

A PLAN FOR MINERS

The Department of
Trade and Industry's
coal review:
An anti-submission



Communist Party of Great Britain

Workers of the world, unite!

Dedicated to
Jack Collins
Kent NUM general secretary
1980-1987

A plan for miners

The Department of Trade
and Industry's coal review:
an anti-submission

Communist Party
of Great Britain

NOVEMBER PUBLICATIONS LTD

Published by November Publications Ltd

BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

© 1992 November Publications Ltd

ISBN 1 874123 05 5

British Library Cataloguing-In-Publication Data: A catalogue
record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset and printed by November Publications Ltd

BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

First edition 1992

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
1. Profit, production and people	6
2. Their disarray	9
3. Their plans	12
4. False friends	14
5. A winning strategy	16
6. UDM	21
7. Communist Party	22

Introduction

The Communist Party submits this 'evidence' to the Department of Trade and Industry's coal review without any illusions whatsoever in its composition, terms of reference, objectivity, recommendations or outcome. Our purpose is to use the review as a platform from which to make the case for socialism and call for working class action against the government and the rotten system it serves.

Of course, that there is a review in the first place has nothing to do with any desire to see fair play or commitment to democracy on the part of the government. It is entirely due to the government's weakness, the miners' determination to resist, and the huge support and respect our pretorian guard enjoys among the mass of the population. Conditions are ripe for workers to take up the weapons of class war.

Obviously then, we will not be bandying about statistics in an attempt to prove that the government's figures are wrong, that Britain would be more competitive using deep mined coal instead of gas, or that coal imports are economically irrational.

We communists serve neither the market nor the bosses' profits, but the working class. Our concern is for the 30,000 miners threatened with a life on the dole and, above all, the long term interests of the working class as a whole.

Provisional Central Committee
Communist Party of Great Britain
November 30 1992

1. Profit, production and people

Utterly and without hesitation, the Communist Party condemns British Coal's decision to axe 31 pits and sack 30,000 miners. Acceptance of such a '*Plan for coal*' in whole or part by the Tory government, even with 90 day moratoriums and commissions of enquiry, is the act of those unfit to govern.

Besides destroying whole communities, putting 40,000 other workers on the dole, and forcing 10 coal-fired power stations to close, the government promoted "rush" to gas-generation is unbelievably shortsighted. At projected rates of extraction, North Sea reserves of gas will be exhausted within 25 years. Squandering such a scarce resource is sheer irresponsibility.

The coal industry should be developed through new clean technology, not destroyed. With good stewardship Britain's deep mines can stay operational for a thousand years. Socially, the mines represent a huge accumulated investment - £12 billion since 1974 - which has made them highly productive, among the most advanced in the world and capable of meeting a good proportion of the population's energy requirements for the indefinite future.

It is unfortunate then that virtually all those in the workers' movement opposing the pit closure programme have done so not on the basis of working class interests and human need. Instead they try and do the impossible. Their case for miners' jobs is meant to dovetail into the dream of making Britain competitive with its rivals. They accept the workings of the market and the rationale of the capitalist system. It does not fit. In reality it is *either* people or profit. The interests of one are antagonistic to the interests of the other.

Judging things from the viewpoint of profit and loss is the 'authentic' ideology of the right. When the anti-union Aims of Industry and Thatcherite Tory 'rebels' argue that the cost of throwing miners on the dole would far exceed" the £1bn cost of subsidising British Coal, we know where they are coming from.

Frankly though, bumbling Willis' TUC is coming from the same direction. It wants to save the coal industry by overcoming the

“malfunctioning of the market”. Given the TUC’s record of betrayal and misleadership in recent years and the fact that the highlight of its 1992 congress was an address by the CBI president, its claim that the market can be made to function for the benefit of the workers is not surprising.

What of our friend Arthur Scargill? Although he staged a well publicised and principled walkout against the TUC’s fawning class collaboration, he too bases his defence of miners’ jobs on *capitalist* economics. He claims the “economic case for coal is unanswerable” (No wonder the ‘official communist’ paper the *Morning Star* can boast about the “common ground” between the NUM and the “free enterprise”, “far right Aims of Industry group”).

For workers, such arguments are dangerous. They put us completely at the mercy of an inhuman system which treats us as *things*, not people. Capitalists purchase workers’ labour power *only* in order to make profit. That is why when profits are rising, demand increases and the number in employment expands. But it is also why when profits dry up, *effective* demand goes down and workers are discarded like so much scrap.

Back in 1912 the famous rank and file miners’ pamphlet *The miners’ next step* demanded as its top priority that “the old policy of identity of interests between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed”. Eighty years later, in 1992, we can only agree. There should be no arguments over coal’s profitability. Miners have been ensnared in this type of book keeping wrangle ever since nationalisation in 1947. It has got them nowhere.

We say fight for your jobs, livelihoods, future, and class, but leave profit levels as a matter for the capitalists and the capitalists *alone*. We say workers have their own interests, the bosses have theirs, and never the twain shall meet.

After all, what if the cost of subsidising British Coal did *not* “far exceed” the cost of sacking miners? What happens when the market is not “malfunctioning” and yet moves into recession or slump? Are we supposed to meekly accept “unanswerable” speed ups, pay cuts and the sack?

In pure economic terms the closure of 31 pits is in line with the *capitalist* market. As Arthur Scargill has said, this time rightly, “they are sacrificing Britain’s future to gain profit”. That is why closing half the country’s pits and making 30,000 miners and

40,000 others redundant is, for capitalism, a price “well worth paying”.

The calculation is simple. It is reckoned that what remains of British Coal will have profit levels making it suitable for privatisation; the present £170 million a year is nowhere near enough for the market. Then there are National Power and PowerGen, the two giant private generating companies. For the sake of profit they want to purchase more gas, more imported coal, more open cast mined coal but less deep mined coal. Even then, to further jack up their profits they are insisting on a price cut - from £1.85 to £1.33 a gigajoule.

Under capitalism production is undertaken *solely* for the sake of profit. It could be said that if capitalism is the only true religion of this country's rulers, profit is its father, son and holy ghost. Without profit, capital stops being capital. Without profit, capitalists stop being capitalists. Without profit, the capitalist system simply grinds to a stop ... And here is the flaw through which the capitalist system must eventually perish.

Capitalists must run on the treadmill of profit or go out of business. Competition never-endingly *forces* them to move faster and faster in the search for more and more profit.

Profit does not originate with self-denial. Capitalism came to dominance in Britain, not through penny-pinching, but courtesy of the slave trade in black flesh and the pitiless extension of workers' hours. Today the essence of capitalism remains as it always was: the exploitation of the many by a rich few, and ruthless and cut-throat competition - one against one, and one against all.

Government ministers would have it that this ensures the survival of the fittest. Untrue. Capitalism is ruled by the law of profit as the drug addict is ruled by their fix or the psychopath is ruled by their whispering internal voices.

In spite of the competitive scramble, the capitalist cycle of laying out money for raw materials and workers, producing commodities, and then marketing them for more money than the original outlay, becomes progressively more difficult. During the present drawn-out recession, as so many of us know to our cost, whole areas of the economy are spiralling downwards or ceasing to operate altogether because they are not profitable enough,

Ironically, the cause of this breakdown in the system lies in the very success of the system. In the fight to beat off competition and maximise profits, capitalists conjure up one new technology after

another. This growth in the power of *dead labour* over *living labour* allows an ever decreasing circle of capitalists to amass ever increasing fortunes by taking productivity to previously unheard of heights (it has increased 155% in the coal industry in the last seven years alone). Yet it also deprives millions of employment.

In the last analysis, however, the source of all profit is *living labour*. It alone produces *value* and *surplus value* (dead labour, ie machines, merely *transfers* its value). So as workers are replaced by machines, the amount of surplus value embodied in each commodity shrinks.

Consequently there exists a growing tendency for the rate of profit to fall; crudely, for each pound there is less and less return. On top of that, increasing productivity through speed up and new technology means the market is flooded with commodities in the frantic effort to realise profit. Plagued by unemployment and low wages, the population is incapable of purchasing what has been produced. The system begins to choke on its own *overproduction*.

That is what again and again throws the capitalist mode of production into general crises; which, as Karl Marx predicted and life proves, become ever deeper and more violent.

We have no interest in dreaming up daft, unrealisable schemes to make capitalism work smoothly. Neither the market nor the economic disruption and human suffering it causes should be accepted by the working class.

2. Their disarray

The much vaunted 'revolt' by Tory MPs over the pit closure programme was the damp squib we always expected it to be. Government threats and blandishments did the trick. There was a 13 majority against Labour's feeble motion calling for no pits to be closed until *after* the completion of a (Tory dominated) trade and industry select committee report on the question.

Nevertheless there can be no hiding the reality and extent of the government's retreat. On Sunday October 18 Heseltine was immovable: there was no case "for changing the recommendations I have made," insisted the *president*. Three days later he not only announced a moratorium on pit closures but was promising a

“genuine review” of Britain’s “energy strategy”.

This was more than a personal humiliation for Michael Heseltine and his ineffectual boss, John Major. The ruling class on whose behalf they administer the system is deeply divided ... and not only over coal. It has no *united* answer to the pressing problems of mounting economic decline, Maastricht, the ERM debacle, etc.

That is why establishment institutions, from the CBI to *The Sun* and from *The Economist* to the Church of England, assail the government with vilification and conflicting pleas and advice. Why the middle classes march against pit closures in true blue Cheltenham. Why a pack of monetarist professors, Thatcher and Tory Euro ‘sceptics’ have constituted themselves an unofficial opposition, and why Major and his cabinet have performed one U-turn after another.

So the splendid disarray results from more than John Major’s unprecedentedly low popularity ratings and his cardboard cup personality. It reflects the fact that one strategy for managing Britain’s relentless decline has failed and has yet to be replaced by another around which the ruling class can unite. Of course, this phase cannot last. A new strategy will be hammered out, and then all hell will be let loose.

Up to the late 1960s British capitalism had the good fortune of being able to carefully manage its decline, ensuring that decay took place with the minimum social upheaval. Between World War I and World War II it could leech off a huge colonial empire. Thereafter, till the late 1960s, relative decline was cushioned by the unprecedented growth in the world economy caused by the US led boom, the biggest and most sustained world capitalism has ever experienced.

All that is over. The empire is just a shadowy memory, and so is the post-war boom. It petered out round about 1968 and gave way to a drawn out period of stagnation which is only interrupted now by episodic bouts of speculative money-making. Under these conditions, relative decline could no longer be easily managed. To save themselves our rulers did what comes naturally. They turned on us, the working class.

The whole social democratic project of welfare capitalism was junked. It could no longer be afforded. Full employment, housing for all and the aim of social equality went from sacred bi-partisan principles to follies of a bygone age, derided as both unnatural and

Uneconomic.

The leaner, fitter Britain that was supposed to result was meant to rediscover its sense of mission and international standing by taking its 'rightful' place in Europe - as its leader. This was to be achieved by playing off France against Germany and powerbroking with the US.

That arrogant pretension has come apart at the seams and left the ruling class strategically naked. As shown by Black Wednesday, Britain cannot survive in the same economic space as Germany. Despite a decade of sustained attacks on the rights and conditions of the working class, despite draconian anti-trade union laws, despite half the country's industry going to the wall Britain remains less profitable than its 'partners' in Europe. In other words, Lawson's boast of an "economic renaissance" under Thatcher was bunk.

The only way British capitalism can compete now is on price, not quality. That means driving down our living standards to South American levels - "the real cost of labour must fall," insists the *Financial Times* - and that means South American social conditions and democratic rights.

The present willingness to consult, even backtrack, on the numbers to be sacked should therefore be seen only as a window of opportunity we have had the good luck to win. Unless we take full advantage of this opportunity, the ruling class will renew its attacks on us with a scope, viciousness and brutality never seen before in this country. Having already been steadily eroded, the few remaining 'communistic' achievements of capitalism, not least the NHS and comprehensive education, are now under sentence of death. Far worse will come.

Our task is not to rescue capitalism, to do the impossible and return it to its supposed golden age through some Alternative Economic Strategy. Working class freedom from austerity, the dole and war lies in the future by carrying through the class struggle to the point where capitalism is finally replaced by a system whose ruling principle is "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". To win that prize means that today we must use our enemy's difficulties as our opportunity.

3. Their plans

When Ian MacGregor fronted the Coal Board/state assault on the miners in 1984, he did so with the full support and active participation of all sections of the ruling class. They were united in their determination to avenge the miners' victories of 1972 and 1974. By defeating the miners, a body blow would be inflicted on the whole organised working class and Britain would become governable again.

They have no such unity now. Our rulers are divided, and therefore vulnerable - ideal conditions for working class offensive. The miners have already won a battle. Getting a pledge to close 10 "loss making" pits with "due legal consultation" and an inquiry was of great importance. It was only a skirmish, of course. The war will be rejoined.

Heseltine has placated 'rebel' Tory MPs and saved his ministerial neck. Now he will be making plans to achieve government objectives using other means. Perhaps pits will be closed through a more indirect process. Perhaps a few well chosen sops will be used to deepen divisions among miners. Perhaps the government will rediscover the virtues of energy planning. Certainly, after the recent outpouring of working class anger, the stage is set for more tactical concessions, including a further slowing down of the pit closure programme.

Heseltine can easily delay the second stage of the deregulation of the electrical generating industry. The free market threshold is to be lowered in 1994 from 1MW to 100KW - Increasing the number of big customers who can negotiate contracts for cheap power from 5,000 to 50,000. Already the first stage of deregulation has created a surge in powerstation construction. There is expected to be 57% overcapacity in 1997-8.

Experts say that if the present arrangement were maintained, electricity distributors could be persuaded to commit themselves to coal based power generation. In this way demand for coal could be raised by 8 million tonnes a year, enough to keep eight pits open and save 8,000 jobs. The extra costs would be hidden in the form of increased household bills.

Another option Heseltine has is to decommission the ageing Magnox nuclear reactors. Nuclear power receives an annual

government subsidy of £1.2bn through the so-called “nuclear levy”, and has the great merit of being highly unfashionable. The beauty here is that creating an opening for the equivalent of 9 million tonnes of coal could be done in the name of the environment. Slowing the “dash for gas” is more problematic, but capping electricity imports from France and coal imports - currently running at 20 million tonnes - would be perfectly feasible.

The rightwing pressure group Aims of Industry wants such a package of measures. Not only would this avoid the closure of “about half the proposed pits”, but a new industrial order could be introduced skewed in favour of ‘free enterprise’ using the UDM in Notts; “they, at least, deserve a thorough study of the facts of coal,” says the Aims of Industry pamphlet *Some questions and answers on British Coal*.

Before the present upheaval, the UDM’s former leader Roy Lynk had been talking about joining East Midlands Electricity in a buy-out. In marginal pits this makes good sense ... for the buyers of coal.

As shown by the example of Monktonhall in Scotland, miners have been willing to risk £10,000 of their own money in an attempt to save their jobs. Those who cooperate in their own exploitation have to *undercut* other miners by getting rid of supposed “ludicrous holidays, loud mouthed unions and spineless management” (Jim Parker, Monktonhall managing director). From the government’s standpoint such a Pontius Pilate solution has much going for it. With the frantic competition in the energy industry, miners would obligingly put each other out of work.

Much of the trade union bureaucracy, including the TUC, would readily claim that keeping even a handful of the threatened pits open, no matter what the terms and conditions, was some sort of victory. The mass of miners would think no such thing. If they can see a clear road ahead and have firm allies alongside them, we are sure that the miners will reject all sops, ploys and traps.

We say: not a pit closed, not a man sacked. With nearly 3 million presently on the dole according to the government’s own crooked figures, and with unemployment set to rise continuously till 1995, we can demand nothing less.

4. False friends

Some would have us believe that the miners will win through pressure politics, putting forward a well reasoned capitalist case and relying on public support. History tells otherwise.

Hospital workers in 1988 and ambulance drivers in 1990 found that such people's power gets nowhere. True, miners have won an almost unprecedented degree of so-called public support - by which is meant not workers, rather Tory MPs, the press, the church, the media and showbiz personalities. Such public support owes nothing to the supposedly 'caring' 90s. It comes about through the lack of ruling class strategy and sense of direction and the fact that for those in the 'opinion forming' middle and upper classes pit closures exist in the realm of abstract morality, not raw class power. It would be fatal to rely on such fickle public support and its you-pay-we-jump media and its you-suffer-we-pray church.

If the working class is mobilised *alongside* the miners, all false friends will scuttle off in terror. Returning to type, as soon as things get serious they will demand court sequestrations, social security starvation and army intervention to put down *the* mutinous mob.

First among the deserters will be the Tory 'dissidents' like Elizabeth Peacock, Nicholas Winterton and Richard Alexander. They may have voted against their government over pit closures. But over the years they have supported every piece of legislation that has made effective trade unionism illegal. Between them they champion just about every right wing cause, from apartheid to anti-abortion and from hanging to flogging. Naturally, during 1984-5 such reactionaries did everything they could to ensure the miners were beaten. The real agenda of these Thatcherites is anti-Maastricht, not pro-miner. So there can be no relying on Tories, especially of the bigot variety or hue.

Nor can the miners rely on *The Sun* or the *Daily Mirror*. Murdoch's whole operation at Wapping was built on cynically *smashing* the print unions in 1985. As to Mirror Group Newspapers, it has just announced the sacking of nearly a third of its journalists. Neither of these mass circulation rags has ever supported workers if they dared to strike, let alone if they looked like winning. Their current 'support' for the miners will instantly turn into its opposite once the stakes are raised.

What of the Labour Party? NUM members pay their political levy to it, and most miners vote Labour. Despite this, the Labour Party cannot be trusted. Its ideology and political practice are hardly distinguishable from those of the Tories. In office the Labour Party has, just like the Tories, managed the coal industry in the interests of capital. Labour's much vaunted nationalisation of the mines in 1947 was an act of capitalist nationalisation. For decades private owners had bled the industry white and starved it of investment. Capitalism as a whole could not afford to see such a situation continue. That is why there were so few objections to Labour's nationalisation. After all, it promised an infusion of state funds and generous compensation. Labour kept its word. The Labour government ploughed in huge amounts of taxpayers' money and paid out over £164 million to the owners in bonds - which are still earning them and their descendants yearly payments and will do so till the year 2000 (a further £78 million in royalties was paid to landowners). So Labour did not expropriate the mines. It put them into the hands of collective capital under managers who served profit, not people.

In 1947 there were nearly 1,000 pits in operation and over 700,000 miners. Those pits and those jobs have been massacred by Labour governments just as much as Tory governments. In 1965 the first Wilson Labour government closed half the South Wales pits and two-thirds of those in Durham. The last Wilson government pushed through a divisive incentive scheme in 1974-in no small part thanks to energy minister Tony Benn. The persisting split in the ranks of miners is a testimony to Benn's hard work on behalf of capital.

Out of office too, Labour has shown again and again that it is not simply a workers' party, but a workers' party in the pocket of the bosses. Remember the role of Her Majesty's loyal opposition and its then leader in the run-up to the Great Strike. Kinnock enthusiastically joined the witch-hunt of Arthur Scargill (initiated by Trotskyites) in September 1983 because he spoke the truth that Poland's Solidarnosc was "an anti-socialist organisation who desire the overthrow of a socialist state".

In the course of 1984-5 Kinnock used every opportunity to scupper the strike by campaigning against acts of perfectly justified proletarian class violence. Miners quite rightly dubbed this traitor "Ramsay MacKinnock".

Smith and Co are no different. They are from the same mould as Attlee, Wilson and Kinnock. They are as committed to running capitalism as Major and Co. The “market and profits” are their twin economic principles. Their recently issued document *Campaign for recovery* actually says it! “The difference between Labour and the Tories is not a dispute about the importance of the market,” it admits. Such a philosophy, which can only mean putting ‘surplus’ workers on the dole, is diametrically opposed to the interests of the working class.

5. A winning strategy

The government’s present backtracking is no more than a temporary retreat. They will be preparing, and so must we. The Major government already has in place the same logistical and repressive apparatus Thatcher used in the 1984-5 Great Strike. Lobbies of parliament, marches and petitions are all very well, but clearly not enough. Might must be met with might. Their courts, police and anti-trade union laws must be met with generalised strike action.

This is an historic moment. Courage, determination and willingness to fight are not in short supply on the miners’ side - they never have been. But what we need is a winning strategy. In 1984-5 that was lacking and the miners fought alone.

The Great Strike was lost because the miners were divided and the militant majority in the NUM isolated. With the connivance of trade union tops, the Tories did everything to ensure that other sections of the working class - crucially dockers and railworkers - did not join them. This must not happen again.

The miners want and need the solidarity of a working class movement that believes in itself, has been united around a fighting political programme and is determined not to let up till total victory. That means no section of our class retires from the field of battle till the demands of all sections are met.

Now is the time for us all to fight. Such a generalised fight will inevitably confront the Tories’ anti-trade union laws and the Tory government itself. It is either that and a real fight, or we accept the logic of the capitalist market.

The key question at the moment then is agreeing a trigger point

when we all go into action. We say it should be the mines. If the government goes ahead with its pit closure programme, no matter how toned down or slowed up, the working class movement must respond with an all out general strike - with or without the TUC. Vague talk about "new networks" and "pressurising the government" is as good as useless.

The miners and their leadership have made clear that they will not go along with any closures. Workers everywhere have been inspired by their stand. At last a section of our class is saying no to the economic vandalism of capitalism and is prepared to fight for human dignity. Others under threat - council, car, hospital, engineering, post office, steel, rail, tube, telecom, broadcasting and other workers - must quickly be fused into a *united workers' front* with the miners. Around them the whole class can be rallied and organised. If we combine daring and imagination with cool heads and a careful mustering of our forces, we can do more than stop pit closures, we can make up *all* ground lost in the last decade, and in the process decisively shift the balance of class forces in this country.

The miners have already taken the lead in convening joint committees composed of representatives of power and rail workers. Excellent, but just a beginning. The scope of these committees must be widened and they must be democratised to prevent them being merely bureaucratic window dressing. Though Edmonds, Fullick, Morris, Jordan and Knapp are talking tough at the moment, only rank and file organisation can deliver the united front that will mobilise the mass of workers.

In every union, including the NUM, this means organising *independently* from the leadership, Form militant rank and file committees everywhere. The fact that the NUM leadership wraps its case in the 'union jack' and fosters illusions in the market and John Smith's Labour Party, points to the necessity of rank and file independence. Far from weakening the fight, this would guarantee that it is not sold out or sold short in the name of a mythical 'national interest'.

To assert rank and file initiative we have argued that all pits under immediate threat should be occupied. Such a bold move would be of the greatest symbolic importance and would instantly command the widest support locally and nationally. Vane Tempest, Parkside, Grimethorpe and Houghton Main, Clipstone, Taff Merthyr,

Silverhill, Cotgrave, Betws Drift, Trentham and Markham Main must become names on every lip, the focal points for messages of support, visits, demonstrations and other forms of solidarity.

There are other important reasons why we advocate this course of action. Those who would otherwise be dispersed through unemployment must be organised and placed at the centre of struggle. Millions of tonnes of coal stored at pit-heads would also be denied to power stations through occupations.

Above all, occupations would provide the perfect springboard for a concerted campaign to win the hearts and minds of rank and file workers across the country; a campaign to secure from the trade unions, the TUC and all working class organisations a commitment to a general strike if the government refuses to *completely* reverse its programme of closures.

True, the recession and anti-trade union laws have taken their toll on trade union membership. Despite this the organised working class remains strong and has the potential to gather to itself all who have been subjected to government attack - women, youth, the low paid, the unemployed, blacks and Asians, homosexuals, the Irish - in other words the people, the broad mass of the working class and oppressed.

There is every reason to believe that the working class of Britain can turn the tables on the parasites that pass themselves off as a ruling class in this country. Never forget, our enemy is weak at present and, as shown by the 250,000 strong TUC-sponsored demonstration on October 25 in London, there is a huge reservoir of popular discontent. If a lead is given, millions upon millions will follow and we will soon have the government on its knees.

Naturally the miners and their supporters have given short shrift to those trying to renovate their tarnished revolutionary image by calling for an *instant* pit strike and an *instant* general strike. Such premature calls risk defeat even before we have had a chance to rally our forces.

The NUM's special delegate conference in Sheffield on October 15 was more serious. Its decision *not* to call an immediate all out strike was undoubtedly correct. We can afford no posturing or playing about in the class war. The NUM was also correct to launch a propaganda battle among its own members. When the call for strike action is made there needs to be the biggest possible vote for it; in 1972 and 1974 there were 96.5% and 81% majorities respectively.

On the subject of tarnished images, it is worth recalling that the Socialist Workers Party - the most vocal advocate of an instant general strike now - refused to even raise the slogan during the 1984-5 Great Strike. Its change of tune in 1992 does not represent a change of heart. The SWP will do nothing itself to build for an instant general strike, or for that matter when the go-ahead is given for the pit closure programme, ie when it could be made a reality. In the hands of the SWP, a general strike is purely a device for recruiting and a matter of "raising motions" in trade union branches, "demanding the TUC" calls it. The SWP does not believe the TUC will do any such thing. It merely wants to appear to the left of others. In truth, its call for a general strike is an attempt to pass the buck and duck the responsibility real revolutionaries have of preparing and fighting for a real general strike.

The demand that the TUC calls a 24-hour general strike at least has the virtue of being sincere. The problem is that if we got one it would be nowhere near enough. A 24-hour general strike would not stop one pit closing, nor would it be a "political earthquake". Workers might take part in massive demonstrations but they could not gain any sense of themselves as a future ruling class.

Perfectly suitable as a protest action, a 24-hour general strike has no internal dynamic. Things at work would be exactly the same the day after as the day before. It would not shake the bosses, the government, the stock exchange nor the capitalist system. In the event of a 24-hour general strike, they would all be perfectly aware that the TUC was responding to pressure from below and that, besides the masses taking an unofficial day off, nothing untoward was about to happen.

If we limit ourselves to demanding that the TUC calls a 24-hour general strike, we are telling our enemy that we are not serious. After all, a TUC-led 24-hour strike would be a Grand Old Duke of York affair. For Norman Willis and his cronies it would be used as a safety valve,

A real general strike would be entirely different. We can outline three basic reasons why.

First, the government would know full well that we were presenting a huge challenge. Once launched, the future would be completely uncertain. Day one of a general strike would mark the beginning of a living process. The stock exchange would panic.

There would be a run on the pound. State personnel would begin to question their loyalties.

Second, a real general strike need not rely on the TUC. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Communist Party successfully organised huge generalised political strikes, culminating in the action that freed the Pentonville 5 in 1972. Today there are so many sections of the working class with their own grievance that simply coordinating them, mobilising them and giving them a common objective would amount to a *de facto* general strike.

Third, even if the TUC was compelled to sanction a general strike, it would have the greatest difficulty in controlling the course of events and containing the struggle.

A general strike, by its very nature, poses the question who rules. In a general strike, the working class forms its own local bodies, such as councils of action. From the very beginning these bodies assume state functions - deciding what moves, what is produced and which essential workers should be allowed to work. Soon two powers confront each other: the embryonic workers' state and the tottering bourgeois state.

If we take advantage of the gaping hole in ruling class ranks and organise ourselves along class struggle lines, if we understand that a general strike creates organs of dual power, we have before us the prospect of far more than the return of the bosses' second eleven, the Labour Party. We can win a workers' government!

- No closures, no sackings. Occupy all pits lined up for closure.
- For Miners' Support Committees in every city, town and workplace. Raise money for the miners. Elect recallable delegates from trade unions, trades councils, unemployed organisations and working class political organisations. Democratise the National Miners' Support Network and fight to transform it into a National Council of Action.
- Organise the militant minority in all unions. Rank and file control over all occupations and strike actions.
- Build the Women Against Pit Closures movement. Integrate it into all occupation, strike, local and national committees.
- For a united workers' front. Unite council, car, hospital, engineering, post office, steel, rail, tube, telecom, broadcasting and all workers in struggle and threatened with sackings and 'rationalisations'. Smash the anti-trade union laws.

- For Workers' Defence Corps to protect our movement.
- Prepare for a general strike with or without the TUC.

6. UDM

No effort must be spared to unite the miners' ranks. UDM members must not be left as a British Coal fifth column.

Notts miners are no different from other miners when it comes down to it. True, after the defeat of the 1926 general strike Nottinghamshire became the centre for company unionism under the leadership of George Spencer, a Labour MP. But this was the result of a vicious coal owners' offensive, not grass roots conservatism, let alone some congenital tendency to scab. Miners were sacked and driven out of the area if they refused to join the Spencer union.

After almost a decade of such industrial terrorism it was Communist Party members, such as Mick Kane, who took the lead in fighting back against Spencerism. He built the miners' federation in Harworth from seven in 1935 to 302 a year later. The 1936-7 strike at Harworth broke the back of Spencerism and re-established independent unionism in Notts: Mick Kane paid a heavy personal price; he was sent down for two years on riot charges as a result of the strike.

So there are two traditions among Notts miners. A tradition of class collaboration, of which Spencerism represented the most extreme form, and a tradition of militancy. These two traditions have always fought for the loyalty of Notts miners, with sometimes one coming to dominance, sometimes the other.

Today the majority of Notts miners, who are still in the UDM, are ripe for re-integration into a militant fighting union. If anything they are now more angry than NUM members, who expected nothing from the Tories. No wonder so many UDM members now say Arthur was right - by which they mean the programme of militant trade unionism, not simply the man.

There must be no re-run of 1984-5, when because of the sectional divisions in the NUM most Notts miners refused to join the strike. That can best be done by reorganising the NUM into a centralised union with the broadest democracy and room for

initiative from below. In the longer term that means a new *industrial union*, an Energy Workers' Union, embracing not only NUM and UDM miners, but open cast miners, North Sea oil and gas workers, and conventional and nuclear power station workers. Such a perspective is no diversion from the need to win the present battle. On the contrary, it is a vital aim in the future if we are to rebuild unity in the here and now.

While some in the NUM do not want anything to do with UDM members, whom they regard as irredeemable scabs, the majority take a much more measured and canny view. They are eager to talk to, work with and support UDM members. Quite right. Whatever union card they carry in their pockets, these men are *workers* whose jobs are under threat by the same British Coal boss. Yes, many of them made a tragic mistake in 1984-5, but they are *ours* nevertheless.

Now they realise that they were cynically used in 1984-5, that the only reward for class collaboration has been Tory contempt and the dole. No wonder their 'leader' Roy Lynk hid himself underground in Silverhill and *said* he would not be standing for re-election. He was made to look a fool by his Tory friends and, justifiably, feared his own members (who, as expected, elected a new president on November 30).

So there must be no recriminations. It is good that UDM members are leaving and joining the NUM. But it would be foolish to bank on all the UDM defecting. The nettle must be grasped. There should be no insistence that the NUM has exclusive rights in the coming struggle. Unity above and below can be won through joint action.

7. Communist Party

Within a matter of weeks the pace of the class struggle has increased dramatically. Events have surged forward and the situation has been transformed. Because of this sudden change, the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain took the decision to put our entire organisation on a war footing and begin again publication of the *Daily Worker*.

The struggle can go one of two ways. Either they win and continue their sackings, speed ups, and drive to ratchet down the living standards of the working class, or we win. We are determined that our class wins, and achieves the sort of victory which does more than reverse the defeats of the last 10 years. We want a victory that lays the basis for a new society, a society which produces for human need, not capitalist greed.

To realise that aim, a reforged Communist Party is essential. We need a mass revolutionary party that replaces Labour as the 'natural' party of the working class. Only such a Party can provide the leadership and coordination needed by a class that refuses any longer to be treated as slaves. Militants, class conscious workers - support, join and build *your* Party.

The Communist Party submits this 'evidence' to the Department of Trade and Industry's coal review without any illusions whatsoever in the review's composition, terms of reference, objectivity, recommendations or outcome. Our purpose is to use the review as a platform from which to make the case for socialism and call for working class action against the government and the rotten system it serves.

Of course, that there is a review in the first place has nothing to do with any desire to see fair play or commitment to democracy on the part of the government. It is entirely due to the government's weakness, the miners' determination to resist, and the huge support and respect our pretorian guard enjoys among the mass of the population. Conditions are ripe for workers to take up the weapons of class war.

ISBN 1-874123-05-5



9 781874 123057 >

£1