

# The **MAARXIST**

**THE LABOUR PARTY  
IN DECLINE ?**

**RIOTS AND PUBLIC  
ORDER**

**SCARGILL AND THE  
MINERS ~ BOOK REVIEW**

**THE TUC**

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# **THE MARXIST**

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## THE LABOUR PARTY IN DECLINE?

In the past, defeats of the kind suffered recently by the Labour movement would have resulted in increased electoral support for the Labour Party. If the opinion polls are to be believed, this is not happening; the SDP/Liberal Alliance is apparently picking up many of the votes which would previously have gone to the Labour Party.

This may partly be explained by the occupational changes that have taken place over recent years, for these often result in changed attitudes, subtle changes in psychology.

Be that as it may, it is certainly true that a large proportion of the electorate, probably including industrial workers, are looking for an alternative to the Tories, which they perceive to be somewhere in between the two major parties.

This is a very disturbing development from a socialist point of view because it indicates that, despite the fact that the policies of both Tory and Labour parties have manifestly failed to solve the problems or cure the ills of capitalist society, a large number of people - probably a majority - are not yet ready to face up to the demands of the situation or admit the need for a policy that will offer a credible alternative to our market-dominated system.

This is partly explained by the well-known propensity of people in general to avoid taking decisions which may result in the even tenor of their lives being disturbed until such time as the need to make a decision is forced upon them by circumstances. But, (and this is where conscious political activity comes in), the time lag can be shortened, particularly with regard to people who are already being adversely affected by current events.

The need for an alternative political and economic strategy has been evident for some time but the need becomes more acute as the crisis of the system continues to deepen. Such a strategy will never be developed by those who chose to operate in splendid isolation from the spontaneous reactions of people against worsening conditions. It will only be brought about by research and discussion, linked with direct participation where practical, in those spontaneous struggles in order to apply the mass line principle.

This can only be effective if it is done in an organised way, that is, through a political organisation which is guided by revolutionary theory.

One of the obstacles to the creation of such a party is the notion that the Labour Party can be transformed so that it can perform this role. That notion rests on the argument that the Labour Party is so democratic that there is room within it for every political tendency within the Labour movement, and that by dint of inner party struggle it can be rescued from the clutches of the right wing and become the instrument for leading the working class to socialism.

The idea is a myth, but one that has gained such credibility that it has frustrated every attempt to form a genuine party of the working class.

In order to illustrate this, we must take a look at the structure and methods of work of the Labour Party.

The idea behind its formation was that there should be a friendly alliance between the socialist societies then existing, and the trade unions for the purpose of getting suitable people elected to parliament. The Trade Union interest in it was that it would be a means of opposing anti-trade union legislation, and promoting that which would create the most favourable conditions for collective bargaining.

The interest of the socialist parties was that it would bring them closer to the organised working class and, by standing on a Labour ticket, socialists would have a better chance of getting elected to parliament.

The other side of the coin was the obvious implication that socialist candidates would have to tailor their policies in such a way as to make them acceptable to the trade union establishment who were (and still are) more interested in preserving trade union rights than promoting socialist policies.

Of the socialist parties which affiliated, only two were avowedly Marxist - the Social Democratic Party and the British Socialist Party. The former withdrew after only a few years because it objected to the domination of the Party by the trade unions.

At the conference which founded the Labour Representation Committee (the direct forbear of the present Labour Party) in February 1900, the following resolution was carried:

"That this conference is in favour of establishing a distinct labour group in parliament who shall have their

own whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which, for the time being, may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of labour, and equally ready to associate themselves with any party opposing measures of the opposite tendency."

From the very beginning it was intended to be an organisation whose sole purpose was to secure the election of suitable people to parliament. Because of the contradictions between the trade unions on the one hand, and the socialist societies on the other, the form of organisation was federative.

In his book "Fifty Years March", a semi-official history of the Labour Party, Francis Williams relates that, at the above mentioned Conference, it was agreed that

"An executive committee should be appointed consisting of seven representatives from the trade unions, two representatives each from the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party, and one Fabian. And it was agreed that the members of the Committee should be elected, not by the Conference as a whole, but by their representative organisations. This embodied a principle of great importance and one that distinguished the Labour Party from all other political parties. Thus it made clear that this new political party was in fact a federation, a federation of trade unions and socialist societies which would retain their individual identities and elect their own representatives on the executive committee of the new party. Local Trades Councils were also allowed to affiliate, and in 1918 the constitution was altered to permit individual as well as organisational membership. Even then the federal pattern was maintained because the individual members were required to join the local constituency parties which were themselves affiliated to the national body."

At the 1918 Conference the constitution was revised to include the objective:

"To secure for the producers by hand and brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service."

Thus the party became nominally a socialist party.

In 1919 the Communist Party of Great Britain was formed, with the British Socialist Party (an affiliate of the Labour Party) providing the bulk of its membership. At the 1922 conference of the Labour Party the request of the Communist Party to be allowed to affiliate was turned down by 3,086,000 votes to 261,000. At the 1924 Labour Party conference a resolution was carried which made any individual member of the Communist Party ineligible for membership of the Labour Party.

The pretence that the Labour Party is a 'broad church' in which all political tendencies within the British Labour movement can be represented was exploded.

What that decision proved, and what subsequent decisions underline, is that only those political tendencies which come under the general heading of reformist are allowed to operate freely within the Labour Party. By reformist we mean not only the parliamentarists, (those who believe in "the sovereign will of parliament" and that all social change must be brought about through parliamentary channels), but also those who believe that trade union action can force changes in the character of the system; the latter represent one of the Leftish tendencies within the party.

Although there are contradictions between the two, they are both reformist because they both assume that the existing state is a politically neutral body which can be reformed to suit the interests of the working class if pressure is exerted upon it by parliamentary, industrial, or similar means.

#### THE TRADE UNION WING

The trade unions have the ultimate sanction over what policies the Labour Party will adopt. This power is enshrined in the block vote system which is built into the party constitution and guaranteed by the fact that the trade unions are the Party's chief source of finance.

In 1983 the trade unions paid total dues of £2,969,000 to the Labour Party nationally; the constituency parties contributed only £570,000.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, in its newsletter No. 31, correctly observes:

"Trade unions are more likely to settle for an accommodation with the status quo, since their task is to defend the immediate interests of their members rather than to work for a complete transformation of society."

The question is even more complex than that because, in prac-

tice, each trade union is primarily concerned with furthering the interests of its own members, so that even trade union solidarity is not to be taken for granted, as the coal strike unfortunately demonstrated.

The immediate interests of a particular trade group may run counter to the longer term interests of the class. The development from purely trade union consciousness to class consciousness can conceivably take place as a result of prolonged experience of trade union struggle, but the same does not apply to the development of political consciousness.

Whereas the former represents an awareness of the relationship between capital and labour, political consciousness represents an understanding of the whole complex of class interests, class conflicts in a given society, and the ability to utilise the resultant contradictions in such a way that the working class ultimately exercises its hegemony over all other classes in the interests of all.

#### SPONTANEITY - THE MARXIST STANDPOINT

Some Lefts in the Labour movement assume that revolutionary political consciousness develops directly and spontaneously out of class consciousness. The Marxist view on this question is clearly stated in Karl Kautsky's criticism of the draft programme of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in 1901, and quoted by Lenin in his Selected Works, vol. one:

"In the draft programme it is stated, 'the more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat becomes conscious of the possibility and the necessity of socialism.'" Kautsky then goes on to say:

"In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships, just as the class struggle of the proletariat has and, just as the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side, and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition of socialist

production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social progress. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia.

It was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus socialist consciousness is something introduced into the struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously." \*

In the absence of an organisation for the purpose of introducing this consciousness into the working class, our class will remain under the influence of bourgeois ideas, for there can be no 'above class' ideology. The experience of the British working class movement is clear proof of this.

Over the past forty years the organised working class has waged a consistent and successful economic struggle, but socialist consciousness is lower now than it was in the 1930s.

What has happened is that the working class has become imbued with the ideas of the consumer society, an ideology which admirably suits the need of the capitalist system for perpetual economic expansion irrespective of actual need, and with complete disregard of the adverse social and environmental consequences.

The political wing of the Labour Party has proved itself incapable of providing the kind of political leadership required to deal with this; it has just gone along with the tide. This

\*FOOTNOTE: Lenin remarks, "This does not mean, of course, that workers have no part in creating such an ideology. But they take part not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians ..... in other words, they take part only when, and to the extent that they are able more or less to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge ... And in order that workingmen may be able to do this more often, every effort must be made to raise the consciousness of workers generally; the workers must not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of "literature for workers", but should learn to master general literature to an increasing degree."

is not surprising because the character of the party makes it virtually impossible for it to do anything more than reflect the various spontaneous tendencies within the Labour movement.

#### THE POLITICAL WING

This comprises the C.L.P.s and the P.L.P. With the withdrawal of the nationally organised I.L.P. in the thirties, the C.L.P.s became the only means of becoming a member of the Labour Party, other than through T.U. affiliation.

The C.L.P.s are semi-autonomous, thus preserving the right to have factions within the Party. But whereas the socialist parties were allowed to organise nationally as a separate entity, the C.L.P.s are not. Their only appearance on the national scene is at the Party conference where the trade unions dominate the proceedings. Thus, while factions are tolerated, they are also rendered ineffective.

From time to time a favourable, but invariably temporary, combination of circumstances occurs where what are regarded as left-wing resolutions are adopted at national conference. This is usually annulled at the following conference as the right-wing tightens up its organisation; but, apart from that, there are two more hurdles to be crossed before they are embodied in legislation.

The P.L.P., like the C.L.P.s, is semi-autonomous, its policies being decided by M.P.s who, being constitutionally minded for the most part, generally take the position that they represent the electorate, not the party.

Furthermore, when a government is to be formed, it is the party leader who decides who will serve in it, thus deciding which direction the government will take. There has never been a case where the P.L.P. has forced a Labour government to change direction.

#### THE 'ENTER LEFT-EXIT RIGHT' PHENOMENON

The failure of pre-war Labour governments was excused on the grounds that they were minority governments - Labour did not have an overall majority.

No such excuse was possible for the 1945 Labour government. It had a huge parliamentary majority; the armed forces were composed mainly of conscripts, and those who had been demobbed had been radicalised by the experience of war and emotionally stimulated to expect radical social change by the propaganda to which they had been subjected in order to get them to fight.

Shop stewards' organisation in the factories was strong and

reflected the desire of the workers for a different kind of society than that which had existed prior to 1939. Socialism was on the agenda as far as a considerable part of the working class was concerned.

The failure of the Atlee government to live up to the expectations which had been raised by its victory at the polls marked the beginning of the retreat and subsequent disillusionment with the Labour party.

After several years of Tory government, the left-wing of the Labour party were ecstatic when, after the death of Gaitskill, Harold Wilson became party leader. Wilson had built up a reputation as a left-winger by his opposition to the abolition of Clause 4, (the one dealing with public ownership), and there were high hopes that this was the breakthrough for which the Left had been struggling.

When Wilson became Prime Minister he dismayed some, and confused others, by diverting attention away from the continued need for economic and social change by presenting it as a technological problem, and advanced the slogan of the 'White Hot Technological Revolution', but the industrial base continued to diminish.

When, as is periodically the case, "sterling came under pressure" he reacted in the same way as any Tory government by cutting public expenditure and instituting a 'Prices and Incomes' policy. The duplicity of the Wilson government on this issue is made quite clear in Wilson's memoirs of the 1964-70 Labour government.

Frank Cousins, formerly the General Secretary of the TGWU, became a member of the 1964 government but made clear his opposition to the policy of trade union involvement in wage restraint. He suggested that a strong clamp down on prices would bring pressure on employers to resist wage increases which could not be recouped in the form of higher prices, thus slowing down the inflationary prices-wages-prices spiral. Wilson rejected the idea as unrealistic and Cousins resigned from the government.

Nevertheless, Wilson succeeded in conning the TUC leaders into accepting a Prices and Incomes Policy under which prices would be controlled. (Incidentally, the TUC leaders must have been just as duplicitous because they could not have been unaware of what had been said to Cousins.)

Labour governments will always back down in the face of re-

sistance from the Establishment because, in terms of their political philosophy, there is no alternative as the system threatens to grind to a halt. The capitalist class know their own jungle, that is, their own institutions, 'old boy' network, and so on, and every attempt to beat them on their own ground using their own institutions is bound to fail.

The challenge can only be met by bringing matters out into the open, explaining what is happening, and having tentative schemes which rely on the initiative of the people - primarily the organised workers - to keep production, transport, distribution, etc. going on an ad hoc basis until such time as they can be organised on a new footing.

That implies a dual power situation which is bound to be chaotic in some respects, thus giving the oppressive forces of the state a convenient excuse for intervening for the purpose of 'restoring order', order based on private property rights.

In those circumstances, parliamentary decisions will be meaningless and toothless unless they can be enforced by a grass roots organisation that really knows what it is about.

The precise circumstances in which that confrontation will take place cannot be known in advance but it is inconceivable that finance capital will surrender power. That is the reality, and those who recognise it will, sooner or later, have to face up to the fact that the Labour party is not, and cannot be converted into the kind of political organisation needed to meet that situation.

August 1985

FOND HOPES! (from the N.U.M. Rule Book)

4.0 "To seek and secure the establishment of common ownership and control by the workers of their industries and of the means of production, distribution and exchange generally, with a view to the complete abolition of capitalism."

32.A (Administration of the Political Fund) "The proportion remitted back to the Areas shall only be used for the propagation of Labour politics, local or parliamentary in harmony with the Labour Party constitution."

## RIOTS AND PUBLIC ORDER

After the heavy casualties and the death of one policeman in the Tottenham riots, it was predictable that the climate of public opinion thus created would be grasped with both hands by those who desired to increase the powers of the police. It is unlikely that the people who took part in the riot had thought the matter through to the extent that this reaction was anticipated. It is more likely that it was political naivety, accompanied by a desire to get their own back on the police. Be that as it may, the ferociousness of the fighting indicated pent up frustration more than political agitation.

The riots of recent years in mainland Britain have not produced leaders who have been capable of rationalising the causes of discontent and putting them in the form of demands. All that has come from the rioters themselves are allegations of police brutality carried out because of the alleged racism of the police.

The media has been at pains to emphasise that the riots have been multi-racial, that white as well as black youths have been involved. That is undoubtedly true, but it is also true that the bulk of the rioters have been Afro-Caribbean, and it certainly appears that they have been the prime movers in every instance. It is wrong to try to blur that feature for fear of stirring up racial conflict. If facts are not faced now, the problem cannot be solved.

The police shooting of Mrs. Cherry Groce and the death of Mrs. Cynthia Jarrett while the police were searching the house were the sparks which set off the two London riots amid claims of police brutality brought on by racism. The shooting of the little lad, John Shorthouse, in Birmingham, and other incidents involving the use of firearms by the police prove, if anything, that racism has little to do with it. The police are becoming trigger happy with white, as well as blacks.

The ferocity of the riots reveals the extent of alienation among youth, a deeper feeling than unemployment itself creates. The resort to guns and petrol bombs cannot be explained away merely as hooliganism or 'criminality'.

Black youth have a heavier concentration of unemployed than white, and feel this sense of alienation more sharply. Long

term unemployment leads to young men and women spending more time aimlessly on the street. The setting encourages petty crime and disorderly behaviour, which in turn provides the justification for more intensive policing. More intensive policing provokes hostility among young blacks who, in many cases, have justifiably felt their very presence on the street is being challenged.

Although there are individuals in the police force who are racist, its chief characteristic is that it is a force for the sole purpose of protecting the capitalist state. The methods used by the police against rioters have been mild compared to those used against the miners, and they were not burning or looting.

The main achievement of the rioters, particularly in Tottenham, has been an upsurge in sympathy for the police, the like of which has not been seen for many years.

The miners had a chance of winning, not least because everyone knew what their terms were for a settlement of the dispute; rioters have not a chance in hell of achieving anything concrete because no one has bothered to formulate their demands, except, that is, for the withdrawal of police from certain areas. That is a demand that no state will countenance, and one that would not be to the liking of most people in the area.

The job of the police is to safeguard the existing state. As part of that, they must seek to keep the mass of the people happy by preventing crime, including the kind which most working people regard as the most important - i.e. drug dealing, petty theft, mugging, rape, offences against the person. So, although many workers recognise that the police are a means of oppressing them when the security of the state is threatened, they also regard them as a protection against the kind of petty criminals who prey on ordinary folk.

In present circumstances, there is no way that the mass of the working class will willingly countenance 'no-go' areas for the police. The concept of 'no-go' areas was popularised by the Provo's in Northern Ireland. It is a matter of record that, during the period when they existed, petty crime was practically non-existent within them, the reason being that anarchy did not prevail because one kind of law and order was replaced by another.

In the absence of a body to enforce law, there will be a vacuum which will be filled by criminal elements. Any kind of

law and order, be it capitalist or working class, must ensure that the mass of the people can go about their business.

Some of the black activists concerned in local Labour Party politics come dangerously close to adopting the position that, whatever a black person or group does, it must not be criticised. One of them who has been in the news lately says that he supports the working class from a black perspective - whatever that may mean. Those who claim that it is their intention to serve the interests of the working class must be able to distinguish between those ideas and actions which correspond with the long-term interests of the class, and those which militate against the interests of the class. That means being selective, not giving support to every idea and action which arises out of every strata of what is broadly termed the working class.

Often it is necessary to go against the stream and to fight against ideas that are against the interests of the class as a whole.

One of the enemies that the working class has to combat within its own ranks is anarchism, for that undermines the internal collective discipline which is the most powerful organisational weapon of our class. Within what has come to be known as the broad working class, anarchist tendencies are strongest among those who, because of the character of their employment, are 'unorganisable' in the trade union sense, among those who have been unemployed for a long period, and among those who have never been in regular employment and, of necessity, have learned to 'live by their wits'.

In some inner city areas there is a large proportion of Afro-Carribeans who come within this strata, not because they are lazy, not because they are inferior, but for a number of reasons that are, in the short term, insoluble. At bottom, however, it is a social, not an ethnic, problem. Those who emphasise the ethnic factor are racists, no matter which ethnic group they favour. Class interest is the common factor and the one which should be persistently and unequivocally stressed.

The strata to which we referred earlier has no future in itself, (that is the reason for its anarchism); its only future lies in allying itself with, and eventually becoming part of, the industrial working class which is obliged to assist that process in its own interests. The most obvious way it can do this, of course, is to lead the fight for increased employment in the productive sector. The other way, (less obvious and

perhaps most controversial) is to play a leading part in combatting the degeneration in standards of social conduct of which everyone except the most deprived is conscious.

A positive feature of the riots is that they remind the rest of society of the existence of those at the bottom of the social scale who do not have the option of withdrawing their labour, and thereby hitting the capitalist class where it hurts most. The only option open to them is to destroy the property of others, and in that sense, rioting is justified.

Social security benefits and social clubs are panaceas which become increasingly ineffective because people can become conditioned to accept them as a way of life, with all the deleterious side effects that that brings with it. Fruitless searching for a job can undermine the best of characters, but sympathy can be misdirected and concern can be expressed in such a way that the negative features are reinforced. Reliance on the state, (some would say poncing off it), has become a way of life for a tiny minority. The only conditions under which the wheat can be separated from the chaff is when there is full employment.

#### IMMEDIATE STEPS

It is said that the barrack-like structures which are euphemistically called Council flats provide the worst elements among the tenants with the ability to virtually terrorise the rest. It also seems to be generally accepted that they must be pulled down at the first opportunity. Why cannot the unemployed people in those flats be trained, and employed in knocking them down and rebuilding better ones?

#### POLICE HARASSMENT

This is difficult to prove and, anyway, what constitutes 'harassment'? Those who have had their homes burgled, been mugged or raped, and those who live in fear of becoming victims of those offences, are not overbothered about what measures are used to counter them, but 'stop and search' operations, stopping many in order to catch a few wrongdoers can be or at least appear to be indiscriminate, and the innocent are justified in feeling aggrieved. Whether they are black, white, yellow, brown, or little green people from Mars, is beside the point; it is the practice that is wrong.

The demand of some Councils on which the trendy Left has a majority that the police should be under their operational control does not carry much support, even among the people who

voted for them. In any case, everyone knows that it is a non-starter, at least in the foreseeable future, for it would mean that the capitalist class would be party to the dismantling of its state machine.

Police accountability is a sound, democratic demand which can command massive support if properly handled, but it must mean accountability to the mass of the people, and not just to a few politicians who have their own axe to grind.

Law and order of the kind with which we are dealing in this article cannot be maintained without the participation of the mass of the people. The political task is to create a situation where participation takes place on terms satisfactory to the mass of the people, not on terms dictated by the police.

With regard to 'stop and search' operations, we suggest that there should be a public campaign to encourage everyone stopped in this way by the police to register the details locally. At the same time, the police must be required to keep similar records and make them available for comparison and analysis to some directly elected body.

If the results are made public periodically, people will then be able to see with a bit more clarity whether the police are in the wrong in this respect, or whether it is the wrongdoers who are raising a smokescreen to conceal their criminal activities.

This will not, of course, change that aspect of policing which is directly concerned with maintaining the capitalist state. When that is necessary, local opinion will be treated with contempt, as during the coal strike, but it will help clarify the difference between the two aspects of policing.

The MIG pay tribute to A. Manchanda who died on 27.10.85, aged 66, after a heart attack. Manu was an active and colourful figure in the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain from early on in the anti-revisionist struggle in the 1960s, through the West Indian Gazette until his last years. Our closest involvement with the RMLCL which he founded came with attempts over 1978-1982 to win unity of Marxist-Leninists in Britain through consultative meetings. Those attempts failed but through no lack of effort from him. We often had differences, but Manu was a genuine comrade whose tireless dedication to Socialism will not be forgotten.

## BOOK REVIEW ~ SCARGILL AND THE MINERS

The miners' strike called in March 1984 turned into the longest national dispute in British history. It was certainly the most bitter class confrontation in the past forty-odd years. Throughout the stoppage the miners outside the strike-breaking area remained remarkably solid and courageous in adversity and loyal to the leadership's calls to stand firm.

To the men on strike and their families who played such a crucial role in keeping support for the struggle alive, the leadership was personified by Arthur Scargill, President of the NUM. At every stage in the run-up to the dispute and the conduct of it he led from the front.

Half way through the stoppage Michael Crick, a Fabian socialist and ITN reporter, wrote the book, "Scargill and the Miners", published as a Penguin special. The book's aim, as described by the author, was to put the 1984 coal dispute within the context "of the remarkable transformation the NUM has undergone over the last fifteen years." Particularly, how did the transformation come about and how important was Scargill in that process?

Crick's book is written in journalistic style and the immediacy of the events of the strike is reported in dramatic prose but without the analysis of the mining community that kept it alive. Therefore the book has some important failings.

For example, although the author clearly had access to certain past and present NEC members, it is clear that he spent no time at all talking to ordinary mineworkers. Therefore although the text is well researched and lively, it is mainly a book about the 'corridors of power' within the NUM. It is a book written in London, or at least with that feel, despite the author's forays into the coalfield.

This is important because it leads to a distorted understanding of the strike. The reader is given the impression that the miners underwent a year's privations more from loyalty to a determined leadership than from a desperate struggle to preserve their jobs and communities.

Secondly, the key to understanding the bitterness of the mining families - which resulted in violence on the picket lines and elsewhere - lay in examining the state of siege that exist-

ed in the mining villages, particularly in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. The flavour of the experience was far better conveyed by the NUM's own paper, "The Miner" and "The Yorkshire Miner" than by Crick's book.

Third, and perhaps the author cannot be blamed here, given the time the book was written there is little analysis of the wretched role played by the Labour Party and TUC. Apart from Kinnock's well publicised dislike for "violence, all violence", the subject gets little treatment. But this, too, is a lesson that will not be forgotten by the miners.

However, "Scargill and the Miners" is an informative and readable account of the development of the union over the past thirty years and of Arthur Scargill's rise to power within it.

The NUM is a federal union comprising geographical and occupational areas which each have members on the National Executive Committee. Also on the NEC are the three elected national officials, the President Arthur Scargill, Vice President Mick McGahey and Secretary Peter Heathfield. The openly collaborationist policies pursued by the leaders in the 1950s and 1960s formed the backdrop to the rise of Scargill and other militants particularly within the Yorkshire area where the members were traditionally far more active than their area representatives. Crick quotes Lord Robens, Chairman of the NCB from 1961-1971:

"When my term of office started there were 583,000 people on the colliery books; when it ended, only 283,000 ..... without the understanding and cooperation of the unions and of the men themselves, this task could never have been accomplished."

Indeed the author notes that in 1968 alone, the Coal Board succeeded in closing 55 collieries and axeing 55,000 jobs with hardly a protest.

"Between 1957 and 1971 the union endured and tolerated pit closures and a contraction by the industry on a scale far greater than even Arthur Scargill's worst fears of what could happen under Ian MacGregor."

Yorkshire had, however, seen an influx of miners from other areas, particularly Scotland, the North-East and South Wales, who wanted change, and in recognition of the developing position, the CPGB sent an organiser, Frank Walters, to Barnsley in 1953 to organise the Yorkshire coalfield. Walters is quoted extensively and relates how the strategy of forming an alliance between Communists and left-wing Labour Party members was pur-

sued.

The main aim was to get people elected to vacancies in the area and nationally where they could exert influence. Policies were secondary at that stage. Arthur Scargill was a branch delegate from Woolley who joined this group. By the time of his election in 1964 he had left the Communist Party but its organisation clearly had had a great impact upon him.

In 1955 Scargill had made two attempts to join the Labour Party, to no avail. In desperation he wrote to the CPGB paper, the Daily Worker, and was recruited the next day to the Young Communist League. He had been elected to the YCL National Committee by the time of the 1956 Congress and only thereafter did he take an interest in union affairs.

This interest was engendered not only by the appalling working conditions in the mines - where he was subsequently a face worker - but also by the political victimisation he received from the Woolley branch leadership. At one point he was expelled from the NUM for leading a strike of young miners and had to be restored to membership by the Yorkshire Area President.

He left the YCL in the early 1960s over disagreement with the Russians' treatment of dissidents, their posthumous vilification of Stalin, but more significantly because it conflicted with union affairs.

"Scargill's career in the NUM also seems to have been an important influence on his decision to leave the YCL.

Scargill was now starting to have some success in branch elections: 'the CP insisted I should work in a certain way when I became a trade union official. They wanted me to sell the Daily Worker and promote CP ideals through the pit branch of the NUM. I resented this. It meant I wouldn't be exercising all my efforts for the men as miners.'"

This perhaps illustrates Scargill's syndicalist tendencies which were well revealed during the 1984/85 dispute when, particularly in the earlier stages he talked of toppling the Government, "rolling back the years of Thatcherism" and the like.

In short, Scargill has probably never accepted the need for a party of the working class and clearly sees no limitations to trade union achievement, provided the right people are in power. He has stated:

Trade unions are political: their role is to bring about political change as much as industrial change."

He was first elected as branch delegate in 1964 and to his great credit he took the same principled position against the run-down of the coal industry being perpetrated by the Wilson Government as he does now. His speeches at National Conference brought him to a wider audience within the union and he had a key role in the development of the National Miners' Forum, an unofficial left-wing organisation within the NUM.

The Miners' Forum succeeded in getting Laurence Daly elected as NUM Secretary in 1968 instead of Joe Gormley (who went on to become President) and took over the organising role of the CPGB whose influence within the NUM now began to wane.

The years 1969 and 1970 both saw widespread strikes within the industry; the first, concerning surface workers' hours, brought no concessions on hours from the NCB but the NUM's wage claim was met in full. The second concerned the annual wage claim; moved by Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey, it led to a national ballot of the union for the first time in its history which led to a 55% vote in favour of a national strike, less than the two-thirds majority required by NUM rule 43 at the time.

The latter strike was more confined than the first but is credited with the 1971 Conference amending rule 43 to make a 55% vote sufficient for strike action, which Scargill believed was the most decisive change of rule ever in the history of the union.

Interestingly, widespread use of the flying picket dates from the 1969 dispute and it is noteworthy that the 'domino strategy' employed by the Yorkshire miners created a lot of resentment in Nottinghamshire.

The book deals well with the campaigns in 1972 and 1974, the years of the national pits strikes in which the miners attained an aura of invincibility in the Labour movement. Those disputes show Scargill as a genuine and tireless leader who was able to rouse the members with his powers of oratory and who was not afraid to criticise slackness on their part when necessary.

The 1972 stoppage originated in the wage claim proposed at the 1971 Conference by Yorkshire. When the NCB rejected the claim and a national ballot was held, it resulted in a strike vote of 59% and on 9th January 1972 the first national strike since 1926 began. To quote Scargill:

"We took the view that we were in a class war. We were not playing cricket on the village green like they did in '26."

Scargill believed that the way to conduct the war was to attack points of energy supply - power stations, coke and coal depots. The most famous confrontation of 1972, of course, concerned the Saltley coke depot in Birmingham. The 'Battle of Saltley Gate' was won after the miners' mass picket had been augmented by 10,000 T&GWU and AUEW members who, with others, had rallied to the miners' call for industrial action.

Both the police and the Gas Board - which owns the depot - tried to underplay the achievement, but Saltley Gate marked the beginning of the Government's collapse and has rightly passed into Labour movement history.

The following year in 1973 saw Scargill elected as NUM Yorkshire President, Owen Briscoe as the Area General Secretary, and Mick McGahey as national Vice President. The union leadership certainly credits the change in political complexion as a significant transformation.

When the 1975 pay claim met with rejection, the events of 1972 were repeated. This time the ballot led to an 81% vote for strike action. Heath called and lost a general election on the subject "who governs Britain" and the incoming minority Labour administration had to concede most of the demands. As the author notes:

"The miners didn't win the 1974 strike - the Government lost it."

This view is evidently shared by Scargill who considers that an election need never have been called.

The next six years during the Wilson and Callaghan governments were less turbulent in terms of open class struggle but they laid the seeds of the 1984 stoppage. Joe Gormley was firmly in the saddle as NUM President and understood the Government's need to keep miners' pay claims within the social contract limits. This, and an incentive scheme, was the price he was ready to pay for the 1974 'Plan for Coal' which guaranteed the industry's future.

Crick quotes Harold Wilson's memoirs on his trip to the NUM Conference in 1975 to urge moderation in the annual pay claim:

"Never, in thirty years in Parliament, had I prepared a speech with such care - dictating, writing, amending, inserting, discarding, and drafting again."

The struggle over the incentive scheme became the focus for internal clashes within the union in the late 1970s. The NCB obviously saw that differentials in pay would make solidarity

for industrial action harder to achieve. Scargill and others on the Left opposed it for this and other reasons. Gormley saw it as a way of increasing miners' wages without breaching Social Contract limits.

The scheme was supported in areas where output per man was high, notably Nottingham and South Derbyshire.

After two national ballots which resulted in a 'No' vote, the Executive outflanked the opposition by permitting individual areas to reach their own incentive agreements which even the militant areas had to do shortly. The author observes that, in the dispute, both 'left' and 'right' wings set precedents which look ironic now.

The left-wing leaders twice took court action (unsuccessfully) to force Gormley and the E.C. to abide by the rules on Conference and ballot decisions nationally. The right-wing, under Gormley, used the power of the Presidency and support on the Executive to command the situation. Moreover, it promoted the idea of by-passing the wishes of the union nationally and taking action area by area.

The late 1970s also witnessed the growth of interest by the NUM area leaderships in development of 'left' bodies within the Labour Party, such as the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (to which the Yorkshire NUM is still affiliated). But it was not until 1981 when Margaret Thatcher had been in office two years that the miners flexed their muscles on the industrial front.

In January 1981 the Yorkshire NUM had received an 86% vote in favour of taking strike action to stop closures on economic grounds, i.e. on grounds other than geographical exhaustion. The NUM had seen the writing on the wall in the form of Thatcher's tight monetary policy and had wanted a mandate. Remarkably, within a few days, the NCB then intimated large scale closures.

The Executive gave notice to the Government that they would call a pithead ballot with a strong recommendation to strike. But the rank and file miners outpaced them and all over Britain began to stop work. The NUM also received strong promises of support from the steelworkers, NUR, NUS, and South Wales transport workers.

The Government backed down but both sides appreciated that the confrontation had merely been postponed. In fact, Howell, the Energy Minister, went so far as to say that the climb down had

been a tactical one:

"Neither the Government nor I think society as a whole was in a position to get locked into a coal strike. In those days the stocks weren't so high. I don't think the country was prepared and the whole NUM and trade union movement tended to be united all on one side."

It was from this date that the Government's plans to confront the miners were laid. The Government were able to weigh the balance of forces in 1981 and decide against the odds, an option that was not available to the miners three years later.

The election to National President in place of the retiring Joe Gormley also took place in 1981. Scargill faced divided opposition from three right-wing candidates.

"His platform was based solidly on those issues which were to be at stake in the 1984 dispute. Scargill pledged to fight the closure of 'uneconomic' pits and to call for strike action if necessary. He also argued that power should be moved away from the 'unrepresentative National Executive' and vested in the NUM Conference .... In 1984 most of the important decisions would be made by sessions of the NUM Conference ...."

Scargill was returned with a landslide vote of over 70%. But over the next two years the membership were to reject his calls for industrial action in three ballots. The first two concerned pay, the third in March 1983 concerned the closure of Tymawr pit in South Wales.

The importance of the ballot results is that without doubt they influenced the Executive's decision in March 1984 not to call a national ballot over the decision to close Cortonwood. But also they can only have strengthened the Government's resolve. After Thatcher was returned to power in summer 1983 with a 141 seat majority, she is said to have announced to Walker in placing him as Energy Minister, "We're going to have a miners' strike."

The events of the 1984 stoppage lead some to believe that the dispute was planned by the Government in the hope that the NUM Executive would suffer another ballot defeat. But the announcement of the Cortonwood closure on 1st March with the NCB's subsequent demand for a four million tonne cut in production left the NUM little alternative to taking the action it took. 20,000 jobs were risk.

It will always be arguable whether a national ballot called

immediately would have resulted in a pro-strike vote. All those areas which balloted their members, with the exception of Northumberland, voted against. And strike breakers in Nottingham and other profitable coalfields would have probably used these results to justify their action anyway.

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## THE TUC

Ever since the Thatcher government took office and the world slump gathered momentum, the British trade union movement has been in retreat despite a few brave efforts, (principally that of the miners), to stem the tide.

The refusal of some union leaders and the inability of others to mobilise their membership in support of the miners was a watershed. After the defeat of the miners, the retreat became a rout, with the government and the employers pressing their advantage.

Trade union members had a right to expect their leaders to draw some lessons from what had happened so that the defeats would not have been in vain, yet the coal strike, the most important industrial struggle in Britain since 1926, was never seriously discussed. Of course, washing dirty linen in public would give the media hacks a field day, but what is that compared to helping the working class to learn from its own mistakes or those of its leaders?

If we cannot draw correct conclusions from our defeats, how are we to prepare the ground for future victories?

As things turned out, even the leaders of the N.U.M. gave the appearance of being more concerned with the replenishment of union funds than making a critical appraisal of the part they played in the strike.

It was politically correct for the N.U.M. to remind both the T.U.C. and the Labour Party that, on the basis of last year's Conference resolutions, they are under a moral obligation to help the miners who have been sacked or otherwise victimised because of the strike, but they are old enough in the tooth to know that the passing of empty resolutions is a time dishonoured pastime of both the T.U.C. and Labour Party conferences. It

is a sign that the working class movement has not yet reached maturity.

### STRIKE BALLOTS

The relationship between a trade union and its members is for them alone to decide. The working class are only too aware of the deficiencies of their trade unions and, in the course of time, the members will sort out the problems to their own satisfaction without the help of outsiders who have their own axe to grind.

Ballots are only one method of ascertaining the mood of the membership. The timing can influence the result almost as much as the way in which the issue to be voted upon is presented.

Properly conducted mass meetings which allow conflicting views to be expressed are far more democratic than limiting participation to the filling in of a form in the privacy of one's home with only the media for company.

At a mass meeting when everyone must stand up and be counted there is a feeling of collective decision-making which cannot be equalled in any other way. That kind of involvement makes it difficult for individuals to escape responsibility for their own decisions.

### GOVERNMENT MONEY FOR BALLOTS

The decision of the E.C.s of the AUEW and the EEPTU to go against the 1984 T.U.C. decision to reject government cash is no surprise to those who have observed the steady drift to the right of those unions.

The trade union movement in general is in such a state of disarray at present that it is doubtful if the threat to expel them from the T.U.C. will be carried out. It is more likely that the General Council will work out a formula which will allow government money to be accepted for ballots, in much the same way that it is accepted for trade union educational courses.

### SINGLE UNION AGREEMENTS

It is no accident that the two unions that are at the centre of the row over the aforementioned issue are also the villains of the piece in the controversy about individual unions coming to special exclusive agreements with individual employers. In exchange for getting sole bargaining rights the union enters into an agreement with the firm which is tailored to suit its own particular requirements.

On the face of it, it may appear that both employers and

workers stand to gain from such an arrangement, but in practice it is the employer and the employing class who gain most.

We come back again to the question of a trade union and its members, but now it must be looked at in relation to the employer and to the power relationship on the shop floor.

The traditional kind of factory trade union organisation is built as a result of enthusiasm and activity at the grass roots. Development is uneven, with first one shop then another becoming capable of confronting management in a collective fashion.

The linchpin of that organisation is the shop steward, not the trade union, and the latter is dependent upon the former for the recruitment and retention of membership. There is, therefore, a practical limit to the power of the union to compel the shop steward to comply with official policy. Furthermore, if one union tries to get too heavy-handed with the steward or the membership, there can be a drift into another union.

The practice of a trade union concluding an agreement with an employer over the heads of the workforce is completely undemocratic, but this aspect has somehow escaped the attention of the paternalistic types in the political parties and the media who are so concerned at our inability to run our own organisations and look after our own interests.

In the traditional form of organisation, competition between unions can be used to the benefit of the workforce. The single union agreements concluded from the top engender competition between unions for these contracts for the sale of labour power. An employer would have to be a complete idiot if he did not select the trade union which would give him the best deal - that is to say, the best assurance that the labour force will be kept docile.

The attitude verging on disdain which the EEPTU and the AUEW adopt to Congress decisions is no doubt partially based on their experience that the bark of the T.U.C. is worse than its bite, and that nothing will come of the implied threats of expulsion.

There is another factor that contributes to their self-confidence: they probably believe that the opportunity for recruitment is expanding in the trades which they cater for, while that of other manual workers is contracting.

The EEPTU has long ago extended its recruitment from the electrical to the electronics sector of industry which (at the

moment) is still growing. The AUEW is ideally suited to cater for the more technical workers on the engineering side.

#### THE SPLIT AMONG THE MINERS

The antipathy of the EEPTU towards the present leadership of the NUM is well known, and the AUEW is not far behind. The breakaway Union of Democratic Miners obviously shares their view; it also appears to share their confidence in a 'hi-tech' future. That means support for the Government-NCB policy of concentrating investment only in super pits where the seams enable the most cost efficient methods of coal cutting to be used. The advantage to the miners in those pits is that they will be able to get bigger pay packets if they cast aside their comrades who have to work in less geologically favoured conditions.

The UDM is an important ally of the other two unions in the broader struggle that is taking place within the British trade union movement. It will lead to serious errors if this is characterised as a simple 'left v. right' contradiction. It is more correct to describe it as a contradiction between those within the trade union movement who believe that the future lies in making industry more capital intensive, more profitable, and more competitive, irrespective of what they regard as short term social consequences, and those whose interests lie in maintaining things as they are as far as possible.

Neither camp has a socialist perspective, therefore the 'Left' label cannot rightly be attached to either, but - as the resolution of contradictions is the essence of social change - it is impossible to take a neutralist attitude to this conflict.

The NUM, despite the errors committed by its leadership during and subsequent to the strike, has a correct policy regarding pit closures because it is not only in the immediate interest of the majority of the miners, but also the longer term interest of the mass of the British people.

Capitalist criticism of the NUM is centred on its strategy; Marxist criticism of the NUM should be centred on pointing out incorrect tactics which hinder the realisation of its strategy. For example, it is a mistake to regard the UDM as a flash in the pan. Whether we like it or not, it will make some impact on the industrial and political scene.

Arthur Scargill did not do the struggle any service when he said, "There is only one union in Notts, and that is the NUM." Refusal to acknowledge reality is an abrogation, not an asser-

tion of leadership.

The allies of the UDM will be pressing that it be accepted into the T.U.C. The NUM is not only insistent that it remains outside, it is also raising the question of expulsion for those unions which it claims have given support and encouragement to the founders of the UDM.

The T.U.C. compromisers will be hard pressed to paper over this crack. The Labour Party will be in an even bigger cleft stick when it comes to accepting or declining the affiliation of the UDM.

If it is accepted, it will increase the already considerable dissension within the party; if it is rejected, the UDM may well seek a relationship with the S.D.P. which will probably strengthen the hand of the S.D.P. in the Midlands.

The strength of the Labour Party resides in the trade unions, therefore when there is a split within the unions of the proportion that this promises to be, the contradictions within the party will be exacerbated.

It looks very much as though we are about to witness the end of an era in the British Labour movement.

October 1985

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As events since April 1985 have proved, Scargill's predictions upon job losses were accurate. The NUM has suffered further reverses since the end of the dispute, notably the split within its own ranks. Whether or not this split heals in time, the strike leaders cannot be blamed for these developments.

If unity with Nottinghamshire could only have been bought at the cost of surrender to the NCB's closure programme, it would have been worthless.

The NUM national officers generally, and Scargill in particular, have shown through positive leadership that fighting unity is the only sort worth having. This is well understood by the communities which answered the strike call. Even the members of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, like their forerunners in the Spencer union, will no doubt appreciate it in time, too.