

STRIKE BACK

news letter of the notts campaign against pit closures

THE CAMPAIGN IS NOT OVER

After the announcement of the pit closure programme in September 1992, the NUM immediately called a Special Delegates Conference, which took place in early October. Delegates from every area went to the rostrum, indicating fear that they might not be able to encourage their members to take industrial action on the closure programme. The Conference took a decision that we were to use every other tactic possible, other than industrial action at that time, to fight the closures. A decision which I, along with the other delegates from Notts., fully endorsed.

In hindsight, I believe we let the government off the hook. The public sympathy we had on the 2 big marches and rallies in London ought to have been enough to rouse the TUC General Council into action. Instead we pussy-footed around and allowed the Tories to manoeuvre into a side-step and play for time. The end result being the same as their decision in Sept. '92.

The gut feelings of members of other Trade Unions were that the time was right to take on this vicious government and its anti-Trade Union laws. I attended the Jobs for Recovery Conference at the TUC Headquarters, where again every Union that went to the rostrum pledged full support to the miners; and still the TUC waited. The fear of breaking the anti-trades union laws holding back any real supportive action scuppered the 2 one day strikes engineered by the NUM and RMT with support from ASLEF.

If the TUC had called for every other trades union to support the miners on their April days of action, I believe a different report and white paper would have been produced.

Every now and then a law is introduced which has to be broken to remove it. The Poll Tax is a classic example.

I cannot imagine a government with its back against the wall taking every union to court for breaking the Employment Act. It's about time the TUC took a stance against these laws and took up the fight.

Our National Conference decisions from June 1993 indicate that the campaign against pit closures and all that comes with it is not over.

Conference fully rejected the introduction of privatisation.

It also rejected any alteration of hours of work, and as it seems to be part of the privatisation package we need to campaign amongst our members, and if necessary encourage them to make the right decisions at the ballot box. If there are further calls for days of action, let's have the full backing of the TUC and tell this government once and for all they've gone too far.

Keith Stanley
Notts. Area NUM President

WHAT! - NO JUSTICE ?

Justice for Mineworkers was set up after the 84/5 strike to campaign for the reinstatement of miners sacked for fighting for their jobs. Now they sell badges, plates, miners lamps, etc., to raise funds to continue the struggle and support those miners still without work. Places available to sell their goods are limited. But every year they have been at the Labour Party Conference. Until this year - when they were refused a stall! WHY ?

Why in his speech to conference did John Smith talk of unemployment, but fail to mention the miners? Talk of opposing rail privatisation, but fail to mention the pits? Talk of the community, but fail to mention the fight the mining communities have been waging for the past 12 months?

WHY WAS THERE NO JUSTICE ?

PENSIONS

Ever since the Maxwell "Mirror" Pensions scandal, the pensions issue has become of national interest. The mining industry also has its problems with British Coal at the present time, and the prospect of future privateers 'raiding' the pension schemes.

The Trustees of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme have just won a historical decision against British Coal and the government which debars them from using pension surpluses to finance enhanced pensions for redundancy cases.

The NUM are also challenging through the courts British Coal and the Treasury's attempts to cream off hundreds of millions of pounds from the Mineworkers Pension Scheme in the form of "contribution holidays".

The NUM are also in dispute with British Coal and the UDM over the proposal to introduce reduced pensions at 50. Both British Coal and the UDM Trustee are insisting on reduced pensions at 50, which will not cost the scheme one penny. The NUM and its Trustee claim that the pensions should be paid at 50 on full benefits, and that the scheme can afford to do so, especially if the £800 million "contribution holiday" is paid back into the scheme.

Developments should be watched with interest, because the outcome will not only affect British Coal Pension Schemes, but many others as well.

Henry Richardson
General Secretary, Notts. N.U.M.

* * * * *

LOBBYING THE TUC

I was not going to write about this, until some fellow trade unionists encouraged me to do so.

On July 28th 1993 I was amongst a group of women from various pit camps and supporters who travelled to London to lobby the TUC Energy Committee meeting at the TUC Headquarters. It was one of numerous attempts - by now dismissed by many back home as futile - to persuade our national union leaders that the pits on the government's closure list were viable and the jobs within them had to be defended.

Some of us had travelled since dawn in order to be there for the beginning of the meeting. Our hope was to be invited into the meeting and to listen to the debate; perhaps not all of us, but at least a delegation. Our hopes were dashed. Nobody was allowed in.

So we waited and talked to passers-by for about two hours. At last our leaders emerged. Three of them, Roger Lyons, Alan Tuffin and Bill Callaghan, stopped to talk. They listened to our plea and then assured us that the TUC had all along been doing everything in its power to defend the pits; that is - we had to understand - everything that government had allowed it to do. They were upset that the Tories had brought in so much anti-trade union legislation and that the media would not give them the coverage they deserved.

We felt sorry for them!

We were then offered a meal in the TUC canteen; which we gladly accepted, most of us having left without breakfast, and some of us with children.

As we sat and ate, a strange figure with a cook's hat appeared and went the length of the room, bowing at each table and asking if the food was to our satisfaction. When he came to us I recognised Norman Willis under the hat. The children were laughing. They liked this clown.

I have to say, not for one moment had I expected anything from Norman Willis. But neither had I expected to come to London to be insulted in this way!

The man has now been replaced. Let's hope that the new General Secretary is not another puppet who pops on a cook's hat when trade union members who he is supposed to represent, and who (no matter how poorly paid themselves) pay for his livelihood, come and ask him to defend theirs.

How can I tell my children to join a union when they are adults if it is still the farce that it is with some of our national leaders at the moment? Those leaders don't own the movement that generations before us have fought for. They are meant to represent us!

Bridget Jones
MSF Trent General Branch

ONE YEAR ON

On the first anniversary of the announcement of the pit closure programme thousands of miners will be standing in the already packed dole queues; they will walk past the pits where they used to work, knowing that millions of tons of needed coal lie beneath the ground, unable to claim it for us all.

Whilst the battle is by no means over, and NCAPE will continue to fight for every last pit and oppose privatisation of the country's resources, we must honestly assess the facts and speak the truth.

In October 1992 the truth seemed to be that millions of people throughout the land supported the miners struggle. Trade Unions, community groups and individuals promised action on all fronts. The promise was that this time we would not let the miners down; we will not allow a single pit to close.

One year on the truth is that these promises have not been kept. We have let down the miners, ourselves, our children and future generations.

There is nothing to be gained by fighting amongst ourselves (divide and conquer is a weapon of the enemy). But we can and must understand why this battle was not won long ago - otherwise we will continue to fail in this and every other struggle.

Who made the promises?

Why were they not fulfilled?

At the beginning of the campaign some small political groups were shouting loudly for a general strike. But whether or not such a thing was possible or how it was to be brought about was never considered. Sloganising is easy. Co-ordinated action requires long, hard work. Those groups have long since abandoned this campaign.

There were demands that the TUC should organise days of action. Surely there are very few who actually expect our TUC leadership to do anything so 'militant'. But the NUM itself did call for such action; and was met with feeble response from most workers. Trades Unionists

argued that their Union had not called them out - as if they themselves do not constitute their own union! Instead of taking action, they lobbied the TUC, asking the TUC to ask them to take action!

The TUC responded by calling for lobbies of parliament. Norman Willis called on us to demand action from 'political parties and religious groups' - the very ones who were demanding he do something!

So, for 12 months, those who claimed to fully support the miners have been calling on each other to do something. This would be farcical if it were not so tragic in its consequences - the unabated closure of pits.

We know that support is still there. But sympathy will not save the remaining pits, nor prevent privatisation.

Towards the end of August 3 young miners were killed in a roof fall at Bilsthorpe colliery, reminding us of the suffering and sacrifice that has been faced by miners, their families and communities ever since the first pit was sunk. Death and injury are not unusual in the mining industry. But if privatisation goes ahead and safety is further eroded in the name of maximising profits for share-holders, such tragedies can only increase.

One year on we cannot sit back and congratulate ourselves on the campaign we have waged. There is still much to be done.

Our task now is to remember our promises, to redouble our efforts, and to fight alongside the NUM.

We can do it. We must do it. We will do it.

* * * * *

Step by step the longest march can be won.
Many stones can build an arch, singly none.
And united what we will can be
accomplished still,
Drops of water turn a mill, singly none.

* * * * *

POWER FAILURE A message from a power worker.

It is now generally accepted throughout the labour movement that privatisation of the electricity supply industry was not only the asset stripping of another publicly owned industry, but part of the government's attack on coal. In other words, the start of a process to use other fuels to generate electricity.

The NUM has stated that apart from its own job losses there will be others in associated industries, such as rail; and some 17 power station closures.

Coal is being squeezed out of its position as base load fuel, to be replaced by oil, nuclear and gas.

A typical large coal-fired power station was originally manned by about 840 workers. Almost 50% of its output can now be met by one new gas station employing 36 workers.

The two main generating companies, National Power and Powergen, have cut 13,300 jobs since privatisation. On the companies' own admission these reductions have not yet reached their levels; it is an ongoing process.

NO-ONE'S JOB IS SAFE.

Fight for your livelihood. You may never get another chance.

Join a local campaign against pit closures.

NOTTS. CAMPAIGN AGAINST PIT CLOSURES / N.U.M. FIGHTING FUND

ANNIVERSARY SOCIAL

(celebrating the continued fight against pit closures and privatisation)

FRIDAY 12th NOVEMBER from 7.30 p.m.

MANSFIELD LABOUR CLUB, Clerston Street (off the Ring Road), Mansfield.

* LIVE MUSIC * BUFFET * GRAND RAFFLE DRAW *

Miners, families, friends and supporters all welcome.

Entrance : £3 waged, £2 low waged, £1 unwaged.

Notts. Campaign Against Pit Closures :

Open meetings every Tuesday at 7.30 p.m.

at the International Community Centre, Mansfield Rd., Nottingham.

Stall every Saturday, 9.30 - 4.00, outside St Peter's, Broad Marsh.

N.C.A.P.C. , Box 5, 118 Mansfield Rd., Nottingham NG1 3HL

Tel. 0602 608363