

WAR

For Anarchism

COMMENTARY

Vol. 4 No. 23.

OCTOBER 1943.

ONE PENNY

LANARKSHIRE STRIKE

Miners fight for their rights

THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT in Scotland has received plenty of free publicity from the capitalist press during the past week, as a result of accusations made during the coal strike in Lanarkshire by Stalinists, and by Lord Traprain, the Regional Controller of Fuel and Power, that the strike had been incited by anti-war elements including the Anarchists, the I.L.P. and the Militant Miners. Actually, as the following report will show, the strike was a spontaneous result of the men's resentment at lying accusations made by a coal contractor against three strippers at Wester Auchengeich colliery, and the imprisonment of 16 Cardowan miners for refusal to pay fines imposed on them for participating in an "unofficial" stoppage last May.

However, our Scottish comrades have been carrying on propaganda in the coalfields since the beginning of the war, and the fact that the miners, in common with workers in other industries throughout the country, are adopting the Anarchist tactic of direct action, while, at the same time discontent and disillusion is rapidly spreading, is undoubtedly giving the Government, the coalowners and the Trade Union leaders a nasty headache!

At the time of writing the strike is continuing. Although the 16 imprisoned men have been released the men are carrying on the struggle, demanding the removal of the evil of coal contracting at Wester Auchengeich Colliery, and the reinstatement of the three union branch officials at Cardowan suspended by the executive of the Lanarkshire Miners Union.

ISSUES AT WESTER AUCHENGEICH

The strike commenced at the Wester Auchengeich colliery on Monday, Sept. 20th. On the previous Wednesday the contractor at the colliery, Andrew Stevenson, had accused three day shift strippers of malingering. The men referred this matter to their union branch committee who contacted the manager of the colliery with a view to forcing the contractor to withdraw his statement. The men on day shift held a meeting on the Friday and decided to continue work on the understanding that the manager, William Sievwright, would bring the contractor before the men the following day. On Saturday the local branch officials together with the three accused men met the contractor and manager. Sievwright admitted that the men *were not, in any sense, malingerers*, but Stevenson refused to withdraw his statement. As the manager refused to take any action a state of deadlock ensued. The local branch of the union referred the matter to the area headquarters at Hamilton and on the following Monday the day shift decided to strike until the management took action against Stevenson. The strike, from the outset, was general throughout the colliery, all of the men employed being solidly behind the accused men, in spite of the attempts of the Stalinists to undermine the struggle.

A CHALLENGE !

Pat McGowan and Andrew Sterling, two of the suspended branch officials at Cardowan, have asked us to publish a challenge in *War Commentary* to Moffat and Pearson to meet them publicly with a view to ascertaining whether the suspended men or the executive are more sincere.

In view of the attitude subsequently taken by the union officials at Hamilton it is interesting to note that when Lanarkshire brought the question of the employment of a contractor before an executive meeting of the National Union of Scottish Mineworkers on May 18th, 1942, the President of the union stated that the abolition of the contracting system was an agreed aim of the conference and if Wester Auchengeich decided, at any future time, to take action against this evil system, they would be assured of the co-operation of the union as a whole.

COAL CONTRACTING

It is difficult to give any clear indication of the function of contractors within the pits. Their appointment dates back to the days when working conditions in the British mines approximated to those which operate at present in the Empire; the days when women were sent down the pits with the men to work twelve and fourteen hour shifts for the barest pittance. The sole object of the employment of a contractor appears to be the cutting of the wages of the miners, but—as a collier from Wester Auchengeich stated to me at the Area Delegate meeting on Saturday, October 2nd—the whole question of coal contracting is shrouded in mystery. For their service to the coalowners contractors are paid between £1,000 and £2,000 a year. Wester Auchengeich is apparently the only colliery in Lanark where the system is still in force.

CARDOWAN MEN IMPRISONED— THE STRIKE SPREADS

Three days later the 1,000 men employed at Cardowan Colliery, Stepps, joined the strike. Some time previously 34 men employed at the colliery had appeared in court on the charge of taking part in an unofficial stoppage in May, and were fined £5 each. 16 men did not pay the fines, and on Tuesday night they were arrested by the police and imprisoned in Barlinnie, Glasgow. The next day a notice was chalked in the streets of Burnbank:

“Six Burnbank men arrested last night for Cardowan dispute. Every pit out! Stand solid behind these men!!”

A mass meeting was held at Cardowan Colliery on the Thursday, and the men decided to take strike action. Within the next few days the strike spread throughout Lanarkshire and into collieries in Stirling and E. Dumbartonshire. The issues for which the men were striking were the release of the imprisoned miners and the removal of the coal contracting system at Wester Auchengeich. By the following Monday the strike involved between 8,000 and 9,000 men.

ANARCHISTS ACCUSED OF INCITING STRIKE

The officials of the Lanarkshire Miners Union and the Scottish Executive immediately set to work to discredit the strikers in every way and to force the men back to work. The ringleaders of this attack were, as was to be expected, three Stalinist officials—Moffat, Pearson and McKendrick. During the following week they spoke to meetings of the strikers throughout Lanarkshire and accused the men of fighting Hitler's war, of impeding production and the usual phrases which the T.U. and C.P. traitors have borrowed from the bosses' vocabulary to use at every industrial dispute since Holy Russia entered the war. Their success was limited. In a few instances they persuaded collieries to resume work but in most cases where the men returned to the pits their commonsense and solidarity with the imprisoned men and their comrades at Wester Auchengeich prevailed and the strike was resumed. A typical instance was at Gateside Colliery. On Tuesday, September 28th, William Pearson, the Stalinist President of the Lanark Miners Union addressed the men, claiming that the strike had been incited by anti-war elements as an attempt to smash the trade union. He attacked the Notts miners for their recent strike of solidarity with the boy who had been imprisoned for refusing to work underground and urged the men not to continue the strike. The following morning the whole pit was idle.

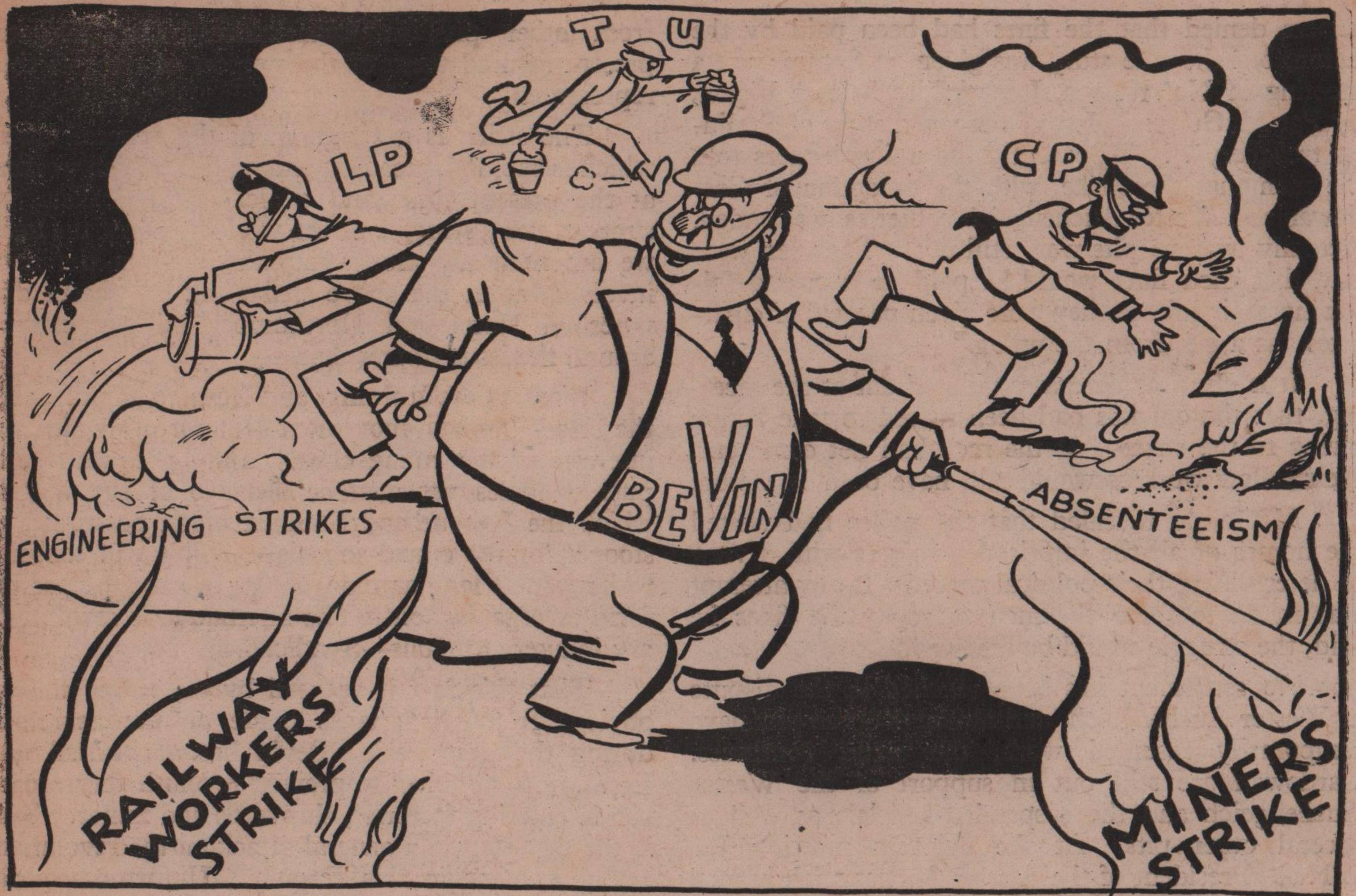
In a statement the following day, Abe Moffat, Chairman of the N.U.S.M.W. stated:

“The lads in prison are merely the victims of a deliberate and planned attempt not only to destroy the trade union but to bring about a political situation for a group of people identified with the Anarchist Movement, the I.L.P., and the so-called Militant Miners, who are definitely opposed to the war against Fascism and have no interest whatsoever in the affairs of the miners.”

This statement was widely reported in the capitalist press—including, of course, the *Daily Worker*—appearing under headlines such as ANARCHISTS “DUPING MINERS” (*Glasgow Bulletin*) and “OUTSIDERS CAUSING STRIKES”—MINERS LEADERS DECLARE WAR (*Scottish Daily Express*). In a statement to the *Express*, Eddie Shaw of the Glasgow Group of the Anarchist Federation stated that:

“We are opposed to war, but we have not attempted to sabotage the war effort *in the interests of a foreign power like the Communist Party who are now attacking us*. We do not disguise our sympathy with the miners.

“Responsibility lies with the owners and the authorities who put the first man in gaol.”



The italicised words were cut from the report which appeared in the *Express* on Thursday, September 30th!

On the Wednesday evening the officials of the Cardowan union branch were summoned to appear before the Lanark executive committee at Hamilton. They were asked to repudiate a leaflet which had been issued by Cardowan branch stating the position of the imprisoned men and calling on the miners in other pits to support the struggle. This they naturally refused to do and as a result the three officials, Andrew Stirling (Cardowan president), Robert Archibald (secretary) and Pat McGowan (treasurer) were suspended from office by the executive.

Following the meeting Andrew Stirling stated:

"We were asked if we would repudiate the dispute but we replied that we could not do this as it was a branch decision.

"The union executive blame Fascism, the Anarchists and the I.L.P. for the Cardowan trouble. That is merely evading the issue. The stoppage was a spontaneous expression of the unrest rampant in the Lanarkshire coalfield.

"I want to make it clear that on the first day of this dispute at Cardowan no branch official and no member of the pit committee advised any man to go home. What was done was decided by the men

themselves. Any accusations against branch officials are fiction."

The following day after a mass meeting of miners at Hamilton had decided to continue the struggle Pat McGowan stated to *War Commentary*:

"We are out on strike against the men being in prison. The pits will remain idle until the men are released and also until the dispute at Wester Auchengeich is finally settled to our satisfaction."

Asked about the possibility of a demand for the withdrawal of the Essential Works Order developing among the miners, McGowan said that he thought this would ultimately develop.

At the meeting the C.P. attempted to end the strike by introducing an amendment to the resolution stating that a strike at the present time "was helping the enemy" and calling on the men to return to work, leaving the unions free to continue negotiations for the release of the imprisoned men. The amendment was defeated by 256 votes to 8!

MEN RELEASED—THE STRIKE GOES ON

On Friday, October 1st the 16 imprisoned men were released from Barlinnie Prison following a visit by the union officials, Moffat, Pearson and McKendrick. The following morning the capitalist

papers denied that the fines had been paid by the union, but the true story was given on Saturday at a meeting of No. 1 Area, Lanarkshire Miners Union, by Pat McGowan. It was the usual story of Stalinist treachery . . . Apparently the union leaders told the men that the strike, with the exception of Cardowan and Wester Auchengeich collieries, was ended. Actually over 10 pits were still out. The men were told that their fines would be paid *on loan* and following their release they were given packets of cigarettes "as a gift from the union."

It is clear, as delegates pointed out at the meeting, that the officials had been forced to take action owing to the strike. If the men had not come out, their fellow workers would still have been in prison.

McGowan revealed that the police had visited the homes of all the imprisoned miners with a view to determining their political records. If any attempt was made to force the men to repay the fines he said, the struggle would be renewed.

No settlement has been reached in the dispute at Wester Auchengeich, and although some pits have temporarily resumed work, the strike continues. Cardowan are still out in support of the Wester Auchengeich and the suspended officials as well as several other pits. At the delegate meeting Joe O'Neill, President of the Wester Auchengeich branch of the L.M.U., declared that the men were determined to continue the struggle until the evil of coal contracting had been removed. While they did not feel at Wester Auchengeich that the other collieries were under any obligation to support their struggle, they would welcome any assistance they received

from other pits in Lanarkshire. The delegates present assured them of the support of the pits they represented.

The strike is a symptom of the general unrest which is rapidly spreading among the British workers at the present time, and while, as syndicalists, we support every struggle of the worker against the boss, we are naturally most sympathetic when the issue involved, as in the above strike and the recent disputes in Notts and Northumberland are centred around the issue of freedom.

Workers are learning, and learning rapidly, that the trade union movement is operating in the interests of the ruling class. The Lanarkshire dispute provides yet another instance of the way in which the Labour and Stalinist union bosses act as stooges for the employing class. This will continue to happen as long as the workers tolerate the present form of organisation. The alternative is revolutionary industrial unions—Syndicalism.

That this fact is realised by the ruling class is obvious from the attacks made on the anarchists during the past week. Bevin has announced that steps are to be taken to prevent revolutionary propaganda entering factories, shipyards and mines. This is the first step in a general attack on the revolutionary movement in this country. Unfortunately for Churchill, Bevin and their Communist lackeys they are acting too late. The workers are already on the move. The present industrial struggles will develop in the coming months—they will be the herald of the social revolution in this country—the revolution for peace, equality and freedom.

READ

**WAR COMMENTARY
FOR ANARCHISM**

FORTNIGHTLY TWOPENCE.

Obtainable from:

FREEDOM PRESS

27 BELSIZE ROAD, LONDON N.W.6.



GET IN TOUCH WITH

THE

ANARCHIST FEDERATION

127 GEORGE STREET, GLASGOW.

Boot Licking to Bevin



BEVIN in a speech made in Lancashire a few days ago said about the Communists:

"We had the Communists seeking power for a long time. And now we get another sect trying to kill the Communists. One flea biting another flea. Don't let them both bite you."

Daily Herald, Oct 2.

William Rust, Editor of the *Daily Worker*, wrote him a letter in answer to that, calling him Brother and licking the boots which had kicked him and his fellow travellers:

"The *Daily Worker*, Mr. Bevin, has given you hearty and consistent support when other organs of the Press have been loud in denunciation. We stood with you on the Catering Bill and the registration of the older women. We like your working-class ways, we like your blunt stand for the workers and how you hand it out to the employers."

(Daily Worker, 5/10/43.)

Of course William Rust never heard the answer Bevin gave some time ago in the House when he said that hundreds of workers had been put in prison BUT NOT A SINGLE EMPLOYER!