DIRECT ACTION

WHOSE STRIKE?

SO IT'S NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU, EH?

There's been a lot of nonsense talked by people who have refused to aid the Miners' Strike this summer because it's 'political'. They won't extend solidarity because they say they don't want to be a pawn in Arthur Scargill's war.

The strike is "political", we make no bones about that. But then workers have had to struggle for everything they have gained as a class over the years. In this sense every strike is political. Other wise why are strikes necessary at all? Why doesn't the system give the workers their rights without the need to struggle? The politics behind the strike certainly don't embarrass Thatcher's mob, that's why they're prepared to sink billions of pounds and thousands of boys in blue into defeating the strike.

The myth that the Miners' Strike is just a war of Scargill's personal war with the system has its source in the Establishment and their friends on Fleet Street. Un fortunately, many working people have swallowed hook line and sinker the lie that Scargill has pressured the Miners' out on strike, and is keeping them out by denying them a National Ballot so beloved of those great democrats Thatcher and Mc Gregor (or for that matter Kinnock).

But the facts of the strike tell a different story. The strike was not the work of NUM Generals, but was built by rank and file miners and has been sustained by ordinary miners and their families up and down the country ever since. The vast majority of miners are behind the strike. Ordinary working people don't suffer real hardship for over seven months unless they feel an issue is worth the sacrifice.

This isn't Arthur Scargill's war. This is a fight by the miners and their families to protect their livelihoods and communities. And its also a fight for all the working class. A victory for the miners against the Government will be a victory also for over four million unemployed, dockers, steel workers, engineers, health workers, housewives - all of us. A defeat will make things for us all harder in 1985. A victory against the miners will give the Govt. the confidence to launch an offensive on jobs, workers and union rights that will make the last five years seem tame by comparison. That is why the Miners' Strike is political. That's why we are all political.

DOCKERS'

At the time of going to press the 2nd dockers strike of this summer has been called off with an agreement which gives the union nothing. The TGWU claim a moral victory in winning informal acceptance of a quota for coal supplies to the Ravenscraig steelworks. This is meaningless when it is realised that the quota will yield 22,500 tonnes a week, after 8 weeks, exactly what British Steel had demanded. The Union have also failed to get any assurances on the Docks Scheme and have failed to do anything about several employers who have ignored the scheme. The employers may use this to further erode the National Docks Labour Scheme, and to press for its abolition. This they want in order to be able to worsen working conditions in the docks, so as to increase their profi.
The British Steel Corpo-
ration has announced that its Ayton works in Middles- 
brough will be shut down in January, 
with the loss of 1400 jobs. 

Trade Unionists at the plant say it's making 
money, but为其工作被
announced, though there had 
been rumours. The closure of the works, 
profitable though it is, could herald a plan by 
BSC to privatise the 
associated products group 
which, along with the works, is a part. Work will be 
transferred to a South 
Wales plant as part of 
BSC's rationalisation, 
workers not entering into 
the calculations. 

The Ayton works began 
production in 1871 and 
has made everything from 
the superstructures to lighting 
columns. There is a promised flight 
the same, but the work was 
expected to be a flight to save the 
Cargo Fleet works (400 
odd jobs) which closed in 
Boro last year. Middles-
brough "poor millionaire" 
Labour MP, Stuart Bell, is 
apparently going to 
lead the fight. 

If the workers 
sink their 
redundancies into 
keeping the 
plant going Mr Bell has proba-
bly got his eyes on the 
Managing Director's job. 

Throughout the Miners' 
Strike steelworkers have 
turned their backs on 
their fellow workers fighting 
to save their jobs and 
co-operated with the BSC 
to keep steel production 
going. They've been told 
the myth that their jobs 
are safer with the 
McGregor, who really 
butchered the steel industry in his 
period as BSC Chairman.) 

We believe that the only way for 
the working class to achieve this is for independent organisations in the workplace and community and 
with others in the same industry and locally, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. 

For such workers organisations must be controlled by workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegations of such workers organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers. 

We are opposed to all States and State 
fronts. The working class has no country. 
The class struggle is worldwide and recognises no artifical boundaries. The armies and police of all States are paid to protect the interests of those States, they exist only as the repressive arm of the class in power. 

We support a new, leaner, militant and all 
attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere 
to control their own lives and the environment. 

The Direct Action Movement is a federation of 
groups and individuals who believe in the 
principles of democratic control where the 
workers alone control industry and the community without the mediation, interference of a bosses and so-called experts. 

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SCABS IN KENT
THE MCGIBBONS

The following article is an edited version of a leaflet we received at DA, which is circulating in Kent - it does not say who it was published by.

Who are THEY?
The McGibbons' first appearance was at British Leyland Cowley Plant in 1974. They led a victimisation campaign against a TGWU shop steward. It was a successful campaign which led to his removal from office. The main thrust of that campaign, led by Irene McGibbon, involved collecting signatures, and agitating amongst the wives of striking men. Robert McGibbon said then "the time has come for something, anything to end this stupid and wasteful destruction" (Oxford Mail 24.4.74)...sounds familiar...

In 1976 Robert McGibbon moved to Betteshanger Colliery in Kent.

WHY ARE THEY IN KENT AND WHAT ARE THEIR MOTIVES?
Betteshanger Colliery has always had, and is proud to have, a long tradition of strong effective unionism and a place for a right wing extremist such as McGibbon to attempt his disruption tactics? Since this dispute began he has been doing just that. The NCB's timely announce- ment that Betteshanger Pit was in danger and unsafe, was held to return to work. In anticipa- tion of his return and to ascertain the state of the pit, himself, miners occupied the pit. The NCB obtained an injunction but the police refused to enforce it, knowing that an agreement was imminent. That day McGibbon, in the company of his solicitor, and witnessed by Terry Harrison (NUM), Frank Redman and John Whittington (NACODS) signed the following agreement: "In view of arguments put to us by individual members known to be unionists, which would be affected by any closure of the Colliery, we have agreed as a gesture of help to keep the peace, not to return to Betteshanger Colliery while the present strike lasts."
The NCB also signed an agreement subsequently that: "There would be no inherent danger to the pit."

McGibbon lied, he cares nothing for the long term survival of the pit, nor for miners' jobs, or communities. When three others reported for work on 3 September, he knew this provocative gesture would ensure:
* the immediate withdrawal of 300 officials in NACODS, COUSA and NUM, depriving the pit of effective safety cover;
* the loss of coal deliver- ing the right to the elderly, sick and disabled;
* and a massive police presence in the village.

100 men have already been arrested, 8 remand- ed in custody for a week and 29 have been sacked.

Mrs. McGibbon meanwhile, is known as an populist amongst the miners wives, with offers of help, providing you can con- vincing your people to cross picketlines.

SO WHO IS BEHIND THEM?
The Freedom Association is known to be unionist involved, and they have a long record of such intervention. In 1976 they helped NCB's former manager Will Richards take the NUM to an Industrial Tribunal. They have uniformed strikers and broken closed shops in British Rail, Gunnings, Local Government, the Post Office, Hotels in Oxford, Rank Toshiba in Plymouth, and are notorious in the construction industry.

On 26 July this year Tony Cook interviewed both Norris McWhirter, chairman of the Freedom Association, and McGibbon, on Radio 4's 'Decision Makers' programme.

When asked about his involvement with the Freedom Association McGibbon said "I'm not following the Cowley dispute they used to phone, and have regularly been in touch with the situation to ask how things are going; they suggested I put an answering machine on my phone to record conversations".

McWhirter admitted that he had "personally talked to people involved", that he knew the situation in Kent was "...the worst in the country", and "...if the miners want to know more about it so we can be more EFFECTIVE in helping an extremely courageous man".

McGibbon is a man who has turned his back on his Union, has willingly acted as a tool of MacGregor, broken signed agreements and the trust of his colleagues, and acted as provocateur in providing the police with drinks at Cowley andace his neighbourhood and community under curfew. HE IS THE REAL ENEMY WITHIN.

Source: Leaflet.

KEWAL

In Birmingham Asian workers, particularly women, are still out on strike - the dispute began on 15th May 1988. The workers employed by Kewal Brothers, a textile factory, came out on strike when three workers were sacked for joining the Transport and General Workers Union. The dispute started when the union was in the process of negotiating improved rates of pay and conditions for the workers. This was agreed at an increase from £25 to £65 for a 40 hour week, and an increase on the piece rate. The T&G was also seeking an agreement that a transfer/increase on the piece rate, eg moving from fitting zippers to buttons, would not result in a loss of pay. However, Kewal Brothers used this as a play and sacked the workers who asked for these basic rights. The strike is part of an intensified struggle against bad working conditions in many sweat shops. In the West Midlands alone 5,500 small factories employ 20,000 women; of these 99% are Asian.

One of the owners of Kewal's is a leading light of a local guru-dwana.(sic) Solidarity is needed from other workers to enforce decent conditions at Kewal's and others yet to pay higher bonus under the production-linked incentive scheme. The union officials, advised the workers not to support the strikers but meetings voted to support the strikers and reject the officials advise.

After more than a week, the officials (who had never supported the action), negotiated a settlement which stopped production of the Maestro and Montego models that seems to amount to a redefinition of overtime! The union leadership is tied to a policy of class collaboration, to the extent that on 19th September 19: "Both national union leaders and the management recognise the need to restructure the shop stewards movement in order to create harmony. But every attempt at reform is undermined by unoffical stoppages such as that provoked by the paint workers."

AUSTIN ROVER

Austin Rover management continues to be concerned at the tradition of wildcat strikes in the company. According to the Times, 300,000 strikes have been taken this year. Austin Rover are considering the possibility of introducing a two stage wage increase on top of the basic rate. The pickets have had support from striking metalworkers from South Wales and Nottinghamshire. They need more support.

For more information on the strike committee Contact 01736 8322. For donations contact Bros. Strike Fund, c/o Shahid Udham Singh Centre, 360 Soho Road, Smethwick, Birmingham B20.
T.U.C. - Pragmatists v. Perverts

TRADE UNIONISM is a funny church.

Most of its members, most of the time, are non-practising believers.

The issue now is can they deliver? Indeed could they ever deliver the members?

In the past the union bosses could never make firm promises to the Government, the Treasury, or the employers. And then to be sure their members would keep to them. Nor could they be sure the rank and file would uphold union deals with employers.

Now, just as the union bosses couldn't always carry their members in their collaboration with the State and the boss: in this more combative era they can't guarantee to muster their troops to take on the authorities.

Why should we expect it to be otherwise?

In 1969, the TUC proved muscle-bound as an arm of the corporate State. When it agreed to vet wage claims of member unions, and act to mediate in unofficial strikes. Why on earth should it be any better as a 'threat' to Government?

Scargill's Syndicalist shortcomings.

None of this can reassure central Government. It simply means the rank and file will go its own way: no matter if the TUC is run by 'realists' and pragmatists of the like of Duffy and Basnett or the so-called syndicalist perversions like Scargill.

The shopfloor spirit of sectionalism and selfishness ensures that sacrifices and solidarity are out. None of this makes the British any less easy to govern. A people devoted to sectional self-interest is hardly likely to produce less chaotic labour relations.

Mr. Scargill's perversity, his rejection of some standard trade union practices, lies in his innocence - his belief that he is right. Unlike other union leaders he likes to lead from the front. Yet his very innocence stands him in good stead in the current strike. His men, reflective, or woman, may have had self-doubts, Scargill sails on leaving the more cynical, calculating and clever pundits, politicians and bosses, looking as if they can hardly hold their water.

The result has been the longest national strike in our history. An incidental consequence has been that the dockers have proved, if it were needed, that by a national strike (like the first one of this summer) they can put a choke on the Government in no time.

No General Strike of course! English workers are too bound up with their own short term self-interest for that.

Yet the Government hope that mass unemployment would put a stop to these sectional struggles has also not been fulfilled. In the present climate neither of these events were remotely likely.

No amount of faith in the words of Marx could produce a General Strike for Mr. Scargill. Nor could Mrs. Thatcher, through unlimited doses of monetarism ever expect to change the nature of English workers.

What is clear is that of state control and more state investment. His response is militant, but his solution is not radical. It represents an appeal to the state.

Realists Retreat?

On the other hand, the pragmatists in the TUC - Basnett, Duffy, Hammond, and even Mosley - are there to react to the actions of Government and the bosses. To work within the system, and not to change society.

Some Unions are even making no-strike agreements with the miners (with some honourable exceptions) could not give a shit. Who gives a shit for the unemployed anyway? The dockers were out in a demarcation dispute, and to keep for themselves a dirty job of shovelling up the slack. What to Government and middle class may look like a necessary structural change, to these victims looks like wanton demolition.

Nothing much has changed since in 1972, when Richard Hyman wrote (1): 'workers...will continue to react to situations rather than exercising positive control over their industrial destinies.'

What can we do?

The Direct Actionists have to work within the context this sectional self-interest on the shopfloor. This policy provides a guide for industrial democracy and workers' control. Direct Actionists are backing the miners' support groups up and down the country. In the North, they have been active on picket lines in and miners' demos. While the socialists just want the rule of businessmen with that of politicians and civil servants; the direct Actionists want to do away with all 'middlemen', with all bosses. 'New bosses for old' is not enough. All we want is what most English people want anyway; that is to be our own bosses. Collective control of workplaces by workers themselves.

B. Bamford (Rochdale DAM)

(1) Richard Hyman - Strikes. Fontana.