

Num United: A Team In Disarray



The unity of the miners has always been a problem, never a pre-given. So it has proved again. But that was not the only reason the strike did not succeed.

Hywel Francis

AT THE END of the most prolonged, bitter and courageous mass industrial struggle Britain has witnessed this century, several important questions need to be asked about the nature and consequences of the NUM's strike of 1984-85. Four inter-related questions should be posed: (1) How will the NUM rebuild its unity? (2) Did the NUM achieve its objectives? If not, why not? Put another way, was it a defeat or a victory? (3) What were the positive achievements of the strike? (4) What are the wider and longer-term political consequences of the strike?

It is imperative that the lessons of the strike be properly recognised and this can only be done if there is a frank and dispassionate discussion which encompasses the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies and tactics employed and the reasons why the trade union and labour movement failed to fully mobilise in support.

A review of events that is merely celebratory on the one hand or simply an exercise in apportioning blame on the other would be to do a grave disservice to the miners and their families who have sacrificed so much and also to all those who did or did not support them. But to assess the strike, particularly so soon after the event, is a difficult and complicated task, in part because it was so clearly different from one coalfield to another.

It would be instructive to begin with the end of the strike for it ended the way it did partly because of the lack of *internal* unity throughout the whole duration of the struggle. The resolution was narrowly carried (by 98 to 91) at the national delegate conference of the NUM on March 3 bringing the strike to an end without a signed agreement over so-called uneconomic pits

referred very pointedly to 'a drift back of members to work in all areas'.

By scrutinising the problems of rebuilding that unity we begin to open up some of the problems of the strike itself.

Rebuilding miners' unity

The rebuilding of the NUM will have lessons for the whole British trade union movement. No union has a greater commitment to achieving and maintaining the unity of its members than the NUM. Ever since the founding of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1888-89, and even with all the earlier attempts at building a national union, the principal aim was always the embracing within one organisation of all workers in or about the coalmines. Despite its diminishing size it remains, as an industrial union, at least until very recent times, one of the tightest, best organised and disciplined of all British unions. That has in large part been achieved because of a long established and strongly held attachment to the principle of one union for the British coalmining industry. In order to illustrate its collective commitment to struggle Michael McGahey, the NUM vice-president, put it succinctly in the 1981 campaign against pit closures, 'There is only *one* coalfield, the British coalfield, and there is only *one* union, the National Union.'

The founding conference of the NUM was deliberately held in Nottingham in 1944 to help ensure the commitment of the Nottinghamshire miners to the new organisation. (They had formed their own breakaway 'scab' union between 1926 and 1937.) In the midst of the fragmented unofficial industrial actions of 1969, one of the delegates at that 1944 conference pointed to the purpose of industrial unity.

It was not an end in itself. It was to achieve maximum industrial and political impact. His words in 1969 are more than a little relevant today:

'At this [1944 Nottingham] Conference many of the older delegates reminded us of the dangers of federation and the need to unite as a national organisation. I am not here as a critic of struggle but as a defender of it, but we must appreciate that in any struggle with the Coal Board we are also fighting against the state and don't anyone underestimate the importance of this. There is only a thin veil between the Board and the state . . . What we are saying is that any action that is taken must be a national action . . .'

When Antonio Ciano, the young Cynheidre NUM lodge chairman stood on a chair in his colliery yard on the first morning back at work at the end of the strike on 5 March he shouted words into the dawn which the NUM leadership should consider very carefully:

'I am delighted that over 800 of you [out of a total NUM workforce of 1100] marched in - united - behind the lodge banner this morning. I am proud that you did this because although many of you went back to work in the last few weeks you were driven back through despair and suffering and not through any lack of loyalty to the union or its struggles. You are *not* scabs. The only scabs in this colliery are those who broke the strike early on and it is their treachery which led to the prolonging of our suffering and that of our families. We will never forgive them too because they have taken our union to court and eroded long-established safety standards in the pit. That is all I have to say except to remind you that the overtime ban is still on.'

His words were met with acclaim in the darkness of a rural West Wales coalfield which had always been seen as the achilles heel of the South Wales miners. By the last

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alongside the vast majority who took no part in 1984-85 struggle.

Defeat or victory?

There are two obvious and legitimate reasons why there is a belief circulating that the strike was a 'victory'. Firstly the incredible organisation and courage which sustained almost half a million in mining areas for nearly a year was in itself a 'victory'. Secondly, the fact that the Government, with the backing of virtually every arm of the state, failed to compel the NUM to sign the dictated terms. Both these statements are undisputed and no amount of Tory crowing can ever take that away from the striking miners and their supporters. Beyond that, the journal of the NUM, *The Miner*, states that the NCB has not been able to close the 20 pits and axe 20,000 jobs which was its intention in March 1984. Neither has it been able to close the five threatened pits which also sparked off the dispute.

The Miner goes on to state that the NCB has been forced to accept an independent appeal body within the colliery review procedure. And finally, and most important of all, *The Miner* further affirms that the NCB wanted to break the NUM and its members' morale.

All these arguments can be claimed as elements of a miners' 'victory'. But it would be a most appalling exercise in self-delusion to claim that the NUM had achieved its objectives: the closure programme has not been withdrawn and in the course of the struggle the unity of the union has been broken, hundreds of its members have been sacked, many have been imprisoned and some have died directly or indirectly as a result of the dispute. And since the return to work, a general amnesty for sacked miners has not been won, and in some coalfields long-established procedures have not been adhered to by the NCB and a generally aggressive managerial policy has been carried out, notably in Scotland.

To talk therefore in terms of 'victory' or 'defeat' would be simplistic. There is no doubt however that the miners and the labour movement have suffered a significant setback but that has to be put in the wider context of the unremitting progress of Thatcherism and the failure hitherto of any other group of workers to mount anything like the scale of resistance achieved by the miners.

nal unity. Again, older members in such areas may not have been active in the strike: with all their savings gone, pressure now from them for redundancy settlements is another understandable problem.

The emerging campaign around an amnesty for sacked miners and the financial safeguarding in the meantime of their families and those of imprisoned miners, could be a surprisingly unifying factor.

However, the means of attaining unity on a more permanent basis begs wider, more profound questions. Older miners, whose wisdom invariably springs from the bitter experience of defeat, would always refer to unity being a very slender reed. They built that unity through national agreements and a national organisation which embraced *all* miners.

In the immediate past, unity was achieved largely on the basis of a unified wage payment system - the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) - which eliminated the divisiveness of piecework. All the disunity which manifested itself directly or indirectly during the 1984-85 strike stemmed from the undermining of the NPLA through the introduction of the incentive bonus scheme in 1977-78. There can be no long-term solution to disunity without first eliminating a scheme whose very objective was to destroy the cohesion of the NUM. That will not be achieved by large rallies and emotional speeches but only by a carefully worked out campaign linking the need for unity to the protection

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of jobs, improving wages and safety standards for all. And that will only begin when the Nottinghamshire miners are convinced that there are great benefits for themselves through unity with the national union and grave problems for them and all other miners through their own self-imposed isolation. That isolation has already started to be broken down by the twinning of communities between South Wales and Nottingham and the maintaining of support links with non-coalfield areas. All Nottinghamshire miners must be made to feel that they are an essential part of the national union. Catalytic in that process will be the handful of striking miners who have now returned to work

few days of the strike nearly 50% of Cynheidre's miners had broken with the strike - but on that morning there was a sense of unity, born out of 12 months of collective resistance, which that colliery had never experienced in its short but predominantly right wing history.

If the NUM is to survive in the coming months its first task is to rebuild itself as an organisation and unite its membership at every level. If Cynheidre is any indicator it has already started from below. Clearly it will not be an easy or simple task and central to it all will be the way in which it faces up to the problem of Nottingham (whose non-involvement in the strike is examined below).

The Nottinghamshire problem

With about half the NUM membership qualifying as 'scabs', at least in the eyes of some, 'discipline' and 'punishment' seem non-starters. Expelling individual miners is one thing, but excluding whole coalfields such as Nottingham is quite another matter again. To complicate the problem even further, a number of striking miners, mainly in the Midlands coalfields, are very much in a minority in their own pits and communities where ostracism and hostility is probably even more fierce than in the militant coalfields. If one militant coalfield appeared to take action against 'scabs', reprisals would inevitably follow in the other coalfields.

That is why a fratricidal war based on looking for its own 'enemy within' can only debilitate resistance at a time when the union itself will be needing to use what energy it has left to defend itself from further attacks. Less obvious, but still a danger, is the problem within the traditionally militant coalfields where attacks from Left and Right on area and branch leadership about the way the strike was conducted place an added burden on inter-



£100,000-worth of food from London trade unionists makes its way to the miners in Yorkshire.

Divisions within the NUM

Why then did the miners not achieve their objectives? Firstly the most critical problem was the failure to convince the vast majority of Nottinghamshire miners and the other Midlands coalfields that they should engage in a national struggle against the McGregor closure programme. On the face of it, this failure appeared to turn on two inter-related questions - the decision not to hold a national ballot over

the proposed closure programme and the extent and nature of so-called violence on the picket lines. Both these questions focus very sharply on Nottingham.

Whilst the whole argument over 'one miner not having the right to vote another out of a job' was a valid one, it did not cut much ice with those who felt they were being disenfranchised. Much more seriously, and it is not a factor that was considered at the time, it implicitly cut across the long-established principle of national unity, national decisions and national action. The absence of a national ballot meant that large parts of the struggle inevitably focussed on flying pickets and

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mass picketing and mainly but not exclusively in the Midlands. There were two very serious problems flowing from the lack of a ballot and the picketing strategy. The miners' struggle became internalised and this in turn diverted attention away from the real issues associated with the case for coal.

As a consequence the Government and the NCB, through a willing media, had a field day. The strike from its earliest days was seen to be about the denial of the so-called democratic 'right to work' (as Nottingham subsequently had balloted against industrial action) and the 'violent' confrontations on the picket lines between striking miners and police who were portrayed as merely trying to allow 'working' miners their right to exercise their legitimate 'right to work'. The whole agenda for public debate for most of the strike was thus confined to these two questions until the last three months when the Government and the NCB added two new spurious issues - 'uneconomic' pits, and a numbers game over the drift back to work. The NUM was forced to spend all of its time rebutting the 'enemy's' arguments. At no time was the NUM leadership sufficiently powerful to launch an interventionist counter-offensive on the media to argue the case for coal. It is not good enough to simply blame the media. The internal weaknesses, inherent from the beginning, prevented the NUM giving itself space for public manoeuvre. The only time any positive intervention did occur was with the initiative launched by the church leaders.

But beneath the balloting and picketing something much more profound had been

happening long before March 1984 in Nottinghamshire and the rest of the Midlands which should have indicated that these miners could not simply be bounced out on strike through gut spontaneous solidarity action. The 1979 and 1983 general elections should have been a warning. Right across the Midlands, several traditional mining constituencies had fallen to the Conservatives. Many miners had undoubtedly become bourgeoisified. Striking miners from South Wales, Kent and Durham thought they were on another planet when they descended on the Midlands. What looked like brand new pits, enormous incentive bonuses, semi-detached miners' homes located in idyllic countryside all pointed to the fact that Thatcherism had successfully splintered the NUM long before the ballot became an issue.

The battle of ideas was being lost in the Midlands: 'old' ideas of brotherhood and solidarity and struggle still strong in Aylesham, Mountain Ash and Easington were fast being eroded in Coalville and Newstead with the even older, reactionary ideas of survival of the fittest in the new Thatcherite garb of monetarism. The introduction of the incentive bonus scheme in 1977-78 had prepared the way in the Midlands coalfields whose willingness to fight for other coalfields had always been questionable. The breakaway Nottingham union of the interwar period was symptomatic of that and a traditional deferential working class Toryism which still persisted from the 1920s.

The lack of solidarity

The changed circumstances of the British working class in the 1980s provided the second principal reason for failure. The internal weaknesses of the NUM which allowed the ballot and picketing to become such major media issues prevented the NUM from creating the conditions to build on greater public support and more specifically to achieve much greater solidarity action through the TUC and the Labour Party. The ballot and picketing often became the pretext or indeed excuse for ineffectual or non-existent support from the trade union and labour movement. Many trade union and Labour leaders in particular failed to accept that the police were being used to break the strike. Violence stemmed from that. Furthermore the NUM's over-concentration on a 'revolutionary' victory at the TUC and the Labour Party Conferences in the autumn overlooked the problem of 'Labour's lost millions', the fear created throughout

the working population of four million unemployed and the insidious impact the media had already had by then on the British people in its portrayal of the strike. The piling up of left wing block votes did not guarantee solidarity. There was not an honest appraisal of the opposing forces. It was as if trade union and Labour leaders were in a time warp.

Following the autumn conferences no general, concerted or dynamic lead was given from above to honour NUM picket lines or even fund-raise in earnest. The honourable exception were the rail unions which had in any event been working in conjunction with the NUM from the beginning. The reality was that fund-raising for miners' families became a substitute for the industrial action which unions could not deliver or were afraid to consider. In the end NUM members found it easier and less embarrassing to put the case for 'starving' children rather than put the sharper more awkward case for industrial action or even making a call for desperately needed donations for picketing. As a consequence coal continued to pour out of the Midlands and through the ports from abroad.

A narrow industrial strategy

The third principal reason for failure was that the very traditional, almost archaic, solely industrial strategy of mass and flying picketing was pursued almost to the exclusion of every other form of struggle - old and new. How many national leaflets were produced? What novel forms of public campaigning were mounted learning, for

example, from the GLC and the peace movement? Relying therefore on its own resources, the NUM's strike strategy became narrower and more desperate as the months slipped by. It almost became simply on of 'picketing our way to power' as one NUM official observed. From the very outset, it was difficult to mount a nationally co-ordinated picketing campaign beyond the coalfields because many areas had their own internal problems. The only national effort of any consequence was the mass picket at Orgreave which in the event emerged more as a Government stage-managed theatrical occasion to discredit the NUM's picketing tactics. One observer described it as potentially the NUM's Dien Bien Phu.

It has to be admitted that this exercise and all other mass picketing failed. They failed because the Government was better prepared and because the tactic of mass picketing was based on the 1972 Saltley Gates syndrome that a quick industrial victory could be achieved. But 1984 was not 1972. Miners were now picketing against the state. Throughout the summer striking miners were continually looking for a 'Saltley' victory to keep morale up until the lights went inevitably out in mid-winter. Once it was realised that power cuts were not to be achieved, NUM members were urged to hang on until the 'pound went through the floor' with the mounting financial burden of the strike. 'Hold tight to win' lacked any credible political analysis of the prevailing situation.

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Given that picketing became so important to the development of the strike, one tactical error could count for a great deal. The early decision to concentrate more on steelworks than on power stations was difficult to comprehend particularly as the Government was known to want further steel closures.

Such a narrow syndicalist strategy was doomed to failure unless it could gain solidarity action and broader public support. That solidarity action was always difficult to achieve. The NUM was compelled to confront unsympathetic steelworkers, power workers, lorry drivers and most obvious of all, members of the pit deputies' union, NACODS. Picket lines became a place of conflict and violence rather than co-operation and solidarity. Too often police prevented pickets speaking to fellow workers and so the whole strategy became almost redundant.

Lacking critical industrial and widespread public support, the NUM's strategy was reduced in the end to one of simply 'stand firm'. Pickets in the Cynon Valley were heard to ask 'Who is this Stan Firm everyone has been talking about for weeks?' The continuation of the 1926 miners' lockout beyond the summer ultimately caused the fragmentation of the MFGB. To believe, as they did in 1926, that by simply holding out indefinitely and

the most courageous and
principled stand mounted
by any union. . .this
century

'standing firm down to a hard core', to a notional 40% of strikers, despite mounting suffering, was to blind ourselves to the consequences. The 'scab-hating syndrome' and the use of the strike to solve all problems are symptoms of a strong trade union consciousness but nothing more. One old miner at Penallta Institute at the end of the strike told a group of younger miners, 'I remember Arthur Horner [NUM general secretary 1946-58] telling us that a strike is only a *beginning*. At some stage it has to come to an end but the *political* struggle will go on afterwards.' Put more pointedly Horner's successor, Will Paynter, condemned those who had a fetish about strike.s. Could the 1984-85 strike have developed into a way of life? If

Women's support groups gather at national march and rally, Barnsley.



so, the Thatcher government would have approved because in staying out forever it would have achieved what the Government had failed to achieve for itself - the break-up of the NUM.

The use of the state

Ultimately, even if the union could have achieved some of its objectives by staying out, it would have been at the price of losing the NUM as an organisation. For a growing number of strikers that was too high a price to pay. Once over 50% no longer supported the strike the very existence of the NUM was called into question. Once 'good men' were unable to maintain their loyalty after nearly a year of sacrifice, it was time to call it a day. One South Wales leader in the last days of the strike put it bluntly 'To prosecute this strike to the bitter end, we have seen our members become "beggars"; we have seen them become "criminals"; we are not going to allow them to become "scabs".'

In the end, the very divisions in the membership produced quite absurd results. NEC members representing handfuls of strikers were prepared in the words of one South Wales leader 'to stay out to the last drop of South Wales blood.' Such situations clearly did not make for unity let alone 'victory'.

With the growing isolation of the NUM, the Government became increasingly confident in using every arm of the state to drive home its advantage, based on plans which it had prepared since 1978. As in 1926, the Government had contingency plans in the event of a major industrial battle whilst the TUC and the miners were exceptionally ill-prepared. What the Government could never have anticipated was the strength of the resolve in the coalfields to resist for so long against such massive odds. In some respects, the use of the courts, the sequestration of union funds, the creation of a national police force, the enlisting of 'scab' haulage firms, the cutting of benefits, the erosion of civil liberties, the tight government control of the NCB and the grotesque misuse of the media, all may well have increased the resistance among miners and their families. In the end, the ferocity of the state onslaught particularly in protecting, encouraging and isolating the working miners and guided by their self-appointed National Working Miners' Committee, was bound to tell on the NUM. In Nottingham it became crucial. The massive police presence there effectively prevented the free movement of people and ideas.

Finally, the willingness of large sections

of the NCB to work naturally and enthusiastically in concert with every other arm of the state to break the strike by aggressive managerial tactics, undoubtedly exploited the cracks in the NUM defences. Working on geographically isolated miners and eventually putting them in contact with each other and arranging massive police protection all added to the growing problems of the NUM at ground level.

However, in spite of all its internal and external problems, far greater than any other large union has ever had to face in this country, the fact remains that the NUM did not feel it was 'defeated'. Its striking members returned not as a rabble as in 1926 but united and with some degree of dignity.

it was a resistance movement against the state which gave birth to a new politics

The achievements

The most important achievement of the year-long strike was the collective national leadership given by Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey to defend jobs, communities and the nationalised coal industry itself. It was the most courageous and principled stand mounted by any union in this country this century. It was above all the first major sustained national defence of jobs ever achieved in Britain. That is *new*. At the very heart of the struggle was a questioning and challenging of the Government's economic and energy policies which would lead inevitably to privatisation. This was held up, at least for a year.

Secondly, the lead given to defend jobs and communities was one which evoked a most loyal and courageous response from striking miners, women supporters, their immediate and extended families, mining communities and a support network at home and abroad the like of which Britain has never witnessed. This went far beyond traditional union and political structures. It was a resistance movement against the state which gave birth to a *new politics* of local and regional broad democratic alliances and an alternative welfare state. The televised return to work at Mardy, beamed across the world, indicated for the first time, outside mining communities and its supporters, that something special had happened to people in this struggle which did not mark the end of an era for coal but potentially a new beginning.

Central to that new beginning were the women support groups. But for the

women the strike would have collapsed in the earliest months, if not weeks. In previous major strikes (such as in the car industry) employers and the media had successfully enlisted groups of women to undermine struggle. The support of the women was wholly unexpected by the Government.

The emergence of a mass women's movement in the coalfields harnessed tremendous new energies for the NUM. What is now equally encouraging is that the NUM leadership appears to have endorsed the creation of a permanent and autonomous national women's organisation which could be called on at any time to assist in industrial struggles in the future. But much more significant than that, such an organisation could develop into a social and political forum for the women of the coalfields to work in alliance with other progressive causes such as the peace and anti-racist movements. Such links have already tentatively been made in some coalfields at local level with groups engaging in discussion and joint action with CND, Greenham women, the setting up of women's community co-operatives and women's history workshops. The lessons for other industrial workers are all there to be learnt.

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Whilst the NUM encountered grave problems in developing alliances, particularly with other workers, important links were made at ground level in twinning people, groups and organisations. A maze of alliances now exist. At the moment these may be of a 'temporary' character but they are pregnant with possibilities. The links with the churches, the women's and peace movements, local authorities in struggle, political and trade union branches, the unemployed, cultural organisations, (for example the Welsh Language Society), environmental groups, ethnic 'minorities', gays and lesbians - all of which allied themselves in one way or another with the miners - point the way towards a genuine broadly based anti-Thatcher alliance with hopefully a trade union and labour movement willing to engage in struggle at the core of it. The endorsement of the continued existence by the NUM (South Wales Area), of the Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities is one positive indication that such alliances can and will survive.

What the NUM has succeeded in doing is challenge in a vigorous and uncompromising way, so-called received government wisdom. It has begun a public debate on energy which has long-term consequences

for the British people and the peace of the world. In doing this it has given back to people a sense of hope that collective struggle could be mounted. It was a gaining of a new confidence which expressed itself through individuals, through groups, through communities and through new alliances based upon friendship and solidarity.

The long-term consequences

The bitter lesson of the miners' strike is that no section of the trade union movement can mount a successful struggle on its own. Moreover, no union can engage in struggle with a significant minority of its workers 'scabbing'. Beyond that however, this strike has shown that simply going to the TUC and Labour Party Conferences in the traditional way and getting fine sounding solidarity resolutions is not enough. The NUM will now, with other unions, have to work out a strategy whereby it is not confronting but co-operating with workers whether they be in the first instance NACODS or eventually also with power and transport workers as part of a broad energy workers alliance. Unless this is done quickly the Government will be able to accelerate its drive towards the privatisation of coal and the whole of the

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British energy market (including probably even the CEEGB) as well as expanding its nuclear energy programme.

The strike also raised important questions of industrial tactics and strategy centring on the ballot and picketing. The 'intelligence' network of the NCB and the Government, based on a serious and scientific assessment of the views of the miners, other industrial workers and the public at large, allowed them to formulate plans which isolated the miners by exploiting doubts over the ballot and picketing. By contrast the NUM and other unions often based their plans on nothing more than hearsay and wishful thinking. Communication between union executives and their members will obviously have to be revolutionised and if the price for 'victory' and 'unity' will be acceptance of the ballot and the abandoning of mass-picketing, then so be it. There was always also a massive contradiction running through the strike. The 'macho' image portrayed by men on the picket lines contrasted with the role played by women, many of whom were involved in non-violent civil dis-

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members for their courage
and determination in
support of the NUM and
send fraternal greetings
to the miners and their
families for their magnificent
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JIMMY KNAPP
General Secretary

GEORGE WAKENSHAW
President

obedience and passive direct action. The lessons of Greenham Common were there for all to see, but with few notable exceptions, the picketing tactics never really altered. The style of protest and struggle will have to change even if it is only to learn from Greenham women on how to be arrested.

It would be easy but misleading to say that the methods used by the Government in utilising virtually every arm of the state against the miners has resulted in the British people becoming more aware of the nature of Thatcherism. We could point to the 1926 General Strike being followed by the return of the 1929 Labour government or the Roosevelt administration arising in part out of the brutal state suppression of the Harlan County miners in 1931-32. There is undoubtedly growing public unease with the way in which the Government finally sabotaged a negotiated settlement, and considerable support for an amnesty for most sacked miners as a means of achieving 'reconciliation'. It is too early to assess this possible 'awakening'. Much depends on the performance of the British economy over the next year, the full impact the miners' strike has had upon it and the general response of the British people to the Government's strategy of burdening

them with the growing cost of the crisis. Political developments will also depend on whether the lessons of the strike are learnt. Certainly none of the leaders of the


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major political parties have come out of the strike with increased popularity, if opinion polls are to be believed. In particular, the Alliance parties were found to be almost irrelevant with David Owen often finding himself to the right of Thatcher. Neil Kinnock's recent positive statement on the amnesty at the Scottish Labour Party Conference indicates a possible healing of the breach with the NUM which will inevitably continue if the Labour Party wishes to be accepted by the working class as a credible alternative to Thatcherism. However his unpopularity among miners and the wider movement during the strike may well cause long-term damage to Labour and Trade Union unity.

Most significant of all, the trade union and Labour leaderships will realise as a result of the strike, that the Thatcher government in its drive away from corporatist policies, wishes to by-pass traditional

working class organisations. Through its new legislation over the ballot for union executives and political funds, it hopes to make a further ideological attack on the working class. The advantage gained by the end of the strike will provide a platform for that further government advance.

The experiences of the strike for miners and their supporters indicate that if the lessons are learnt, they can go beyond the narrow trade union consciousness and class consciousness which held the struggle together in 1984-85, in 1974 and 1972. But the lessons were not learnt a decade ago. Today there are no options: the miners and the rest of the labour and democratic movements have to accept that there is a *political* struggle beyond the miners' strike, and they must engage in that struggle in the broadest possible way. Had the miners' strike been fought in a different, less traditional way, to take account of the new conditions of the 1980s, then the task of countering the ideological advance of Thatcherism into the 1990s could have been easier. What form that struggle will now take will depend on whether we are capable of nurturing, unifying and broadening the fragmented but new political consciousness which has emerged in the course of the struggle. •



The National Union of Mineworkers
South Wales Area


Salutes the striking British miners, the women's support groups and all our allies throughout the world who have made 1984/5 a turning point in our history. The struggle for jobs, communities, democratic rights and peace continues.

EMLYN WILLIAMS President
TERRY THOMAS Vice-President
GEORGE REES Secretary

THE BAKERS, FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION

Appreciation to the NUM leadership and all members who supported the fight.

JOE MARINO General Secretary
TERRY O'NEILL National President



THE GENERAL, MUNICIPAL, BOILERMAKERS AND ALLIED TRADES UNION

Fraternal greetings to all members of the NUM and their families, and our best wishes and support for their future.

DAVID BASNETT
General Secretary

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