THE RED MINER

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RED MINER EDITORIAL

CONFERENCE '86 – CONFERENCE '86 –

The great strike shook up the NUM good and proper. Thousands of young miners became activists. Right wingers fearful for their official positions, kept quiet about their doubts and criticisms of Scargill. The NUM executive during, and even for a period after the strike was, to all appearances, the most left-wing in Britain. The impact of the defeat of the strike on the balance of forces within the NUM was, for a time, concealed.

The 1986 delegate conference in Tenby has exposed the true state of affairs. it is not a heartening sight. The defeat of the strike has enormously weakened Arthur Scargill and those like him, who remain advocates of class struggle to defend jobs, wages and conditions. It has strengthened all of those in the bureaucracy who oppose such a perspective. The NUM 'left' executive is clearly in the grip of 'new realists' - of men who want to compromise with British Coal and, until they can get a Kinnock government, with Mrs Thatcher.

ARTHUR SCARGILL

The two key debates at Tenby prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Scargill is vitrually completely isolated in the Executive. Those debates - on relations with the UDM and on whether the NUM will need to take industrial action over jobs and pay - revealed that an alliance of the traditional right-wing (Bell) and the traditional left-wing (McGahey, Bolton, Clarke, Taylor and Terry Thomas) exists. The policy of this alliance is one of retreat and surrender in the face of British Coal's attacks.

The old 'left' are dominant within this alliance. They are in fact a new-right. The coalition of the Euro Stalinist Communist Party members like Bolton and McGahey with Kinnock supporters like Clarke, Thomas and Taylor firmly believe that the lesson of the graet strike is that industrial action is 'outdated'. In it's place they favour negotiation and collaboration combined with a campaign for a Labour government.

When Scargill, in his address, called for industrial action, he was rounded on by the new-right. Scargill argued

"Only direct action which carries economic impact can halt the policies and terrible slide to complete disaster which faces Britain today...we must act soon" rather than later."

The response to this call was revealing. Most delegates were silent while others afforded the President only polite applause.

The new-right were furious. Eric Clarke said Scargill was out of touch and that in the areas "the demand for industrial action was not there". Des Dutfield a supposed Scargillite from South Wales echoed the charge that Scargill was out of touch and Jack Taylor made it plain that he thought there was no prospect of industrial action. And to demonstrate their control over Scargill these men ensured that conference was not committed to any action at all over the pay issue.

Resolutions demanding sizeable pay rises were tabled. The fact that British Coal has not paid last year's rise and is trying to tie all rises to a type of no strike deal (pension rights would be automatically penalised if we took action) indicates the need for a coherent and militant strategy on pay. A strategy based on co-ordinated action against the divisive incentive scheme is realistic. The recent vote for an overtime ban in North Derbyshire (see RM10) shows miners can be united in action on this issue. Yet look what happened at Tenby.

Yorkshire, in the name of "unity" withdrew the call in it's resolution for strike action. Instead it supported a South Wales, Midlands and Notts. composited resolution calling for negotiations to achieve a £22 rise, that would take the lowest paid surface workers from £98 a week to £120 a week. The only committment to this resolution was to call a delegate conference if negotiations break down. The new-right will do all they can to ensure that negotiations do not break down. In fact their great hope is MacGeggor's replacement, Haslem. Peter Heathfield praised this man's previous record and declared :

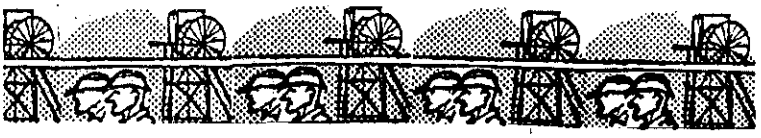
"We hope we will be entering a new period of negotiations when we can seek to fulfil the aspirations of our members."

As if Haslem is going to be any different (in anything other than manner) than either previous butcher of the industry, Ezra or MacGreggor.

On the question of the scab UDM the right also triumphed. They played their trump card against Scargill. McGahey, a member of the triumberate of leaders, broke ranks publically by calling for reconciliation with the scabs. He declared that no member of the UDM should be called a scab! What an insult to those imprisoned and victimised thanks, amongst other things to the treachery of the scabs. McGahey argued:

"Do not allow your anger to endanger the rebuilding of this unionb. We need one united union in this industry."

A resolution from Scotland setting this process of reconciliation in motion was passed. It called on the TUC and Labour Party to mediate between the NUM and the scabs. It allowed for individual UDM members to rejoin the NUM, though an ammendment from Notts. tied this to them accepting the new disciplinary rules passed last year.



Once again Scargill was virtually alone in opposing this approach. He recognised that any unity at the moment would mean unity on the scabs terms. It would mean unity based on accepting aspects of the UDM's company unionist style evident by their wining and dining of MacGreggor at their conference. Scargill warned in vain:

"We must never again commit the error of our forefathers who accepted false unity and reconciliation with Spencerism."

The conference opted for the strategy of the old MFBG conciliators. No wonder the right-wing Labour Weekly declared after the conference:

"A clarion call for unity and for Notts. miners to march back into the NUM went out from Tenby."

Like George Bolton who said it openly at conference, Labour Weekly recognise that unity on the scabs terms will re-assure Labour's potential middle class voters in the run-up to the election.

The new-right triumphed at Tenby. The NUM joined the Kinnock band-wagon. It opted for a peace with British Coal that will mean massive job losses, poor wages and deteriorating safety and conditions. All of it's hopes are pinned on Kinnock's cavalry coming to the rescue.

The reasons for this significant shift in our union are important to understand. Ther defeat of the great strike has gradually worn down the morale of the majority of militants in the union. At pit level this is reflected in the willingness of pits with a reputation for militancy to boost production levels. Of course this is partly explained by the fact that in the absence of a pay rise bonus earnings are vital. But, the bureaucrats have used this to divert the union from a national campaign on pay. And militants have not really resisted this drift.

Demoralisation is also evident in the lack of a fight against the butching of the industry. Since March 1984 43,000 jobs have gone. Instead of a fight back many men are taking redundancy money. At the same time the sacked lads are receiving little in the way of action to get them re-instated. A flurry of one-day strikes before the conference cannot conceal the fact that there is no organised and systematic campaign being waged by the union. Nor was one planned at Tenby.

The new-right are contributing to this mood by sabotaging local struggles. There has been an increase in the number of local strikes, yet each of them has been deliberately kept isolated. The recent strike at Armthorpe is a good example. The men were willing and able to spread it, but the Area leaders obstructed them all along the line. The new-right feed off the demoralisation they they help cause, and that way they have grown in strength and influence over the last year.

But there is another reason for their victory. Scargill is incapable of really fighting them. We will defend Scargill against the attacks of the old and new right. We support his stance of rejecting 'new realism' and calling for class struggle. But we will not pretend that he is capable of delivering the goods. Tenby proves that he, alone, cannot. Moreover it is his politics that mean he cannot.

Scargill is tied to the union machine. That machine is bureaucratic and, in the NUM, fiercely federalist. Scargill knows full well that Clarke, Thomas and Taylor are out to obstruct class struggle policies. Taylor even prevented him addressing the Yorkshire Miners' Gala just before conference. Yet Scargill will not go over the heads of the bureaucrats and organise the militants in the areas to fight for class struggle policies against their leaders. He uses the fact that he is a servant of the executive to justify his becoming a slave to its reactionary decisions.

Scargill also refuses to face up to the fact that the strike was defeated. at the conference he argued that the strike had saved 30,000 jobs and 22 pits. Given that 43,000 jobs and over 30 pits have gone this is, frankly, a piece of nonsense. The fact is that a defeat took place. That is no excuse for defeatism. It does mean addressing the real problems, something Scargill does not do.

Of course his call to action is generally correct. But it is too vague, too general. It is to be 'sooner' rather than 'later'. But what does this mean for militants in the pits, what tasks must be fulfilled in order to prepare for a new battle? Scargill has no answer to these vital questions. Red Miner does not underestimate the difficulties of the present day situation. But we do believe there is an alternaltive to Scargill's vague calls on the one hand, and the treacherous class collaboration of Bolton and co, on the other.

The regeneration of the union must begin at pit-level. The continuing attacks and provocations of British Coal must be met with local strikes. Boosting production is still vital to the bosses. Regular interruptions of production will make them think twice about staging provocations.

On a long-term basis confidence can be rebuilt through such struggles only if they result in a re-juvenation of pit organisation. At a local level militants must organise to throw out the 'new realists' on branch committees.

Taylor: No longer listening to Scargill!

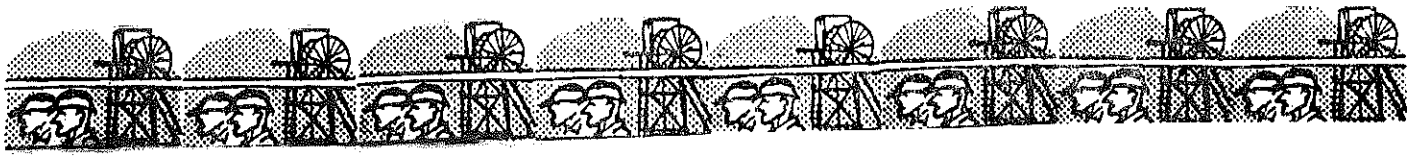
The committees must be made accountable and recallable to the men.

But building the fightback on a purely local level is not enough. A national strike is a long way off. But that does not mean that area-wide and cross-area organisation and action is impossible. Every attempt should be made to spread local strikes. Every threatened new closure must be met by area-wide action. A fight must be waged to impose a total, indefinate overtime ban over the pay issue. Both of these questions are vital to all miners. All miners can be united in action around them. While an overtime ban is not the most desirable form of industrial action, it is a step in the right direction. It can, in the period ahead, rebuild a fighting spirit.

Militants in every pit must establish contact. Pit, panel and regional rank and file links must be built up. Each dispute must become a means of extending a network of rank and file militants. A sizeable group of militants in the NUM could begin to turn the tide, on one condition - that they are organised in an anti-bureaucratic militant rank and file movement.

Since this article was written South Wales area leadership have called an overtime ban over pay under pressure from the lodges. This is an important move. However the worrying thing is that the South Wales leadership see it as a local issue and have already told the bosses press that they don't intend to call on other areas to follow. This is wrong! This should be used as a lead by militants in the orther areas to fight for a national overtime ban as a first step in the pay battle.

REGIONAL ROUND-UP



SOUTH WALES

The recent deal struck between British Coal and the CEGB will mean around £20 million less revenue for B.C. in South Wales and further destruction of the coalfield. The Area director has announced plans to bring forward from December to September the production target of 3 tons/man shift. This will mean the axing of at least 10% of the wworkforce, 1,300 jobs will go - but likely to be nearer 2,000. In the short term BC plan to phase out all districts producing less than 500 tons/day, this means that about 12 of the present 44 coal faces will be closed down. No pits will be shut yet, but obviously shutting faces will make many pits less viable and put them in severe danger if/when they hit problems in the future. So, after massive increases in productivity in South Wales, BC have responded in typical fashion. Clearly, increasing productivity in itself can't save jobs.

WORKSHOP CLOSURES.

British Coal also recently announced the closure of the Tredegar workshops, the main service centre for the Area's 17 pits. 400 jobs will go in an area of already massive unemployment. After the closure of the Mountain Ash and Tonddu workshops in recent years, the men at Tredegar were given an assurance by BC that their future was secure. As usual, this meant the kiss of death. In addition, another 50 jobs will be lost with the closure of the Ammanford workshops in Dyfed. The NUM leadership have not opposed either of these closures. Indeed, Area President Des Dutfield has played the role of the invisible man since his election last year.

NEW INVESTMENT

The Tower Colliery at Hirwaun in the Cyon valley is to receive £5 million new investment. This will apparently 'guarantee' it's future into the next century, but will also result in the loss of 100 jobs. The new money will enable Tower to tackle a heavy deposit of anthracite coal up to 10 feet thick in places. The new face is likely to come into production in September. The Aberaman Phurnacite works which is supplied by Tower also appears to have a safer future now. However, Abercynon, the other remaining pit in the valley (Penrhiwceiber shut last year) is under possible threat of closure. The pit, which is linked with Lady Windsor at Ynysybwl may not even go through the review procedure, as it is feared that this would put the future of Lady Windsor in doubt too. Mining conditions are far worse at the Lady Windsor end of the link-up, miners travelling 3 miles underground to the coal faces, compared to 1 mile at Abercynon. Such considerations are of course of no importance to British Coal.

SOUTH WALES GALA.

Last month saw the first South Wales miners gala since 1983, held in Swansea because the traditional venue Cardiff, has a Tory Council. "Guest" speaker was the treacherous Kinnock - invited by the NUM executive against the wishes of the militants. This may help explain the relatively poor turnout, with only around half the lodges represented on a march through the city centre before the gala.

Kinnock gave his usual vague committment to the miners and implied some of the sacked and jailed lads would receive "justice". Needless to say he made no mention of Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland. While he received some applause (and heckling) most people had better things to do than to listen to scabby Kinnock. Thankfully, next year Arthur Scargill is guest speaker.

REGIONAL ROUND-UP

NORTH DERBYSHIRE

Whitwell colliery : members voted not to fight the closure of their pit. Voluntary redundancies will take most of the 750 jobs.

Selling your job seems to be the order of the day, at Renishaw Park. Along with some men, the branch officials including the president, secretary and treasurer (all solid) have took their thiry pieces of silver.

The call went out at the national conference for all NCB officials carrying out Tory government policy during the miners strike to be sacked when the political climate is right. What do they mean when the politacl climate is right? I assume our delegates mean when Judas Kinnock reaches No.10 he will pull the knives out of the backs of miners he so regularly put there during the strike. Our own area was the only section of the union to oppose the call saying, would you believe it, that they were against any 'witch hunts of any sort'
Well one stands outside the Chesterfield office and scratches one's head. Eyes come into focus on two statues and you ask yourself what these two have in common with those inside!

One pit's monthly management bulletin contained this article under the title Save on Supplies.
You can help by making certain we make use of what we buy and don't leave it lying about to get lost. During the year, we will be illustrating the costs of our materials but to give you some idea:-

One Cutter Pick = 7 pints of Bitter.

One Strut = 40 cigs.

One Bolt = 1 Gin and Tonic.

So one pick/strut/bolt can take you and yours out for a night.

Has anybody got a knee pad strap = 1 plastic bag....I want to be sick!

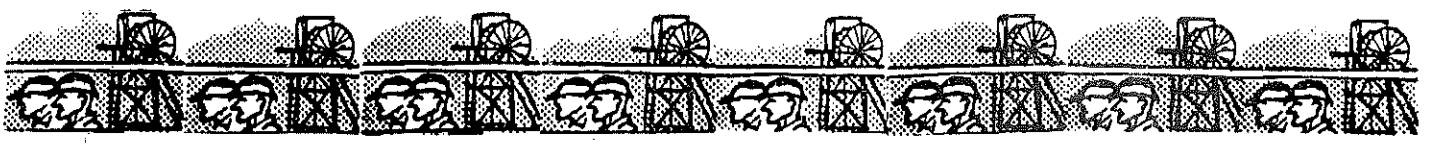
DURHAM

An important fightback looks set to develop at Murton Colliery. The Board's insistence on 6,600 tonnes a day production target made the lodge suspicious that they were paving the way towards closure as well as the price cuts granted to the major customer the CEGB.

The lodge are staring to campaign with the 'Murton Miner', a new colliery newsletter to keep everybody up to date with the management's moves. A major issue is the way the NCB deliberately kept industry out of the area in the 1960's and '70's when they needed all the labour. Murton will be looking for support from other areas.

YORKSHIRE

The Yorkshire Gala made the headlines in the local press again this year. No, not the usual cheap stories about drunken brawling miners - well hardly after the magistrates refused to, allow it to be licenced! This time it was the fact Scargill was not invited to speak and the pitiful excuses offered by Taylor about not having the same person two years running. Some believe that Scargill had not even been invited to attend. When the speakers were ready the audience set up a slow handclap giving Taylor a rough ride until Scargill stood up to acknowledge them and wave the proceedings on. Taylor went on to give his classic speech about being realistic and how he was working away negotiating the sacked lads their jobs back and how we must wait for a Labour government.



SOUTH AFRICAN MINERS

ANSWER THEIR CALL — WORKERS SANCTIONS NOW!

'The message for the British labour movement is that their support in our struggle for liberation is important. We don't only mean verbal support. We don't only mean words. We mean action'.

This was the call from Cyril Ramaphosa, the General Secretary of the South African National Union of Mineworkers, to the Annual Conference at Tenby. Ramaphosa and the South African NUM's president, James Motlasi, had made a dramatic appearance after two weeks spent avoiding arrest by the massive dragnet of arrests by the South African Police in the new State of Emergency. As they spoke, an estimated 3,000 activists were detained with no charge being laid, about 1,000 of those trade union leaders and shop or shaft stewards.

Reports reaching Britain tell of whole meetings of trade unionists rounded up, church services broken up by police using arms and gas, and torture of detainees.

Cyril Ramaphosa.

South African trade unionists are fighting back, despite these extremely difficult circumstances. Miners in the DE Beers diamond mines took strike action. Other trade unions affiliated to the major federation, COSATU, have either taken or are planning strike action. The news blackout means that few reports are getting through in the media, but we know that substantial strike action has taken place in stores and in the metal industries.

DECISIVE SUPPORT

Cyril Ramaphosa made clear that black South African workers know they will have to continue to struggle and suffer themselves.

'We have to fight in the mines, in the streets, and townships. But the support we can get from the British working classes is very meaningful and would probably be decisive in winning the struggle.'

It is time that the British trade union movement took matters into its own hands. It is no use waiting for Thatcher to impose sanctions. She has made patently clear her desire to avoid them. Her own husband is a director of the truck manufacturing company Frodens. Her cronies in the city have been profiteering in South Africa for decades.

T.U.C.

Red Miner is convinced that a large number of trade unionists do want some effective action taken. They applaud the stand taken by young workers at Plymouth Hospital stores who have given a lead in refusing to handle South African produce. But every steward in a car factory, every militant on the docks or rail, is worried that they can't get their own members to take action because of the real threat of victimisation. That is why no trade union activists should have to think they are isolated in taking action. That is why we must fight for joint union committees at all levels of the unions. And that is why we must demand the leaders of our movement actually give a lead.

(P.T.O.→)

Neither the British nor the South African NUM has any reason to put faith in the TUC! Cyril Ramaphosa struck a familiar note when he told Conference :

'The British TUC was highly respected but nowadays our working classes are beginning to doubt the TUC'.

Cyril Ramaphosa added:

'When it comes to South Africa we see the British TUC trying to draw back and not speak out when it should do'.

FOOL'S ERRAND

We know the TUC will continue to avoid taking real action, that is organising an effective workers boycott of South African goods, unless it is forced to do so. Our union must take a lead in this. We should not be fobbed off with a promise of a new approach to the government - a fools errand that would be. We should not be satisfied with further action to withdraw pension funds from South African investments. Of course we should ensure that our unions don't have blood on their hands in that way. But the key to the situation doesn't lie in the slow trickle of investment out of South Africa. It lies with massive workers action to stop all goods and services moving to and from South Africa.

It lies with workers here ensuring they are in touch with their fellow trade unionists in the factories and mines in South Africa, and taking action to prevent them being detained and victimised.

That is what our union executive should be taking to the TUC at the General Council in July and to the Congress in September. And that is what it should be preparing the membership for. James Motlatsi and Cyril Ramaphosa have returned to South Africa at great risk to themselves, to help forward the struggle there. We must not let them down.

LOBBY THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL

Lobby of the July TUC General Council 9.00 am 23rd July . Congress House, Gt Russell St. (more fun than the wedding!). Lobby supported by Birmingham and Lambeth Trades Councils. Demand the TUC organise a blockade of apartheid!

INTERVIEW

"I DANCED FOR THE SULTAN. . . ."

An interview with Coventry Womens' Support Group member Liz Sugrue, on her recent visit to Afghanistan.

Red Miner How did you come to go on this trip?
Liz. An organisation called Liberation contacted National Women Against Pit Closures with an invitation to come on a fact finding visit to Afghanistan. It was passed on to Warwickshire and I went. Les Sweeting of Kent NUM was there and some trade union and Labour Party people.

Red Miner. What were your impressions of Afghanistan?
Liz. It was out of this world! We met all sorts of people. Trade unionists, soldiers, visited orphanages, factories and villages in the border areas with Pakistan where the fighting is. Anyone can be trained to use a gun and we saw the villagers out working in the fields being guarded by local militia. Even young kids have their part to play in the militia and there are women involved as well.

Red Miner. Did people know about the miners strike?
Liz. Yes some did. In the offices of the Kabul Times there were photos and badges from the strike, and they asked us how things were going since the return to work.

(P.T.O.→)

Red Miner. What kinds of places did you visit?
Liz. All sorts. We visited a textile factory which was quite interesting because there was a creche there for the children so's the women workers would be able to go and see them and feed them in break times. Also the villages in the border area were really interesting. When we were there there were meetings called in the villages to discuss the attack on Libya. People asked us what we thought. I said I felt most people in Britain were against the bombing.

Red Miner. Was it all hard work?
Liz. We had some fun too ! One of the local sultans or chiefs invited us to dinner and I tried to dance an Afghan dance for him! He gave us some clothes from Pakistan as we hadn't expected to stay away from Kabul that day and had no extra change of clothes.

Red Miner. What's the political situation there?
Liz. It's clear that the Soviet Union gives them aid for their orphanages and schools and so on. But you don't see many Russian soldiers around. There are lots of fair haired kids in the orphanages though. But it's true the Afghans called the Russians in to help them against counter revolutionaries based in Pakistan. The people are sometimes very wary of the army though and this upsets some of the soldiers. But they do have their own militia. The government told us themselves that it is very difficult to convince some of the villagers to change their traditional and religious ideas

We were at the airport and about to leave when we were asked to come back for some extra days just at the time when a new President was chosen. They wanted to explain this to us I think.

They have definately done some amazing things though. There are collective farms where the desert was before. I wrote some poems when I was there about it all.

Off to Afghanistan I went
Expecting to sleep in a tent
Hotel Royal you should have seen
Fit enough for our Queen
Wash and change and food to eat
Then an hour in the heat
Off to meetings we did go
Chauffered cars to and fro
The driving scared us half to bits
Living now on our wits
Notes we wrote and notes we took
Time later to put them in a book
Afghanistan is blistering hot
And in such a short time we've learned a lot
They've armed their people as they must
But this was done to show a trust
They still have bandits who have a gun
Who'll come in the night to hit and run
Times are changing in Afghanistan
For woman as well as for man

Every time the sun came out
We have been shut inside
Meeting after meeting
We're taking it in our stride
We feel we are the lucky ones learning something new
Even learning Afghan words
We feel the chosen few
The sights are sometimes sorrowful
The poverty is bad,
Seeing homeless children here
Can make you feel quite sad
But to see Afghanistan striding on
To make a better future here
Makes you feel quite good inside
And our good wishes to you are true and sincere.

BOLIVIA

ELEUTERIO GUTIERREZ is a Bolivian miner and Trotskyist who was imprisoned in September 1985 at the time of the five week general strike against the austerity measures of the UDP government. Accused of "stealing mining equipment" on his arrest the comrade has been imprisoned for 8 months without trial or any charges laid against him. The real reason for his arrest was because he was a well known militant in the region of Oruro, being active in campaigns to nationalise the private mines, on protest marches of miners to La Paz, and an active delegate of his Union.
Letters of protest and resolutions calling for his release should be sent to the Bolivian Embassy, 106 Eaton Square, London SW1.

WHAT IS  MARXISM ?

In the April issue of Red Miner we looked at the causes of capitalist crises. We finished by saying that 'abolishing capitalism will abolish the death grip of profit on production. It will liberate production once and for all from all crisis.'

Sounds fine doesn't it? But how and why? Once the working class has triumphed over capitalism and smashed the capitalist state, how will we organise production of goods and services to avoid crisis and to the benefit of all?

Marx and Engels were very wary of drawing up 'blue-prints' for the future of socialist society. They were too scathing of utopian socialists who devised wonderful schemes for socialism in the here and now without getting down to the business of waging the class war now to get rid of capitalism first! Still we have had the experience of the Russian Revolution in its early years before it fell under Uncle Joe's stranglehold, and we can say a few things about how we'll set about the job.

First, we will no longer produce goods for exchange for money on the market. We will produce useful things to distribute to all members of society in order to satisfy their needs. Of course, before we get to that happy state we will have to massively increase production on a world scale to raise the masses from starvation and poor housing. That's why socialism can only be a world order because no one country, however massive has the resources to provide what we need. But by taking advantage of a new, rational international division of labour we stop the ridiculous system of competition and duplication of effort that goes on at the moment. For example, one or two countries could reasonably produce all the tonnage of shipping we need for trade, while other countries use the resource for something else. (And we will not waste all that steel and new technology on warships either!).

Under socialism individuals will not be condemned to one occupation for life. Instead of being victims of the division of labour as under capitalism, we can master it. As Marxists we reject the idea that some are 'born to command' and others 'born to obey'. It is not in one's nature to be a miner or a bus conductor for life. The desire to try out different activities

exists in us all. The proof is in what people do in their leisure time.

In socialist society the free access to education and relevant skills will allow workers to set about numerous tasks. The choice of jobs will not be imposed but will be fitted within the needs of an individual's development.

A massive reduction in the working week will be possible because we will get rid of enforced unemployment. This is only necessary under capitalism to keep a downward pressure on wages and increase profits. Work-sharing will be the norm under socialist society. Absenteeism and words like 'work-shy' will start to disappear because work will cease to be an imposed burden that we try to escape from.

(P.T.O. →)

Getting rid of the wages system over time as we produce an abundance of goods for all is not the only consequence of socialist society. In the factory or office it will mean doing away with hierarchy in the workplace. In its place will be substituted a system of producers democracy. The aim of socialism is self-government on all levels of social life, beginning with economic life. Elected delegates will replace institutional hierarchies. All permanent functionaries will be replaced by delegates who take on these roles in turn.

Such a system of organisation and social wealth can, of course, only be achieved through a planned economy. Representative democracy that reaches down to every office, factory, street and estate is a pre-condition of such an economy. Only people know what their needs are; can articulate them and decide collectively on the order of receiving them.

Only such an economy can put an end to waste, utilise machines for people and apply them on a large scale to the arduous, dirty, monotonous jobs (which are not very profitable to invest in today!), and so eradicate drudgery.

Workers will thus find work fulfilling and only a part of their lives. Miners will breather fresh air, get the sun on their backs and let the machines do the work.

BOOK REVIEW

SHIFTING HORIZONS
Lynnn Beaton
Canary Press £5.65

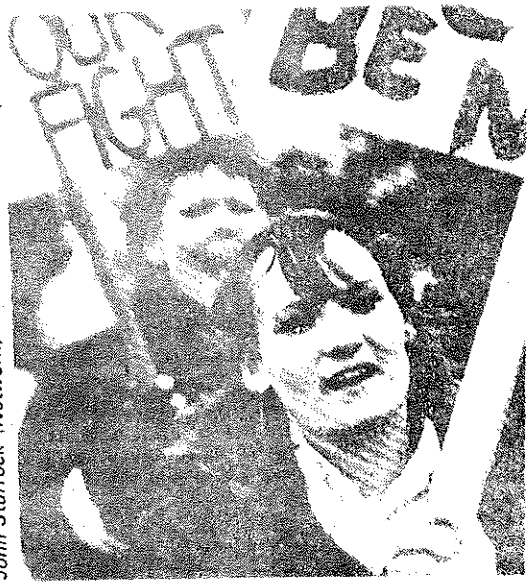
Shifting Horizons charts the political journey of two miners' wives from Blidworth, Notts. over the year-long strike. Both women came from mining back-ground and were ordinary housewives at the start of the Great Strike.

Both women were extremely apprehensive about their husbands joining the strike. Pauline's young son had a rare illness and Doreen had been in financial difficulties. However once their husbands were picketed out, both women stood firm with them, *"Now we were standing up for our principles and that made us feel proud."*

Going to their first picket got them involved with other women and together they began to organise a soup kitchen. Being on picket lines and being personally harrassed by the police opened their eyes to the role of the police, Pauline said, *"I couldn't understand why they had acted that way,* (arrested a lad crossing the road) *They're supposed to be upholders of the peace, and there wasn't any peace being broken.... they could make a perfectly peaceful picket into a violent one"* It also made them rethink the truth of all that the media said, not just about the miners' strike but about other events such as the Brixton "riots".

Both women got involved in activities they wouldn't dream of before: public speaking to support groups, giving interviews, occupying the youth club, travelling all over the country to collect money for the strike centre

(P.T.O.)



John Sturrock (Network)

and meeting people who supported the Miners' strike because they felt it was their fight too. One supporter said *"I understand that if the NUM is defeated in this struggle then I am defeated as well....I am merely acting in my own interests...."*

As the Strike went on, both Doreen and Pauline gained confidence and became more than soup kitchen organisers. Doreen became the legal "expert" for the strike centre. They became involved in other struggles and Doreen joined the picket and then the lie-in at South London Women's Hospital on the day that it was officially closed. They also spent time with the Greenham Common Women.

Their husbands also changed. They took charge of the housework and looked after the children while the women worked in the Strike Centre.

The saddest part of the book was at the end when striking miners were told to return to work, a lot of the men said, *"We're not going back to work without Ken"* (a sacked miner). Yet, the next day, they all returned to work.

Hatfield Main Wives Group

could weld working class women into a united fight for women's rights and women's emancipation against capitalism and its agents in the labour movement. The experience and organisation of miners' wives could provide the basis on which such a movement can be built.

Doreen and Pauline have now joined Labour Party Women Section and are still active in Blidworth Action Group, taking up issues like Health Cuts, Greenham Common.

Wives groups must draw up their own demands to meet the needs of women in their communities, eg nurseries and adaquate health care. but they must also go beyond that and give active support to other women and workers in struggle. They must maintain their links they have built up with other worker during the strike. A first task for the wives' group must be the fight for the reinstatement of sacked miners like Ken.