of some humanitarian concern for the dockers' well-being, although middle-class liberals had always expressed concern about casual labourers. Victorian philanthropists had been dismayed by the 'demoralisation', 'criminality' and 'vice' associated with this form of employment in the docks. This can be seen as a moral precedent for present-day 'Right to Work' campaigns which always carry the implication that today's casual labourers, those who are working on the black while signing on, should be found 'proper jobs'.

Its function was to break the dockers' control over the production process by ending the host of informal restrictive practices associated with casual hiring, and pave the way for the introduction of containerisation, which would lead to tens of thousands of redundancies. It wasn't just a question of softening up the workers so they would accept job losses. The introduction of containers, which implied a dramatic shift from a work process mostly composed of living labour to one mostly composed of capital, involved a completely new style of management of dock labour. For a start, payment by tonnage had clearly become obsolete, but there was more to it than that. To a large extent, the organisation of labour in the docks, like in C19th factories before the introduction of Taylorism (the exact science of time-and-motion study), remained in the hands of the workers. It was the dockers themselves, organised into work gangs, who passed on their collective expertise from generation to generation, who determined work speeds and methods. It was this 'community of work' which produced much of the intense solidarity found among dockers. However, it must not be romanticised. Amongst dockers there was a rigidly determined hierarchy of job-access and within each gang there was also a definitive hierarchy with a recognised gang-leader. The important point is that all this was largely outside the bosses' control.

Containers are the extension of the production line into transportation. From the factory to the point of sale, the rigidity of the production line – the dream of every capitalist – is maintained, making the worker a mere appendage of the machine, unable to control the process of loading and unloading.

It is no coincidence that the chairman of the National



This article by a Playmate is one persons view of the purpose of producing Playtime. It argues that return to normal production after six months is "not a defeat", that the "greatest battle of all has been the struggle itself", and that the failure of the lay-off to achieve a better result is due to the lack of solidarity from the rest of the class. In short that you should

# DOUBT every word

When we started Workers Playtime two years ago we agreed about several things. One was that the unpopularity of the idea of revolution today was due, in large part, to the silly, stale and unintelligible attempts to argue for it. Not that we had any instant solutions to this (as you may already be thinking). We didn't start Playtime because we all agreed about everything, but because we discovered we had the resources to produce it. We were more united in being aware of questions than in having answers to them. Two years later things have developed in some respects. Our ability to put Playtime together as a 'package' has grown considerably. Against that there have been some set-backs. We suffered a severe blow last spring in losing our printers and production base. It has taken a long time to recover our ability to print cheaply and conveniently. Reorganising other production facilities has been rather harder (hence part of the delay in producing this issue). But the difficulties this caused us has only accentuated another problem which had been building up over a long time. Our common sense of why we were producing Playtime hadn't kept pace with our technical abilities (such as they are). In short productive relations were lagging behind productive forces and the onset of 'crisis' made this all too apparent. Well the last few months have seen efforts by us to move from 'the formal domination' of Playtime to a 'real domination' blah blah etc etc. The first results of this lie in your hands dear reader.

Confronting our own disatisfactions and differences of perspective had another consequence. Unhappy with the fact that we weren't doing enough by way of looking for solutions to the problems we all saw, now we became aware that we weren't even conveying very clearly that we saw any problems. This became most obvious when we met people who'd read Playtime but didn't know us. Some had liked the paper but didnt get on with us. Others said they were pleasantly surprised to discover that the image they'd got of us from reading Playtime was quite wrong. Specifically that we weren't as boring and worthy in person as we appeared in print. If nothing else this made clear to us that we were not making what we were doing and why clear to other people. We decided it was time to discuss what we were doing and ways of doing it better. In the meantime, while we try to find a date we can all attend a meeting, here's a boring and worthy article about my view of the problems we all face and the directions in which we should be looking for answers.

"There are the thoughtless who never doubt.

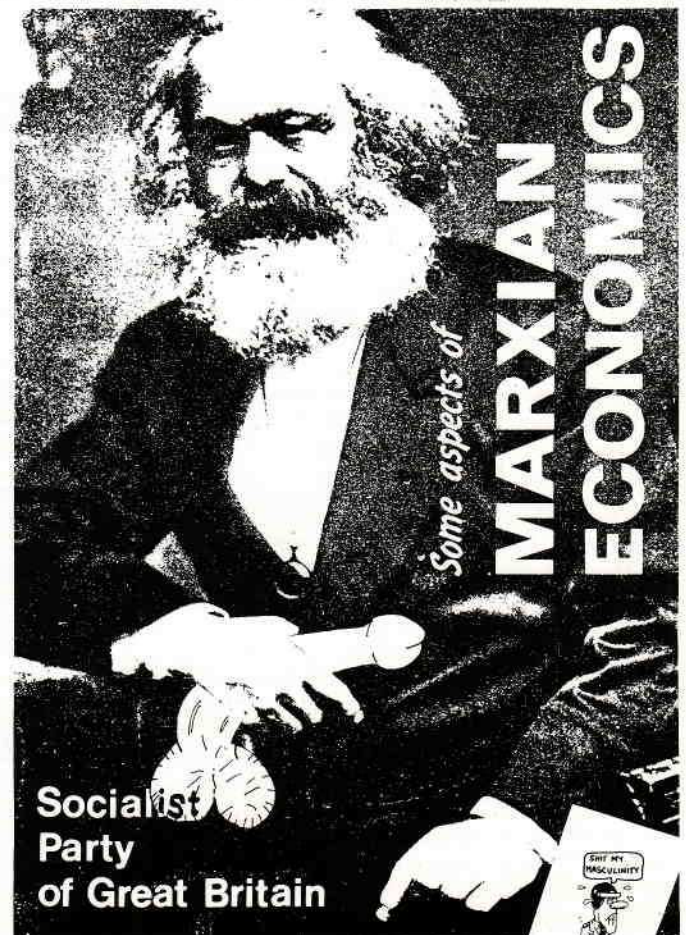
The first problem that has to be faced is that these are not very receptive times for the ideas of would-be revolutionaries. Many take heart from the developing signs of crisis and breakdown all around. Rather fewer seem prepared to admit that crisis and breakdown are, if anything, more evident in the currents of those looking towards revolution, than in the society they wish to revolutionise. Over the last few years we have seen a marked decline in the revolutionary circles in this country (there have of course been exceptions to this rule). Overall there has been a retreat. On the one hand into

the various 'revolutionary traditions' and their defence : Anarchism, Left Communism, Situationism, Councillism etc. On the other hand into forms of 'activism' - a trend which is encouraged by the fact that 'activism' is more attractive than the traditions as people first become radicalised. In this article I'm concentrating on these 'political' currents rather than groups in other areas of struggle, because it is out of these that Playtime has developed. And I've more to say about the 'traditions' than about activism. Activism usually starts from the right idea - that there's a need to struggle - but it's lack of any real sense of direction generally leads to disillusionment. Or it stops tailending the Left (whether by Militant attempts to make leftist strategies successful, or by remaining dependent on left demonstrations, meetings etc. in order to display a Militant alternative) and finishes up joining it.

In order to make what follows clear I should say that for us in Playtime the Left, from the Labour Party to the so-called 'revolutionary' left of Trot's and their 'left shadows', is nothing more than the left wing of capitalism. When we talk of revolutionaries we mean those currents and individuals who see - in however distorted a way - that it's necessary to overthrow capitalism and the alienated social relations of capitalist society. Not just 'reform' or 'restructure' them but destroy them.

"Their digestion is splendid, their judgement is infallible.

In both activist and traditional circles there is a reluctance to confront the reality of this society and the struggle against it. Or to confront the task of putting the case for revolution in terms that are relevant to that reality. Indeed for many militants the retreat back into activism or traditional sects isn't a search for a better understanding, or for a focus for struggle but a search for an identity - a uniform in which to parade their militancy and conceal their doubts. Fair enough, this is a response to a real problem, the social alienation and isolation which has been the great achievement of 'advanced' capitalism. (And of course social alienation can be seen more clearly and isolation become more acute as individuals set themselves consciously against this society). Nevertheless adopting a 'militant' role sidesteps the fact that the 'identities' on offer





in capitalist society are an aspect of the social relations we're supposed to be overthrowing. We don't have the option of 'personal liberation' from these alienated 'identities' while capitalist social relations remain. Unfortunately we do have the option of believing that our 'identities' are 'natural' or 'real' and not a product of the capitalist culture we live in. These sorts of belief make understanding society and what's involved in its overthrow more difficult – however much it does for the self-confidence of the militant holding them.

None of us who produce Playtime would pretend that we haven't made these sorts of mistakes, or that collectively we can offer some magical solution to these problems. There's nothing very remarkable about us and we're certainly not exempt from the difficulties facing all would-be revolutionaries. The most important thing distinguishing us and the groups we feel close to is our attitude to these common problems. We want to confront rather than evade them. We would like to encourage people to maintain a sceptical attitude towards the conventional wisdoms of 'revolutionary' orthodoxy, while remaining prepared to think about things for themselves. In the same way we'd like to encourage people to doubt the capitalist lies (from left and right) about this society – while remaining capable of coming to conclusions and acting on them.

For me the point of producing Playtime is to tackle two of the most serious difficulties facing people like us who want to put written arguments for revolution. (Amongst other forms of struggling that is). Firstly, coming to an understanding of the society we live in and of what's happening. Secondly, attempting to renew the case for revolution in the light of that understanding. To date Playtime's confrontation with the first of these difficulties has been limited to those aspects of society, and the struggle against it, which those of us who started Playtime were interested in or felt competent to write about. Basically this meant a diet of workplace class struggle and general politics. Unfortunately this corresponds to a number of 'traditional' political agenda's. Hardly surprisingly since most of us are 'graduates' or 'drop-outs' from such 'schools of Revolution'. Equally unsurprisingly it has led to Playtime being lumped together with the publications of these traditional sects. Suffice to say here that we see workplace class

struggle as a crucial element in the movement towards revolution and we will continue to write about it. However its not the only form of class struggle, nor is that the only area of struggle. We wish – and intend – to write about other aspects of this society and the struggle against them. Still we are well aware of how inadequately grounded our thinking is in those areas we have looked at in the past – we've no intention of writing a lot of crap about things we know even less about simply in order to demonstrate the 'breadth' of our conception of revolution.

"They don't believe in the facts, they believe  
Only in themselves.

As to "renewing the case for revolution", Playtime's hesitancy has been even more marked. Indeed the word paralysis springs to mind. Here it is necessary to make clear what I mean by renewing the case for revolution. Many militants would agree that we're not doing this – but see the most important aspect as being our 'failure' to express our common political positions as a 'platform' or 'aims and principles', or to give 'form' to our thinking by working one out. Our 'failure' to do so isn't some oversight. We don't see platform touting as very useful (except in political competition with traditional sects – which doesn't interest us much). Its true that platforms – in the sense of a concise statement of the basic level of common understanding between revolutionaries – do have a limited role. But they are not a way of short-cutting necessary debate. The problem today is that the basic agreement and understanding necessary for debate to take place (that is, understanding and agreement about terms – what to disagree about – not about conclusions), doesn't exist in an active, living form between revolutionaries. At best platforms are a limited expression of the depth of debate between those people who believe that the only solution to the horrors of this society lies in its overthrow – in revolution. In times like today when what debate exists is characterised by lack of depth what function do platforms have?

They become a substitute for debate as militants continue working 'traditional' theoretical machinery – incorporating the 'dead labour' of past generations of revolutionaries. (And not always the distant past – 'Situationism' for example, or the 'Left Communism' that developed in the early Seventies from the 'bolshhevizing' of various councillist, luxumburgist or 'rev. socialist' fragments.) Where not actually clapped out this 'machinery' produces as much low quality rubbish as it does usable insights into this society and the struggle against it. And sorting out the gold from the dross is frequently more effort than it's worth. Worse still however, it is used as a shortcut to understanding society rather than as a set of ideas to be tested against reality in struggle. It becomes a way of evading the problems that reality faces would be revolutionaries with.

"When it comes to the point the facts must go by the board.

Renewing the case for revolution today means re-establishing an active debate about this society and the need for its overthrow. Obviously that will be done in reference to what has been done in the past (how else?). But it will not substitute past theorising for present activity.

Some revolutionaries are aware of this but argue that we can't afford the 'luxury' of abstract debate. Today, they argue, there aren't enough of us – the need is for 'basic propaganda' to 'win' people to revolutionary 'positions'. When we have the 'numbers' we can sustain a debate. This tends to presuppose that 'we' (however defined) will be doing the debating, and doing so in order to improve our presentation to 'The Class' who somehow exist 'out there'. But even ignoring this aspect I believe it stands things on their head. Part of the reason there are so few of 'us' is because the so-called 'basic propaganda' is so badly put. And the 'theory' which should assist in producing it largely lacks substance. In contrast to the left, who try to conceal a 'hidden agenda' of counter-revolutionary aims behind their words, most 'revolutionary' propaganda is incoherent in its own terms and hides no agenda at all. Instead it brandishes a tired collection of catchphrases and proverbs

from safely behind the battlements of one of the traditions.

“Their patience with themselves is boundless.

I'm not suggesting that the traditions are all alike, or equally useless – some are much worse than others, and traditional groups all adopt different (mistaken) strategies for dealing with the same (real) problems. For some traditionalists the job of working out ideas – ‘developing theory’ – becomes a matter of achieving political consistency within one of the traditions. Becoming the ‘real’ anarchism, or left communism etc etc. This sort of ‘consistency’ is always based on turning one or two ‘fundamental’ ideas into eternal truths, existing outside of history or struggle. It's either ‘developed’ at the expense of any revolutionary spirit, or of contact with reality.

For other militants ‘developing theory’ means creating a ‘new’ tradition. Normally this means spicing up leftist or liberal ‘common-sense’ with some borrowings from revolutionary debate, and a lot of intellectual elitism. (As can be seen in some forms of ‘Autonomism’ and ‘Situationism’ (sic.)) Where the ‘old’ traditions read every struggle in terms of the traditional vanguards, the ‘new’ traditions look everywhere for new vanguards and forms of struggle. Lastly there are the ‘centre parties’ which “draw on the best elements of the different traditions”. As the history of such attempts demonstrates this usually flounders into lack of depth and conservatism held together by the political skills of leading cadres. (As can be seen in seventies style ‘libertarian communism’, or the history of the groups around Guy Aldred – or if those examples mean nothing the Liberal/SDP Alliance.)

“To arguments they listen with the ear of a police spy.

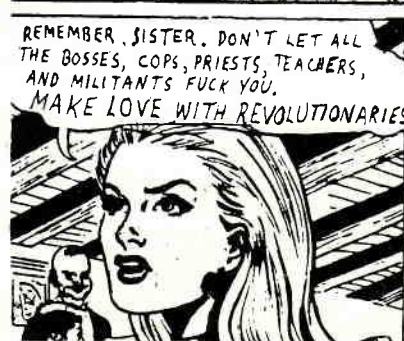
In criticising the traditions I don't want to be misunderstood. They only have a disproportionate influence today because the shrinking of wider ‘revolutionary’ currents leaves few alternatives outside activist groupings. And these have only shallow ‘political’ ideas – despite their being drawn, often enough, from a more embracing sense of what's wrong with society. This sort of ‘global’ viewpoint on the misery of life under capitalism – one lacking any detailed understanding of the parts making up the whole – is common among people first becoming aware of alternative ideas and possibilities for activity to those normally on offer. Consequently they are often more receptive to radical ideas than militants in the traditions, who have a vested interest in not devaluing the political capital its taken them so long to accumulate. (Mind you, Globalism can become a tradition in its own right – see for example the authors of Stop the City leaflets). It's because they have a broader view and are open to new ideas that the so called ‘masses’ invariably lead the politicians and ‘revolutionaries’ at the start of any mass struggle. The traditions are attractive because they appear to offer the sort of detailed knowledge of the ‘parts’ of society that militants lack. The price of entering these political ‘public schools’ is the need to accept the narrow perspectives demanded by the traditions ‘academics’ in order to fit in. For most people that means the loss of the ‘naive utopianism’ – the sense of what's wrong with society on the grand scale – which brought them there in the first place. And those who eventually graduate or drop out have to unlearn the sectarian ways of thinking and arguing, and the one dimensional divisions into different and apparently unconnected ‘subjects’ and specialisations. (Playtime is a good example of the problem). As fewer and fewer militants are enrolling in sects today its not surprising that hardly any make it back out except as isolated individuals in the post-political wilderness. The argument that this is an inevitable situation and that there is no alternative to the sects is like pointing to radicalised ex-catholics as proof of the ‘objectively progressive role’ of the Vatican.

The decline of the ‘revolutionary’ currents isn't because there is any less struggle going on in society. Struggle is fundamental to capitalist society because capital cannot reconcile its own needs and goals to the material circumstances it dominates – there are no permanent gains possible on either side of the class struggle. The reverses of recent years have helped

produce a situation where on the one hand struggles are consistently failing to break out of their specific situations, and on the other hand amongst proletarians there is no widespread sense of the possibility of fundamental change which might be ignited by struggle. Needless to say these two factors tend to reinforce one another. Obviously the present situation will not last forever – equally obviously things might get a lot worse before getting better. It is always important to try to understand the implications of the general situation for our activity – as it becomes more and more difficult to do so in isolation (even within isolated groups) the traditions come into their own.

“The thoughtless who never doubt  
Meet the thoughtful who never act.

People respond to traditional arguments and align themselves in sects because they do reflect in a distorted way the desire for a more fundamental understanding of society, or for a more fruitful focus for activity. I certainly don't criticise people for turning to the traditions in the absence of anything better – having done it myself I've every sympathy with them. Nor am I suggesting that the traditions are 100% counter-revolutionary. Even the worst of them are as ineffective in that direction as any other. They do offer space within which individuals can develop their understanding of this society and of revolutionary opposition to it, a space within which they can come to terms with the change in attitudes towards themselves, the people they know and their material circumstances, which the adoption of a revolutionary perspective makes inevitable. However the lessons are as often learnt in reaction against the sect, as they are taught directly by it. For most people, participation in ‘political’ groupings provides a crash course in how alienated political relations really are. And by their nature the traditions set restrictive limits to how far people can come to terms with ‘being’ a revolutionary in a non-revolutionary situation, and also actively perpetuate useless and counter-productive ways of thinking and acting. The problems they purport to address are real problems. They can all be boiled down to the two eternal arguments over the development of understanding and the organisation of struggle. Or in the language of traditionalism ‘building the organisation’ and ‘defending the programme’ – or vice versa.



THE SPIRIT OF  
LOUISE & MICHEL  
%  
POINT-BLANK!  
P.O. BOX 2233  
STATION A  
BERKELEY, CA



“They doubt, not in order to come to a decision  
But to avoid a decision.

So if these are real problems what alternative solution does Playtime offer? No solution at all? That's almost right. What links us as far as I am concerned is the conviction that while capitalist society or alienated social relations exist solutions to these problems can only be temporary and achieved in practise. They arise from specific situations and in specific struggles and the response to them. They cannot outlive them except as memory of struggle, as conclusions drawn from it, and as strengthened determination to continue struggling. As Joe Jacobs put it writing about organisation:

“To think we can establish, even in general terms, a set of objectives/principles which will be a basis for a real “revolutionary organisation” is an illusion. We can and do combine for the realisation of specific immediate projects, and we are obliged to do so. We can and do have ideas/visions concerning the long term future: these change according to the results of current and resulting actions and so on (...). It follows that organisations cannot be established and frozen for very long. They change split or liquidate. As we try to create effective organisation, we wonder why “organisation” is always on the agenda....”

And it could be added, as we try to develop effective understanding, we wonder why “theory” is always “on the agenda.” We don't see Playtime as having a solution but as having a task – to contribute to the collective struggle against this society by contributing to the active debate about it.

The fundamental criticism of the traditions is that they claim to have or to offer permanent solutions to these problems – though this expresses itself in different ways. As I've said before there are no permanent gains to be won in struggle within capitalist society. Those who claim that The(ir) ‘organisation’ or The(ir) ‘theory’ are permanent gains won by The(ir) ‘class’ are perhaps the worst reformists of all.

“Their heads they use only for shaking.

However I don't want to be misunderstood as arguing that the traditions or activism are the ‘enemy within’, or the main problem facing revolutionaries. Nor is our principal task exposing them. Those would, after all, be entirely traditional attitudes. Bordiga (a dead revolutionary) argued that the worst product of Fascism was Anti-Fascism, because it substituted an alliance of ‘progressive forces’ (including ‘progressive’ ‘democratic’ capitalists) against one form of capitalist society, for a revolutionary attack on capitalism as a whole. ‘Anti-sectarianism’ (for example anti-marxism, anti-anarchism, even anti-leftism) is only the feeble echo of anti-fascism in revolutionary circles.

The main enemy we face is the world capitalist system and the alienated, competitive and hierarchical institutions and social relations, which it draws its strength from and perpetuates. The main task for ‘us’ is struggling to advance the movement to destroy it. If the sects and traditions are at worst alienated institutions adapted to capitalist reality, they are still no more central to the task of overthrowing the capitalist state, than are bicycle co-operatives in the task of overthrowing the capitalist economy. They will naturally be expropriated of what is of use, however the main battles will be fought elsewhere.

“With anxious faces they warn the crews of sinking ships  
That water is dangerous.

Advancing the case for revolution is something that can only be done collectively. That doesn't just mean by a group rather than individuals. No person or group of people has sufficient inherent wisdom – or more importantly sufficient understanding of all aspects of society to develop the revolutionary case in isolation. Beyond a certain level ideas can only develop in discussion with others and by taking account of similar discussions elsewhere – wherever they may happen to take

place. (That includes the sensible aspects of the traditions of course – but also means actively listening to what's happening outside them. It also means listening to what is actually said and trying to understand what is meant by it – without becoming so polite that you don't make your own views clear). For those overwhelmed by the size of this task traditions offer an easy approach to the problem (For a start off by prioritising ‘politics’ or ‘economics’ as the ‘real’ problem), and market easy package deals of ideas and activities. (This doesn't prevent them, like producers of luxury goods anywhere, from disparaging the cheapness and extra facilities of mass-produced package deal leftism. Leftism returns the insult from the same analogy by calling them petty-bourgeois and meaning home-workers and craftsmen rather than middle-managers).

Even where people are critical of the traditional package deal many persist in working ‘within the tradition’ in the hope of reforming it (the ‘if only we could kick out the wankers’ strategy), or more realistically of meeting like minded individuals. Exactly the same arguments used by leftists to justify attempts to ‘use’ or ‘reform’ capitalist unions or parties or institutions. To solve the problem of getting ideas across they find ways to say what they ‘really mean’ using the jargon and catch-phrases of the tradition in question. As far as we are concerned this adds to the problem of understanding what they really mean.

“Beneath the murderer's axe

They ask themselves if he isn't human too.

Obvious examples are the way the terms ‘intervention’ and ‘direct action’ have been rendered quite meaningless by their use to describe different – and frequently contradictory – things. To the point that the only meaning they now retain is a political one – as coinage in the competition to expand markets between rival sects inside the traditions, and between the different ‘ideological’ blocs themselves. Since these buzz words are used either without explanation – or with a form of explanation which has itself worn shiny from overuse – it does little but baffle and irritate non-initiates.

More common still today, as even the largest sects are forced

“The proletariat must build up its own “bodies of armed men”, its own police force, army, prisons etc. with which to break the resistance of the classes who oppose communism . . . .”

### Political Platform

“ . . . . the specialist bodies such as police and red army, although controlled by delegates from the councils, must have a permanent existence outside the workers councils.”

“The important positions of power must be filled by clear sighted and dedicated communists. These people will be democratically elected from the soviets and, like all delegated soviet deputies, be subject to recall.”

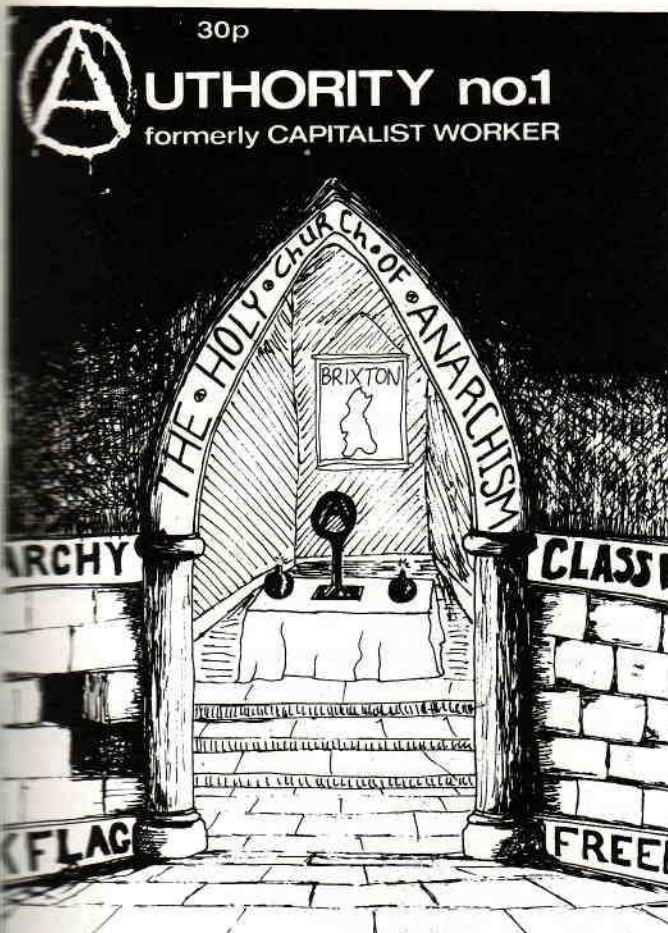


“When all of humanity has been integrated into the proletariat the basis for separate class interests will no longer exist, and the special bodies of armed men, who enforce the will of the proletariat against the will of other classes, will be superfluous. Then the management of things will replace the management of men.”

Internationalist

Communist

Organisation



30p

**A** **THORITY no.1**  
formerly CAPITALIST WORKER

to take account of their insignificance, are attempts to find ways of saying 'what we mean' using the jargon thrown up by capitalist politics - because this is terminology people are familiar with'. An obvious example which has interested us is 'democracy'. This sort of usage is liable to cause even greater confusion than unexplained or unintelligible jargon - not least in the minds of the militants who adopt it. I can understand why people do it - its perfectly possible to 'use' words to convey something beyond what is normally intended. At the basic level that's what allows the creation of meaning at all. Its easiest in conversation where there is the additional dimension of vocal emphasis, tone of voice etc - and the possibility of asking whats meant when you don't understand. Its much more difficult on paper - demanding not just a common language and culture but a clear sense on the part of the writer of who he is writing for. But in all cases it presupposes that the speaker or writer has a reasonably clear idea of what they are trying to say. And in practise this is something the revolutionaries could claim today (we make no claims at all for ourselves).

"Whispering something about the situation not yet being clarified, they go to bed.

Instead jargon and rhetoric is used to conceal lack of understanding. The result is that groups finish up relying on one or two 'theoretical leaders' to provide the rest with 'fast food' arguments and styles of franchising them to 'the class'. Its the 'theoretical king' approach to politics: "Cn y rd ths sign? F so a sht ht Rvltny n bld a bg rptn." 'Collective' sets of arguments and parables are developed, which are flourished like magic beads, but which don't thread together into a connected understanding of society and revolution. Instead they all around loose in the mouths of militants producing a confusion of intellectual motion and a misty sense of having a 'complete' explanation on the tip of the tongue. I hope I've said enough to make it clear that the answer to this is not throwing them together into programmatic rosaries.

Language isn't jargon-free of course, and never will be. The difference is that we do actively question our own use of it (if only by putting inverted comma's 'around' it - as 'you might have noticed'). And we genuinely want you lot to

do the same. Question it that is, not use comma's. And if you're interested but don't understand something challenge us to explain - if we can.

"Their only action is to vacillate.

If I've been talking a lot about jargon and theory and debate its because I'm talking after all about the problems of producing a magazine. Its perhaps worth saying however that we don't see 'theory' or 'discussion' as a precondition or substitute for 'struggle'. Debate is a crucial element in struggle - on its own its not just pointless, it is impossible. Explosive social struggles not only can but will occur without 'organisations' having given a lead. But unless they take place in the context of a sense of where they are going and how, beyond the level of gut instincts and reactions; in other words, unless they help develop an active debate which involves the mass of the participants because it addresses their experiences and sense of possibilities - a debate moreover expressed in deeds as well as words - then the sort of revolution we 'revolutionaries' want to see will not occur. Those of us who know now that we want to see, and help make, revolution have to be active in waging struggle and debate. But revolutionaries aren't specialists who can distance themselves from 'basic' struggle in order to develop advanced insights.

"Their favourite phrase is : not yet ripe for discussion."

The basic struggle for anyone who hates this society starts where they are - however insignificant or unrewarding that might seem to be. The militant with a solution to every problem but their own is only the other side of the coin from the comfortably placed individual who looks 'elsewhere' for struggle because that doesn't threaten that comfort. At the basic level struggle takes specific forms and demands specific responses. But once its understood that your own struggle relates to the other struggles in this society - and that only attacking the causes of problems rather than their effects on us will make any real difference - it becomes necessary to work out how struggles are linked and how they are divided. Only with some sense of that does talk of linking up with others struggling in different circumstances have any meaning. That in turn means developing some understanding of this society. To develop very far it means discussing with other like-minded if not necessarily like-situated people, to go further it must take account of what other groups and individuals are saying. To make any significant impact on events it must go beyond this to developing an active debate amongst those struggling against this society who see the need for nothing short of its destruction and the collective creation of a better one.

Playtimes only function in this as far as I am concerned is to contribute to what debate there is by making our own views known, and providing a focus for us to develop them. But in isolation from attempts by others to do the same we can go no further than that - indeed its impossible that we could sustain our efforts without ourselves succumbing to the half measures and easy solutions I've been criticising.

What then do we want you to do? We want you to struggle if you are not doing so, and to make what you are doing known to other people. If you still have time and want to write stuff for Playtime great - but we'd be even more pleased to see more papers starting up. And not necessarily involving the amount of resources and fluency in advanced theory that we try to look as if we have. We'd obviously love to discuss our ideas with other people - but by debate we don't mean encouraging people to write to us so we can criticise their 'incorrect thought'. However we would like to know what you think of Playtime - even if its just telling us we're a load of rubbish. And of course if you want to help our finances by taking a subscription or buying extra copies . . .

"But the most beautiful of all doubts

Is when the downtrodden and despondent raise their heads and

Stop believing in the strength Of their oppressors."

(Brecht)

# What IS Workers Playtime stand

Poor old *Workers Playtime* ! The miners' strike has certainly made you come clean. The latter-day Bolsheviks can carry on selling papers, holding meetings, trying to recruit miners to The Party, no matter whether the miners lose because the NUM gets what it wants, or lose because the NCB and strictly non-interfering friends get what they want. Does it matter to Militant that their call for a 24-hour general strike was passed by? Or to the WRP that the TUC still hasn't got round to organising the indefinite General Strike? Building the Party, fighting for Marxism in the Labour Movement goes on regardless. The ICC can develop the 'political avant-garde of the class'; the CWO can try to set up their first 'communist kernel' in the workplace. The RCP, which got the 'wrong' answer to the ballot question in trying so hard to be different, has given up on the miners who "remain unconvinced by our approach" : now the RCP can concentrate on Preparing for Power. It seems that Workers Playtime have given up on the miners as well, but with no consolation in party-building : or perhaps the competition to invent a new name for a 'Leftist Communist Party' isn't just a dig at Wildcat after all!

The arguments of the first part of Playtime's editorial are :

1. The NUM controls the strike; only a minority of strikers are involved actively.
2. A face-saving (Scargill's face?) sell-out will be achieved (at best?) *if nothing changes*. Pits will close in exchange for better wages, early retirement, shorter hours, or some such package.
3. To get something "better" (unspecified), there needs to be
  - a) a more "solid" strike,
  - b) an extension of the strike to other workers and
  - c) blacking of coal movements by transport drivers.
4. In the meantime, the miners and their families must be kept going through food and money collections which go to them directly.
5. "And the growing anger of strikers must be turned in a practical direction. Direct links must be forged directly between militant pits and regions, and within mining communities, so that when one-off closures restart after the strike ends, miners in the affected pits have a solidly-based confidence in their ability to resist closure, or simply sell jobs as dearly as possible."

Let's look at all this. Does the NUM control the Hit Squads? Does it control all the support groups and relief funds? Does it

organise the sabotage? Patently not. The NUM controls the negotiations, controls the picketing money, is trying to control food and money collections. It threatened to discipline and fine (! - after 24 weeks on strike) miners who threw bricks at the police at Gascoigne Wood. The miners ignored that threat : does the NUM control them? If the strike is merely not going to work, does the NUM even control it in the sense that it can get a return to work? Playtime mentions that some miners have no intention of being starved back, but of fighting "to the finish" : what is the 'finish' - the face-saving sell-out? communism? or are the miners in Playtime's view only capable of the former?

How can the miners be defeated? Would it be a defeat for the miners to sit it out endlessly and never go back? That is the question that arises if you assume "nothing changes". For Scargill to sell a face-saver, a *lot* has to change. The NCB is already offering large sums to pack it in. The state shows no inclination to back down at all. The 'drift back to work' is the only way this strike looks like ending - which is precisely why striking miners have directed such violence at those men going in in the North East, Scotland and Yorkshire (and at NCB property) to put a stop to this 'drift'. That is precisely why the state has devoted such resources, physical and financial, to get miners to work, even to get one man into a pit as a symbol.

Calling for a "more solid strike" implies that in some way working miners have to be persuaded (or forced) out. Picketing has failed. On May 2nd, 10,000 Yorkshire miners failed to stop 200 men working at Harworth in North Nottinghamshire. What ratio of striking miners to working miners would have succeeded? There is simply no way those scab miners will come out. There is no persuasion possible now. If they'd had a national ballot and lost they'd probably have demanded a raffle, and if they'd lost that ... All the rationality of capitalism is with them - and an argument from Playtime (see below). The strike is as solid as it can be.

Until it's clear what they're being asked to support, calls to other workers to 'extend' the strike are empty. The call for class solidarity regardless of the issues only goes so far (a lot of dockers, some railway workers, not a lot of steelworkers.) If the strike's about a sectional interest, then for the steelworker it's fair game to be against steelworks closing. All six remaining Gwent pits depend on Llanwern steelworks - it's their sole customer. The South Wales NUM has deliberately avoided any serious picketing of Llanwern or the coke convoys from Port

## On our heads or on our ear?

Our editorial in the last issue was the object of a good deal of debate and rancour between Playmates. Since it appeared it has been the subject of a lot more. Your open letter to us about it was doubly welcome. Its helped us to reach conclusions about what we see as the deficiencies of the editorial. But it also indicated to us that there was somebody who took what we wrote seriously enough to take it apart.

Your criticisms relate to our arguments about the miners strike on the one hand, and to our reasons for producing Playtime at all on the other. I'll deal with these two things separately - first with your criticisms of the editorials arguments.

You summarise us as saying that "The NUM controls the strike; only a minority of the strikers are involved actively",

and ask whether we are suggesting the NUM controls the initiatives that have come from the strikers and their families and communities. As you say, patently not. In the editorial we only rather briefly listed the militant initiatives which have marked the strike. Not simply the most militant actions but the determination and spirit shown by over 100,000 miners striking for nine months with the hardship and resistance to State violence that has entailed, and the resourcefulness and courage it has demanded. Of course the NUM doesn't control the initiatives of the strikers - it can only attempt to channel them for its own ends.

That has been the story of the strike from day one. Scargill and the 'militant' faction in the NUM leadership wanted a national strike for their own ends. They were unable to get a 'democratic' mandate for one in a series of votes over the last couple of

Robot beyond a few minor push and shoves with the police so some miners can let off steam. As long as the miners strike is an 'industrial action', it is no use expecting other workers to strike for months on end - and most workers know that one-way sympathy strikes are token, ineffective and a stupid way to get money.

The two sentences quoted above as point 5 really are quite suitable. From discussing the strike as it is, Playtime now says 'the strike is over'. But, says Playtime, while this strike is

still on, strikers *must* turn their "growing anger", not to winning this strike (in whatever terms they might see winning), but to preparing themselves for a struggle *after* this strike. The 'practical' forging of links is not for any immediate ends, but to be kept in reserve for the next struggle. And for what specific struggle "must" the miners do this? Why, to fight the next one-off pit closure! Voices off-stage: "But this strike started with the one-off closure of Cortonwood." Absolutely. This strike here and now, *this* concrete struggle which is proving so unsatisfactory to so many political groups, is to resist closures. If this battle is lost (i.e., pit closures continue), where will the "solidly based confidence" come from? From having turned "growing anger" into forging direct links? Either this "practical direction" will have failed in *this* strike, or won't even have been tried!

But that's not all. If this 'practical direction' fails to stop a pit closure next year or whenever, it will apparently help miners to "sell the jobs as dearly as possible". Well, a lot of cracked heads and empty stomachs had to be gone through to get to this. The jobs can be sold *now*. The NCB has the money on the table for that, and many miners have got their eyes on it. There's no need to struggle to sell the jobs: why go through a long, costly strike just for that? It's an argument for the scabs. Their calculation is to carry on working and get their wages: if their pit stays open, all well and good, they've kept their jobs; if their pit closes, they'll take the money. Who'll sell the jobs "as dearly as possible"? The same people who've been selling them for years - the unions, in this case the NUM. In all honesty you ought to come right out and say "Miners, you can't win: sell your jobs, accept pit closures!". That is the real message of your editorial.

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P.S. One last point. "And the growing anger of strikers must be turned in a practical direction." How is this 'growing anger' showing itself at the moment? Attacks on NCB property, attacks on scab transport firms, throwing bricks and stones at the police, attacks on police stations, organising hit squads and a lot more besides. But for Workers Playtime all this is an *impractical* direction: miners must turn away from all this and instead forge links with each other. This is very reminiscent of the objections raised by the left to the rioters in 1981: rioting, looting, attacking the police etc., are all impractical, mere 'anger'; demanding jobs, joining The Party, voting Labour (reading Workers Playtime?) etc., were practical.



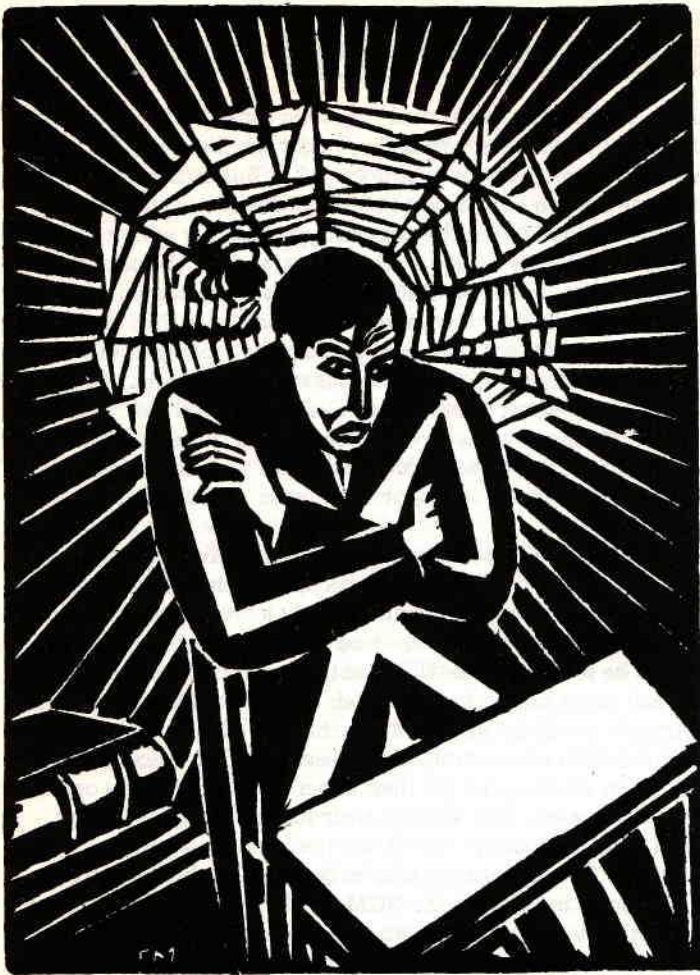
We received this response to the editorial in our last issue (Aug '84) shortly after it appeared, and this reply was written to it in December when we expected this issue to come out. Obviously both the criticism's by Scorcher Publications and our reply are a bit out of date. We decided to publish them anyway. Scorcher Publications can be contacted at Box 56, 1-0-8 Bookshop, 108 Salisbury Road, Cardiff.

The present strike came about through the initiative of the strikers themselves. They responded to the threat to their jobs and communities posed not just by the announcement of specific closures (Cortonwood etc) but by the announcement of Scargill's future plans. For the strikers the issue is clear - that must be stopped.

The language used by both the strikers and the NUM is the same what is meant by it is rather different. The strikers are not merely interested in the 'Plan for Coal' but in what Scargill's plan means for the "future of the industry" in their own terms. The 'militant' NUM leadership by contrast are interested in "defending our members jobs and communities" by ensuring the place of the NUM in determining the future of the mining industry in Britain". The strikers see the need for a national strike because no one pit or even region

can stop the national plan for closures. Scargill and co. see the need for a national strike because the argument about the future role of the NUM can't be settled at the level of any individual struggle - (at the level of 'isolated' closures, specific economic arguments, actual hardship and community devastation etc). It can only be won by making the political price of the NCB plans too high for the NCB & the Government. In those circumstances a new 'accommodation' with the union over the conduct of future industry-wide negotiations would be necessary. Is this what the strikers are after? We think not.

We don't think there would be any disagreement between us about the aims of the strikers and the NUM being different. But if that is the case an obvious question raises itself. Whose aims are currently put forward? More exactly, since as long as



unions and workers co-exist it will never be a completely black and white distinction, whose aims are predominantly at stake. We don't believe that there could be much doubt about the answer when we produced the last issue or now. It is the NUM's. The strikers have certainly forced the NUM to move in directions it wouldn't have chosen. But they are not determining the direction of the strike – and not therefore its goal. At the moment.

You ask "...does the NUM even control (the strike) in the sense that it can get a return to work." As things stand it would be very difficult to 'sell' a sell-out in the militant regions (S.Wales, Yorkshire, Kent etc). However it was our gloomy conviction then – and events have if anything reinforced it – that if a new round of talks agreed a formula which both the NUM national leadership and the delegate conference could accept, they would be able to get a majority return to work nationally. It would be bitterly resisted by a minority in all areas – perhaps a majority in some – but once the strike was no longer national that resistance could be isolated and either defused or crushed. Its not as if the precedents don't exist. The NCB are not currently refusing to negotiate because of any conviction that the NUM would be unable to police an agreement.

In the last week we have seen the delegate conference throw out a National Executive motion on strategy towards the receivership as too moderate. If that indicates the difficulties the 'militant' national leadership face it doesn't alter our belief that any deal Scargill puts his name to will probably be accepted by the delegate conference.

However, as yet neither victory nor defeat (or if you prefer 'victory' or 'defeat'), are on the horizon. What we actually wrote was that "the overall direction and control of the

strike remains firmly in the hands of the NUM executive, and the majority of the strikers are not actively involved". It would perhaps have been clearer as to what we meant if these statements had been put in the correct order. It is because the majority of the strikers are not actively involved that the strike remains in the hands of the NUM. You don't challenge our assertion that the majority of strikers are not actively involved – in other words active in picketing beyond their own pits (many not even that), in seeking practical support from relevant groups of workers, even in collecting money; let alone in the encouraging instances of a more militant resistance to NCB manoeuvres, state violence and treachery in their own ranks. There are of course considerable differences between regions in this respect – that is part of the problem. For us that lack of active involvement by a large number of the strikers is the most important element in determining 'victory' or 'defeat'.

A little further on you read our argument that "for anything better than a face-saving sell out to be achieved the strike would need to become more solid..." as meaning that working miners should be picketed out. As you rightly say this (as opposed to trying to prevent a drift back) is wasted effort. Its what we said ourselves in the issue before last. By "more solid" we simply meant the need for more active participation, to give the strike more bite. It could of course have been put more clearly.

You paraphrase us as saying "...some miners have no intention of being starved back, but of fighting "to the finish"..."and ask "what is the 'finish' – the face-saving sell out? communism? or are the miners in Playtime's view only capable of the former?". As you imply communism isn't (unfortunately) on the agenda. Except of course in the somewhat abstract sense that every struggle since 1848/1871/1914 (delete as appropriate) has posed the question of 'socialism or barbarism' blah, blah, blah . . . . . We are certainly not suggesting that a face-saving sell out is the only possible alternative. There are at least two clear alternatives – clear defeat of the strikers and clear defeat of the Government. And the term sell-out covers a broad range of options with greater or lesser degrees of defeat for either the NCB or NUM. What we are saying is that unless the strikers take the direction of the strike in their own hands a deal along the lines sought by the NUM is the best prospect they could hope for.

By direction we don't just mean running the strike – in material terms the strikers are running the strike and have done so from the start – we mean determining by their actions the future course of the strike.

You say "The 'drift back to work' is the only way this strike looks like ending" and "The state shows no inclination to back down at all". But the reason there hasn't been a sell-out so far isn't because of the pressure of the strikers on the NUM, or because of Government intransigence. Obviously those are important factors, but the determining element remains the fact that the hardline factions in charge of the NUM and the NCB haven't caved in or lost control of their respective executives. Despite rumblings in both camps, and attempts in both cases to foment divisions from outside. And despite discontent with their performance expressed (as yet privately) by a minority within both Government and strikers.

At this level what there is to be 'won' remains what is on the negotiating table. On neither side have the legs been kicked over or sawn through. Both leading factions are genuinely hardline and both have staked too much to back down unless forced by events or undermined. Its uncommon after many years of dominant 'consensus' unionism to see a genuinely 'militant' hardline national union leadership. (Hence the difficulty some 'revolutionaries' have in criticising it for what it is and does,

and the ease with which others have actually supported it.) This definition ('hardline' 'genuine militancy' etc) obviously begs a full discussion of what's involved - but the reality so defined isn't one of the points at issue between us as far as we can see. More familiar is the hardline management style displayed by the leading faction in the NCB - not just McGregors own past in British Steel, but Michael Edwardes and his successors at British Leyland, or in a different way the 'businesslike' management introduced at British Telecom to prepare for privatisation. All were put in by Government as a response to the effects of economic crisis and the needs of state economic policy. The security of the regime at BL reflects the terminal state of the company when Edwardes took over and the crisis in world car production. The hardline approach by McGregor & co. in the NCB reflects the crucial importance of restructuring the coal industry for state directed energy supply policy. But 'soft' or 'hard' all are just a choice by the Government of the day as to the appropriate tool for carrying out the same job - 'motivating and streamlining the parallel bureaucracies of middle management and union, and breaking entrenched workers power, so that these state controlled monopolies can cut costs and respond to changed demand.

Amongst other things the miners strike is significant as the first industry-wide struggle with hardline factions in charge of the respective union and management. So far neither has lost control to the forces pressuring them from behind. At the moment the principle to be settled isn't the "Government's right to govern" or the expression of working class power. (Perhaps in light of your criticisms we should emphasise that we don't see class power as something which is only expressed through revolution, but as one side of the class opposition that is fundamental to capitalism). The strike certainly raises these questions to a degree no strike has since the "winter of discontent". But so far they have only been raised negatively, as unfulfilled potential, and they are not - as yet - the issue at stake. That is still the question of how the coal industry is to be managed. In other words how 'capitalist realities' are going to be applied - and how much say the NUM has in that process. After nine months of striking the questions are still how many pits? Which pits? On what basis? On what terms?

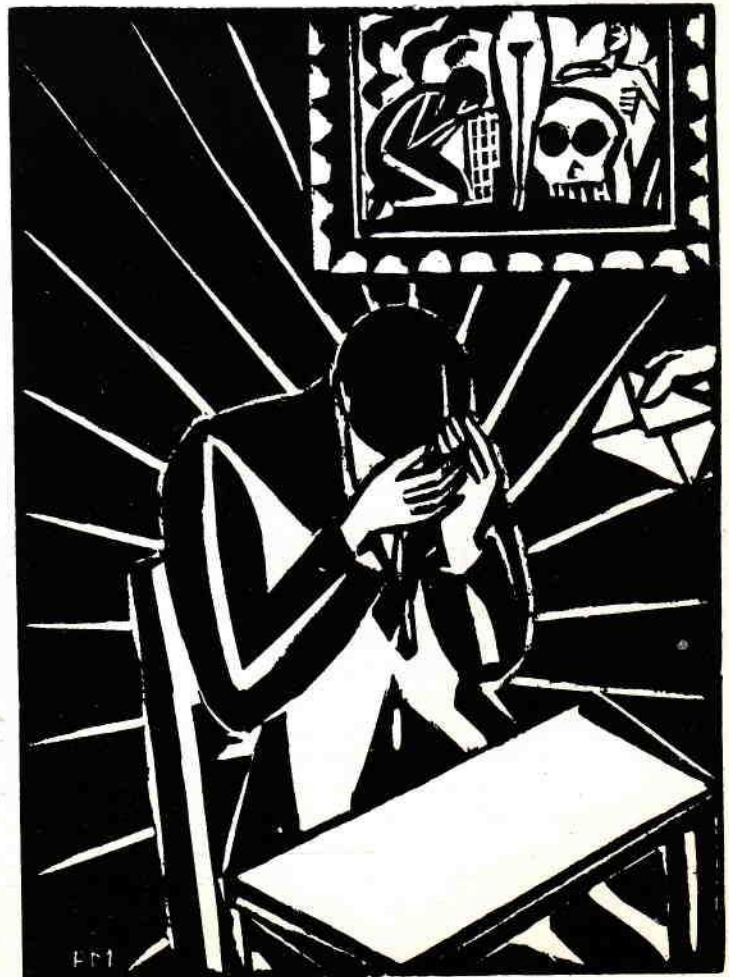
The process of democratic negotiation between the NUM & NCB is currently deadlocked. The TUC "initiative" seems to be heading nowhere in a transparently desperate attempt to rebuild TUC credibility amongst its 'moderate' constituency. The Government has gambled everything on the strike crumbling sufficiently (in numbers or spirit) before February, when coal stocks start to run below the level needed to maintain the NCB's so far entirely successful crisis containment strategy. At that point large scale coal movements and extra generating capacity from power stations currently running at low levels will be necessary. The Government clearly hope the strike will be sufficiently weakened by then to police these movements without using politically unacceptable levels of state violence, especially if that is combined with disruption to electricity supply in practise. For the moment they are not sitting still - wherever possible the screws are slowly being put on the NUM leadership which is clearly seen as more of a problem in ending the strike than the activities of the strikers. However it is not necessary for the Government to escalate things at the moment - merely to attempt to contain them. (Indeed they have a positive interest in not creating the sort of incidents that might fuel resistance or sympathy in support of the strike, which has to be balanced against the need to police existing resistance and break the will to struggle).

The NUM's current interest is in holding the strike 'solid' in every sense. Given the relative passivity in the ranks of 'their' strikers it's necessary to organise (largely symbolic and useless) continuing initiatives to maintain a basic momentum of activity,

alongside the propaganda aimed at keeping morale high and ensuring it's channeled towards the 'correct' goals. In addition efforts to prevent 'drift back' have to be made. The aim is to keep resistance ticking over until the crucially important time when coal stocks run down. Similarly the propaganda efforts put into calling for 'Industrial Action' in support by other 'trade unionists' are clearly less calculated at producing results now than in creating a climate in which direct appeals will bear fruit in practise, when the 'real battle' starts on the picket lines in a month or two. This is the most the NUM leadership can do in support of their strategy since for them to appeal directly to other groups of workers beyond making public speeches would breach the democratic etiquette amongst trade unions - one set of 'laws' the NUM has no intention of flouting. For the strikers however this clearly cannot be enough unless they are prepared to accept what the NUM wants as 'victory'.

The NUM is committed to a 'last battle' when coal stocks run down to the point where targets for activity (large coal movements - power stations coming back on to the grid) are created. This is certainly the only chance for a "union led victory" along the lines of 1972 which might force the NCB to settle. If the strikers want more than that they will have to act on their own initiative. Indeed its arguable that they would have to do so to make the NUM's risky 'all or nothing' strategy work.

Take first the question of 'forging links' with other workers. The NUM leadership making speeches clearly isn't enough. We have argued from the start that - as in any strike - the only effective way of calling on solidarity is for the strikers to identify the relevant groups of workers (those whose action would make the strike bite) and approach them directly. The importance of this is only underlined by the shyness and reluctance strikers generally display about doing this. (Its always



"what the union should be doing" when in most circumstances its the last thing the union wants – and where it does coincide with their ambitions is generally beyond their power to achieve.) That reluctance by strikers and the difficulties it reflects says more about the changed composition and consciousness of the working class than any intellectual sounding generalisations from us about the 'destruction of working class community' etc.

We agree entirely with your paragraph about calls to extend the strike being empty unless its clear to other workers what they're being asked to support. But it was never our intention to suggest that this could be done usefully through public 'calls' or 'appeals'. Such calls (particularly from strikers as opposed to unions) have a limited role in pointing out to people that class solidarity is at issue. But in practical terms they must be regarded as secondary to direct approaches. And at that level it is not a matter of 'class-unifying demands' but of *whatever* arguments are necessary to achieve results. That is a different matter to 'calling on' other workers to make a 'stand'. In this strike one of the problems is the degree to which the miners see themselves as making a stand rather than waging a fight, and see solidarity in terms of other workers doing the same. 'Making a stand' is in the literal sense 'voting with your feet' – treating the strike as a political event, in a society where politics are the domain of the ruling class and working class power by contrast means putting the boot in.

Your final paragraph criticises our extremely stupidly worded sentence about anger being turned in a "practical" direction as meaning that we see class violence as impractical, or somehow secondary to 'forging links'. Its a reasonable interpretation of what we said – it's the opposite of what we meant. The only way we can see the current deadlock being broken in a way favouring the strikers is if the anger demonstrated by the militant minority becomes more widespread. Traditional mass picketing was defeated by nationally directed riot policing in the first battle of the strike. Over the last month or so we have seen resistance to state violence turn into violent resistance, and the first instances of succesful hit and run picketing. Only if the readiness to do whatever is necessary to make the strike bite is generalised – for a start beyond the battleground of S.Yorkshire – will the question of class power replace the issues on the negotiating agenda. It has been obvious from the start that to prevent a deal over closures the strikers would have to do more than break the NCB's determination. It would also mean making the political price of maintaining "The Resolute Approach" too high for the Government. For all its rhetoric of confrontation the Government has no intention of taking on any single group of power workers directly – as opposed to doing so through its industry board hatchet men. They insist on the need to defeat 'Scargillism' but they are still relying on the NCB to do it. For the strikers it must become a conflict directly between them and the State if the sort of victory they want is to become possible. That is still possible – as things stand it is one possibility among others.

It would be easy to become over-optimistic on the basis of the instances of violent escalation of the struggle. It would also be easy to become over-pessimistic as many now are on the basis of the return to work during November. But the facts of the situation must be even more obvious to the miners than the rest of us. As things stand neither success nor defeat are clearly in view for either side. Nor is there any sign of it being possible to agree the deal which has become all too visible in outline during the last two rounds of negotiations. Something has to give – be it patience or nerve – on one side or the other.

The criticisms in your last two paragraphs are clearly those you feel strongest about. We don't suggest this strike is over. No strike is ever over until a return to work has taken place – and sometimes not even then. We believe it's possible for the strikers

to win the sort of victory they want. We would like to see signs in whats taking place that that is the most likely outcome. But we can see no point in deceiving ourselves or anyone else that that's the case when it isn't.

Having read us as 'writing the strike off', you see our arguments about the need to develop solidarity between pits for the struggles after this strike is over, as being nonsense. Of course links need to be developed to win this struggle – how else will they be developed. But what are you suggesting is at stake in this struggle? This is an all or nothing attempt to prevent the NCB's current plan being implemented. Its not about whether closures take place or not – its about the timescale of them. Over a short period of time, or over many years (with the possibility of a change of State priorities). Are you suggesting that victory will mean the NUM won't sabotage future struggles? Are you suggesting that the divisions amongst the miners are going to be forgotten? Are you suggesting that once the strike is over that's class struggle settled in the mining industry for the next fifty years?

The crucial point as far as we are concerned is the one you put on one side when you say "while this strike is still on, strikers must turn their 'growing anger', not to winning this strike (in whatever terms they might see winning) but to preparing themselves for a struggle after this strike." We are talking precisely about 'what winning means'. Thats what we said back in June "There are two things to be won. They can force McGregor to drop his current plans for the industry.....Just postponing the process of closures would be some sort of result of course..... Without the other thing to be won it would be a hollow victory indeed. That other thing to be won is the development of a confidence and solidarity at rank and file level which could mount an effective resistance to closures when they restart."

However it's all very well being able to 'defend' ourselves from 'misunderstandings' about 'what we really meant'. The fact is that the editorial was written in a way which didn't convey what we wanted to say. Worse still it was written in a such a manner – tired and detached – that makes your assumptions about our attitude to the strike entirely understandable.

The inadequacies of the editorial are largely a result of the circumstances under which it was produced to meet a deadline. Much of what you object to or misunderstand is where we have hastily thrown ideas together without explaining them properly. This is even worse in the second part of the editorial which you don't go on to criticise. There are several passages in that which could be wildly misunderstood. I hope we've said enough to make clear we are aware of that.

This second aspect – the 'attitude' we convey – is perhaps more of a problem than the first. We don't believe that getting our ideas across is just a matter of accurately stating facts or political points. It's also a matter of getting over the attitude underlying why we are writing them. That we produce Playtime because we hate this society, because we are angry at what it does to our class. In practise this obviously isn't clear enough – we have more than once been accused of taking a 'calm' 'detached' 'academic' point of view. We could put it down to our undoubted deficiencies as writers and theorists. But that would still not be the whole story, because our deficiencies reflect the weaknesses of the revolutionary circles in this country. Our sense of that weakness was why we started to produce Playtime.

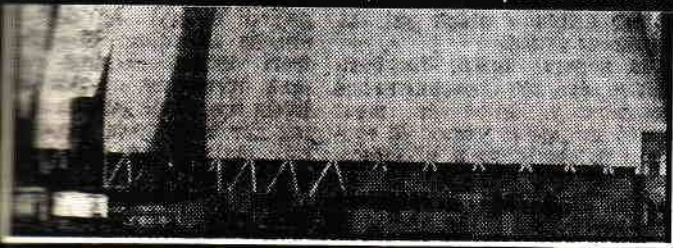
Thats the principle difference between us and the groups you line us up with in your first paragraph. We don't produce Playtime because we imagine we have the perfect revolutionary programme, or the right answers for every situation we write about.

weather was the miners' last chance to intensify the strike and turn it to their own account—certainly as far as stopping the Macgregor plan was concerned.

The 'drift back' didn't help coal production figures much, but it was tying down most of the active strikers to picketing pit gates, and usually their own pit. The level of picketing declined after Christmas, and the active minority found themselves spread more thinly, as they had to turn their attention to stopping the return to work, at the expense of the effort to stop coal movements. Bail restrictions and conditions of sentencing prevented many miners from picketing local pits. In addition, they came up against the conservatism of some branch and area officials, who were reluctant to sanction initiatives which were not closely controlled by the union, such as door-knocking campaigns. The South Wales and Yorkshire NUM areas were obeying injunctions to restrict picketing at some pits to six people.

But even if some of the tens of thousands of strikers who sat out most of the strike at home had begun to take a more active part, the miners would have needed a lot more than food or money. They would have needed physical solidarity.

The strategy of the strikers was all along to disrupt the electricity supply industry. But the Central Electricity Generating Board's crisis policy, designed to take the pressure off power stations in

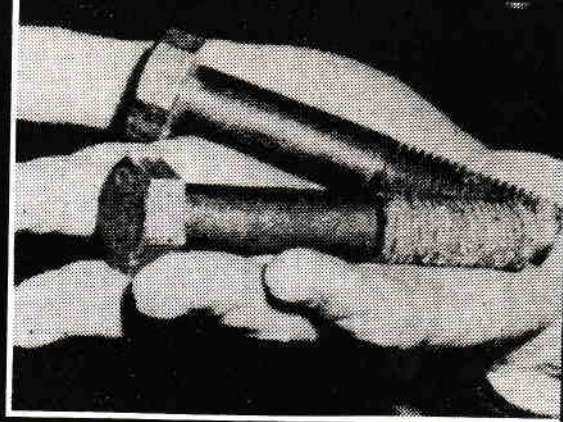


strikebound coalfields where stocks were being conserved or power workers were known to be sympathetic to the strike, succeeded in preventing blackouts. It did this by working some plants beyond their declared capacity (Isle of Grain, Littlebrook), and adapting others to burn fuel oil (Blyth, Aberthaw). Local power cuts for short periods were one consequence of this, as the pressure resulted in a higher number of 'technical failures' than usual. But these could no longer be taken as 'signs' that the coal strike was putting unbearable pressure on power stations. An overtime ban and work-to-rule by NALGO staff at power stations in January (in pursuit of a 35-hour week), helped to undermine the myth of an imminent collapse by failing to push the electricity supply industry over the edge.

The CEBG's strategy relied on its ability to bring stocks of fuel to the places where it was needed—coal from pitheads by road, rail and sea, and oil. Their task was made easier by small numbers of miners going back to work before Christmas at pits which had, until then, been totally strikebound. Up to that point, they had been content to move small amounts of coal from pits in areas where the strike was less than solid. Later, they began moving coal in larger and larger quantities, with less and less opposition. When the Coal Board decided to put on a show of strength by moving a large quantity of coking coal by road from Silverwood colliery, the NUM took up their clear challenge and called for a mass picket—to which only 200 people turned up.

The CEBG was also relying on the willingness of power workers to handle 'blackied' coal and substitute fuels. In the south, for instance, sympathy action was confined to three coal-fired stations on the Thames Valley; Didcot, Tilbury and West Thurrock. But even here, negotiations on fuel quotas resulted in a return to something like normal production soon after the New Year.

Both these trends would have had to be reversed for the strike to take more effect. It would have meant widespread, mobile and determined action at power stations and pit gates, railway yards, docks and on the roads. Workers who were already supporting the strike directly, by refusing to move coal by rail and



sea, would have had to resist mounting pressure and attempts at victimisation from their bosses. British Rail, for instance, was routinely suspending workers who they knew would hold up coal trains.

Others who were supporting the strike half-heartedly or not at all, even though they were in a good position to do so, would have had to be persuaded to take a different attitude.

No-one except the more stupid leftists could have expected anything from the TUC's 'solidarity' stunts, which were nothing but a diversion. Ridiculous parliamentary lobbies, Coal-not-Dole carnivals complete with clowns and foam rubber Maggie Thatchers, souvenir mugs and so forth only served to enhance the south-east region TUC's reputation for abject tokenism (in most people's eyes, anyway: groups like the Labour Party Young Socialists were still demanding that the TUC call a general strike *a week after the miners went back.*) Already well-practised in the staging of symbolic Moments of Action, SERTUC decided in the autumn to 'mobilise' weekly shows-of-weakness outside West Thurrock power station—which had already been shut down as the result of the actions of its own workers (the only power station in the region to do so.) While it busied itself trying to find a 'middle ground' between the government and the miners' union, the TUC could be counted on to do everything in its power to dissipate and waste any real sympathetic impulse among trade unionists.

As for the prospects of an early settlement together with a unified return to work, such a possibility was growing smaller all the time. But minutely-chronicled shifts in the attitudes of the negotiating parties, and the constant rumours of talks-about-talks and new 'forms of words', largely succeeded in shifting attention away from the fight in the coalfields, transport and at power stations, where the original objectives of the strikers would be won or lost.

Over the years, we have become used to seeing strikes openly isolated and sold out by unions, or at least the facts could be compressed into such an interpretation. The fact that there was a militant union leadership in the coal strike, makes the standard categories of 'militant workers' vs. 'reactionary bureaucrats' harder to insert into political accounts of the strike. This has led to some bizarre contortions among far- and ultra-left groups. Some have got round the problem by basing their analyses on a selection of anecdotes which yield the correct insights (for instance, union officials asking pickets to dismantle a barricade). Some 'revolutionaries' said maybe the NUM should have held a national strike ballot after all. Others queued to do disappearing acts up the NUM's backside, notably the Socialist Workers Party, which

## Police accuse Scargill

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publically stuck to its line of championing rank-and-file militancy as the way to win the strike, at the same time as it was privately conceding defeat and preparing to 'retreat within the traditional organs of the working class'. Both attitudes betray a contempt for 'ordinary' workers by the way they manage to avoid talking about the real relationship between unions and strikers.

Since the early weeks of the strike, which was not started on the union's terms but began as an initiative by miners threatened with immediate redundancy, the NUM had succeeded in establishing its control over the direction of the strike and in limiting it to strictly defensive and reformist aims, even though these aims have been pursued very militantly and sometimes violently. But it should be clear that the strikers and their leaders meant different things by the slogan 'No Pit Closures on Economic Grounds', and that they were making a different set of calculations about the strike. The Macgregor plan was bad news for both the miners and the NUM. But factors outside the direct control of the strikers, such as national energy policy or the attitude of governments to import controls, the value of the national currency and subsidies for nationalised industries, are factors upon which the union aspires to have a direct influence. As middlemen in the labour market, the union is threatened on two fronts; firstly, the loss of members, and possibly the end of its negotiating monopoly if profitable pits are returned to private ownership. Secondly, the undermining of its role as a partner in the managing triumvirate of government, employer and union, to which the NUM became accustomed during the 1970s. This has been the real argument

sackings, pit villages being Corbyised, communities broken up, miners forced to be more 'flexible', more 'responsive to the needs of the industry'. Their calculation was that this could be held off for at least a few years, and many strikers must have had an eye on the possibility of the government rethinking its energy policy in favour of coal. It was always a long shot. To reinstate domestically-produced coal as the country's primary energy source, the government would have to be persuaded by an overwhelming combination of political and economic pressures. As it is, British coal's sudden attractiveness on price is the result of a sterling crisis which probably won't last long. Even if it does, other considerations make a major change of emphasis unlikely. The CEBG's plans to expand its nuclear generating capacity have run into a number of problems, but during the strike nuclear power has met up to 20% of the total demand for electricity (as compared with 3% at the time of the 1974 strike.) For the future, nuclear power looks set to further undermine coal's pre-eminence. The aim of the government and CEBG is to create a more broadly-based generating industry using a number of different technologies, which would be less vulnerable to political pressures and fluctuations in the price and availability of fuels from different sources.

Arguments from some quarters on the left—that the strike and its effects have set the coal industry so far back as to make the Macgregor plan redundant anyway—represented feeble attempts to construct capitalist-sounding reasons for letting the strikers off the hook. They were also, indirectly, an admission that any victory

## How Mr Moses broke the mould

By the end of the last year, North Derbyshire was being promoted by the NCB as the hammer of the NUM, as each week large numbers of mine-workers returned to work.

Mr Moses had broken the mould; others, who had at best doubted his tactic, were now

following.

He was careful, throughout the months of cajoling his men back to work, never to attack the union. "I've never opposed the union as an idea; I've always said, and I've meant it, that it is to our advantage to have a strong union properly

between the NUM and the government, behind the rhetoric of 'Honouring the Plan for Coal' from one side, and 'Management's Right to Manage' from the other. As far as the union is concerned, Plan for Coal was a sacred document, not so much because it sanctified particular production targets or levels of employment in the industry, as because it enshrined the principle of NCB/NUM joint planning.

Now the NUM feels itself being elbowed out, as management opts to deal more directly with its workforce, which means pressing the union into a more subservient role. The high eminence to which the NUM rose during the 70s was the result of a conjunction of circumstances—the full development of the national power grid, rising oil prices, the infancy of nuclear technology—which gave the miners a powerful (but temporary) strategic weapon in their fight for higher pay, better conditions and secure employment. The idea that the miners possessed 'traditional' industrial might (as distinct from an exceptional degree of rank-and-file solidarity) is nothing but a leftist myth; during the sixties, many miners were forced by pit closures to move in search of work. While this strike was from the union's point of view a struggle to regain lost strategic ground by forcing the government to change its priorities, it was by no means the NUM's only line of defence. While the contraction of the industry and mass redundancies would undoubtedly put the union in difficulties, it could still survive as a union with a negotiating monopoly over a smaller workforce in a technology-intensive industry, and survive quite well if it could obtain a closed shop among the new layer of technical staff which would be created as coal production came under computerised, integrated, automated mine operating systems. But to make this transition, it would need the consent and assistance of management, and, ultimately, governments. The point is that whether the union wears its militant face or its bureaucratic face according to the moment, it is an organisation which has to adapt to changing capitalist priorities. While it may choose to use workers' struggles to try and change those priorities, the workers themselves are engaged in an endless and fundamental struggle against the implications of capitalist reality itself.

Striking miners must have known, as the union does, that it isn't a question in the end of *whether* the industry is restructured, rather of *how* and *when*. The Macgregor plan meant mass

on the issue of pit closures would have been temporary.

Barring a sudden global deterioration of uranium stocks, all oil evaporating overnight, world revolution or some such natural disaster, long-term restructuring will almost certainly mean a permanent reduction of the workforce in the mining industry, whether this strike had been won or lost. It has already happened in steel, shipbuilding, the docks, the railways (and in coal mining itself, though in a steadier way, over the last thirty-five years.)

Clearly, the NUM will need to be consulted rather than excluded from this process, and this will mean proving its ability to police distasteful agreements. As long as the strike continued, and maybe for a while to come, the union could play hard-to-get. But if it wants to survive at all as a national organisation, the NUM will have to negotiate and help implement Coal Board policy—this year, next year or in ten years' time. It can have no other role. It is precisely the question of their own political survival, of what part they can play in the future management of the coal industry and its workforce, which now exercises the minds of the NUM high-ups. This is where the different interests and priorities of striking miners and union functionaries really becomes apparent.

That is, if it wasn't already apparent from the NUM's conduct before last March. The left had already got its fingers burnt twice when it had tried to initiate strikes by holding national strike ballots. Both times, it had failed to get the required majority. It was not a matter of the leadership proving itself to be more militant than the rank-and-file; neither was it a matter of the rank-and-file proving themselves to be clever strategists, biding their time. The difference between March 1984 and the NUM's two previous embarrassments was that this strike was started and consolidated by the miners themselves.

Like most mass strikes that start in this way, the action was un- and even anti-democratic in the sense that the strike was begun by a minority and was spread, at least in the early weeks, less by formal decision-making, voting and headcounting than by force of direct persuasion and example. During the early days of the strike, miners at some pits which had democratically voted against striking changed their minds after meeting strikers from other pits and areas on the picket lines, and stayed out (for instance, in the South Wales area and at Ashington in Northumberland.) Later, this strike movement was closed down

Both the NUM executive and the strikers resisted pressure for a national ballot during the early weeks of the strike, though for different reasons. For active strikers, it was an obvious waste of time and energy, since as far as they were concerned the strike was already on. For the union, it was a question of turning a rash of walkouts into a *de facto* official national strike, run by NUM officials on the ground and firmly harnessed to the ambitions of the national union. This meant that *some* democratic procedure would have to be gone through, as a means of bringing the strike under the formal control of the national and local NUM and swinging it behind a set of negotiable demands on the union's terms. As the union correctly said, government pressure for a national strike ballot was aimed at formally dividing the strike in the hope of exhausting the energies of the strikers at an early stage. We would say that the NUM's attempts to justify the strike in a slightly different set of democratic terms was no less opportunistic, since it was aimed at recuperating that same energy. Apart from shifting the initiative into the hands of the union, the strategy of holding area-by-area ballots succeeded in formally isolating the minority of strikers in areas like Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and gave a ready-made alibi to the scabs in those areas. In general, we would say that any and all democratic practises are a hindrance to workers in struggle, although they are a powerful weapon in the hands of those who would suppress, divert or neutralise them.

He has stayed in touch with the area union leadership in Nottinghamshire, and though the relationships are understandably strained, the two sides have been in contact on recent times, to sort out individual cases of hardship. He has been unsuccessful,

however, in persuading the Derbyshire NUM, to encourage the branch secretaries to go back to work and to give the leadership to their men once more: but he is adamant that he would prefer the elected leadership to any unofficial "working miners" leadership

which might arise — as it has in neighbouring Nottinghamshire. He never given any priority to the working miners' interests. The most they got is without pay to attend to their business. I don't want to see leadership between

them and the elected officials—though if the men elected different officials after the strike, that's up to them." Mr Moses has come through one of the most difficult management tasks any manager in any industry could have anticipated. He is now understand-

ably pleased with himself: and it is certain that others are too. Together with a handful of other area directors—Michael Eaton, the North Yorkshire director, who was handed the potentially poisoned chalice of being the Board's communications chief; Albert Wheeler, the

tough Scots director, and John Northard, the North Nottinghamshire director, Mr Moses is in line for higher things. He has shown the much-vaunted commodity of entrepreneurial flair in adversity—and when his chairman and the Cabinet look round for senior appoint-

The NUM was taking a calculated risk when it decided to go for a national strike last March. On previous occasions it had, in fact, deliberately suppressed strike movements against pit closures because it thought it would be unable to turn them into the kind of strike it wanted, on the terms it wanted. In 1983, it ignored an 80% strike vote in South Wales, while Yorkshire officials dissuaded miners at the new Selby 'super-pits' from striking in sympathy. In Scotland, a strike and sit-in at Kinneil was pacified by Mick McGahey in person.

Again, this was not because the union had decided to reveal itself as the deadly enemy of the workers, but in line with the different priorities of the national NUM. When the NCB's March closure plan was announced, and was met with immediate walkouts, the NUM judged that both the severity of the closure programme and the strength of the response would be sufficient to sustain a unified official strike which could be directed at forcing the government and NCB to negotiate on their future plans for the industry, in terms favourable to the NUM. They hadn't done their groundwork very well: the pit closure programme would affect different areas very differently, and while there is no perfect correlation between the militancy of miners at individual pits and the immediate prospects for those pits under the NCB's plan, the unanimity of the strikers in (for instance) Kent and South Wales clearly related to the seriousness of the threat posed to jobs and to the quality of life in general. The failure of the strike in Nottinghamshire has nothing to do with any 'scab tradition', and everything to do with the fact that Nottinghamshire is a profitable coalfield which will attract heavy investment in the future, with the (relatively) good chance of alternative local employment even if one or two pits were to close, and with the relatively dispersed nature of the mining 'communities' in those areas.

NUM agreed to the introduction of differential bonus schemes, under which miners at highly profitable pits earn much more money than miners at older pits which have not attracted as much investment and where productivity is therefore lower.

The question of why the miners' strike failed to spark off a wave of sympathetic actions, and why it did not apparently give encouragement to other groups of workers to pursue their own demands, must also be seen in terms of the aims and context of the strike.

From the beginning, the NUM and the left couched their arguments in terms of 'honouring agreements signed by Mrs. Thatcher herself', 'protecting the British coal industry from heavily-subsidised foreign competition', in terms of 'fighting for the right to work' and 'keeping jobs down the pits for future generations'. These arguments may have had some appeal for Labour traditionalists and liberal bleeding hearts, but they were hardly calculated to raise the temperature of the class struggle. Of course, we would not expect the union to pitch its propaganda at any other level than social patriotism and attachment to the job. Many of the strikers would put their case differently in private, where it's alright to say they couldn't care less whether there's a pit to go back to any more, and the last thing they want is to see their children working as coalminers. But in public, even the most militant strikers have allowed the union to speak for them, on its own terms. So it's little wonder if other workers have used this as an excuse for treating the miners' strike as if it were a purely sectional dispute which had nothing to do with them. Why *should* other workers support the demand for unconditional guarantees of employment in the coal industry, especially if such a demand conflicts with their own interests at a similar level? (the future of the steel industry, for instance?) As one power station worker said, the CEBG has been shutting down old power stations for years—he'd worked at a string of others before ending up at Fawley. What was so different about coal mines?

No amount of abstract appeals to 'stand by your class' and 'fight for basic human dignities' are enough to change such

attitudes. That is why, in spite of miners support groups appearing all over the country arranging workplace meetings, visits to pit villages, collections of food and money, and generally trying to whip up support, the miners' strike did not 'pose the question of class power'; why limited sympathy actions among workers on the railways, in the docks and at power stations were so easily isolated; why the identification of other workers with the miners' struggle stayed at an emotional level, where it existed at all; why solidarity has been expressed indirectly, rather than directly.

The end of this miners' strike is not the end of the struggle, for the miners or anyone else. The strike will not have brought revolution any nearer, but then can any limited, defensive struggle do that? On the other hand, it's no use complaining about the 'limitations' of defensive or reformist struggles—by definition, any action which is not aimed at destroying capitalism is going to be limited, because it cannot result in any lasting gain, and can only end with a resumption of business as usual. We are all compelled to take up 'limited' struggles every day of our lives, usually on our own, sometimes collectively.

Nevertheless, such struggles begin from a refusal to accept capitalist misery, or to live our lives in a way which is congenial to capitalism. It is this refusal, at the heart of the miners' strike and every other proletarian struggle, which we can identify as the basis of class unity. The fact that it has been expressed collectively by large numbers of strikers and others in the mining communities, for so long and with such intensity, is why the miners' fight has been and continues to be so important for anyone who wants revolution.



Pickets at Betteshanger, Kent 8/3/85—five days after the mass return to work

“Society does not develop in a continuous way, free from setbacks, but through conflicts and antagonisms. While the working class battle is widening in scope, the enemy’s strength is increasing. Uncertainty about the way to be followed constantly and repeatedly troubles the minds of the combatants; and doubt is a factor in division, of internal quarrels and conflicts within the workers’ movement.

“It is useless to deplore these conflicts as creating a pernicious situation that should not exist and which is making the working class powerless. As has often been pointed out, the working class is not weak because it is divided; on the contrary, it is divided because it is weak. And the reason why the proletariat ought to seek new ways is that the enemy has strength of such a kind that the old methods are ineffectual. The working class will not secure these ways by magic, but through a great effort, deep reflection, through the clash of divergent opinions and the conflict of impassioned ideas. It is incumbent upon it to find its own way, and precisely therein is the *raison d’etre* of the internal differences and conflicts. It is forced to renounce outmoded ideas and old chimeras, and it is indeed the difficulty of this task that engenders such big divisions.”