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Wildcat

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FREE
TO
STRIKERS

RELEASE IMPRISONED STRIKERS DROP ALL CHARGES

Up to 14th August, five-and-a-half thousand workers involved in the miners' strike had been arrested. This figure has now risen to above six thousand.

Most have been charged with breach of the peace. Other charges include: obstructing police officers, obstructing the 'public' highway, criminal damage, and assaulting the police.

Up to 19th July 85 per cent of those charged hadn't yet been brought to court. Bail for these workers has usually been granted on the condition that they have no further involvement in pickets or demonstrations connected with the strike. Since the number of active strikers is smaller in this strike than in previous ones (like 1974), these conditions of bail are intended to remove many of the most active and militant workers from the struggle.

Of the 750 workers whose cases had been heard up to 19th July, 65 were acquitted. Most of the rest received fines of between £75 and £100.

There have also been many cases of people collecting food or money for striking miners and their families being harassed and arrested by the police. Donations of food and money have been confiscated.

At least 206 workers involved in the strike had been injured by the police up to 14th August. There have been three deaths.

Almost every miner actively involved in this dispute has broken the law. The law is there to protect the privileged, to protect property and to maintain order. Those who have been the most militant have taken the most risk, some have been caught. Those convicted of serious offences during the strike must not be forgotten. These people face fines, prison and future unemployment.

Miners must not return to work leaving their comrades in prison or on the dole. Even the sweetest of victories would sour if those brave enough to attack the police or burn coal board property are betrayed.

All those arrested during this dispute should be released, and all charges against people involved in the strike should be dropped. No one should have to lose their job or pay a fine. The demands of the strike must include the release of all those in prison and that all charges connected with this dispute are dropped.

When the Pentonville 5 were released, the fact that the law is merely a weapon of the ruling class was clear to all. We must fight to blunt this weapon, refuse to accept their justice, their law, their prisons.

CP-FALSE FRIEND TO THE MINERS

The so-called 'Communist Party' in Glasgow has shown just whose interests come first for them in the present miners' strike. Despite posing as the miners' ally they have deliberately sabotaged the efforts of other political groups to directly assist local pit villages. In particular they have used their influence in the Ayrshire Regional NUM and the Glasgow Trades Council to force miners at Kirkconnel, who desperately needed assistance, to hand back, against

their will, over £1000 collected by Glasgow anarchists. They did this by threatening withdrawal of other benefits and legal advice.

The 'Communist Party' and their friends in the Union bureaucracy oppose any threat to their tight, centralised control over the actions of the miners. They use their control over funds to stifle any independent initiatives by miners in their own interests when such initiatives are essential to winning anything from the strike.

WOMEN IN THE MINERS STRIKE

Since the strike started in March, women from mining areas, often the wives and girlfriends of miners, have found ways of being involved. We only hear about Scargill's soup kitchens now, but women have initiated some imaginative and successful actions. At Fryston in Yorkshire 200 women met because of the strike and realised that their main concern was having their electricity cut off as they could not pay the bills. So they organised a demonstration and picket of their local Electricity Board offices, demanding that no miner's electricity was cut off during the strike. The manager met their delegation and agreed to their demands.

on the picket lines

Many women were keen to get out onto the picket lines as the most obvious way of supporting the miners in struggle. In the first few weeks of the strike, Kent and Yorkshire miners' wives picketed Leicestershire pits with their husbands. Women at the Yorkshire Main pit discussed what they could do, and set up a Women's Action Group to provide a canteen for pickets and picket Nottinghamshire pits themselves. One woman said: "It started because I couldn't stand the TV making out that the wives weren't behind their men". At Silverwood pit in Yorkshire, 30 women organised picketing regularly to fit in with their kids' school times. Miners' wives from Royston, Yorkshire, picketed Grimethorpe pit. Carloads of women were sometimes allowed through police road-blocks when miners were stopped, and they told of the fantastic response they got from picketing miners. Throughout the coalfields women met together to decide what to do to help win the strike.

Then they came up against the NUM. At Castlehill pit in Scotland, officials tried to limit the wives' groups to just distributing food. The women had to insist on picketing. A miner's wife said: "You're having to fight your own union when you shouldn't have to". The Northumberland NUM has discouraged wives from taking part in pickets. In Yorkshire, the wife of a Barnsley miner said: "Women who wanted to go picketing at the start of the strike were told by NUM officials 'It's a bad enough job organising the men'." What they

mean is they are scared the women will organise themselves without them.

unfeminine

This hostility is not because the NUM is full of male chauvinist pigs, and will not be cured by having more women union officials. By opposing women's participation on picket lines, the trade unions are in part just following traditional prejudices about what a woman's role should be. When over 100 Kent miners' wives picketed Leicestershire pits, the media also tried to use these prejudices to drive a wedge between men and women joining in the struggle together, by calling the women 'petticoat pickets' and saying how unfeminine picketing is!

The NUM's particular hostility is because they are scared of the women. Like all unions, they want to keep control of the strike which they are running. Otherwise there is a chance of it growing into a widespread revolt against the capitalist system - of which they, the unions, are a part. Women's involvement threatens this control in a number of ways.

unions divisive

The trade unions are based on dividing the working class - workers are separated by the trades and industries they work in. During a strike, people are divided into those involved and those not involved. This is a miners' strike and the NUM ensures its control by keeping it that way. But this tradition of union divisions is disastrous for the miners. For example, at Bold pit in Lancashire miners felt they couldn't ask the women canteen staff to come out, because they weren't actually miners. On a picket line where members of Wildcat were present, at Parkside pit, Lancashire, both miners and police there agreed that they didn't want non-NUM members picketing. And pickets let workers from other unions go in to work at the pit.

When women take an active part and join miners' picket lines, they are challenging these divisions, for many of them are not just the wives of working miners. They are workers too, with their own grievances and fights to be won against the bosses. When a whole

community is involved on the picket lines, there is a real chance that the strike will spread to other workplaces, and go far beyond union-erected boundaries. At the start of the miners' strike, in March, the mainly female workforce at Dunlop Sports in Barnsley walked out after management imposed a series of attacks on working conditions. The women workers were part of the same community, and families, as Barnsley miners, and the links they built up together made sure that after only a week-long strike the bosses were scared and the Dunlop workers won all their demands. The bosses do all they can to prevent this class unity and power - they were all desperate to stop the railway workers striking while the miners are out.

NUM control

Women also threaten NUM control of the strike because they mostly have no experience themselves of the unions' organisation and bureaucracy. If something needs to be done, they go ahead and do it. This is opposite to the way that all unions try to instil in their members that nothing should be done unless you've gone through all the proper procedures, however long that takes. Women who have organised themselves found that not only was this the best way to run the strike, but the experience has changed both themselves and their husbands. Picketing women say they won't go back to the kitchen sink. A miner's wife from Scotland told how the men weren't that keen to start with, but now "they are getting used to the idea that we can do things instead of just sitting at home waiting for them to come in from picketing". Rather than women having to stay at home wondering what is happening, as one woman put it: "the more involved I got, the more I believed in it". People are becoming radicalised through their activity in class struggle. It is this radicalisation which is at the heart of the revolutionary process. Men and women contributing to collective working class strength at the same time develop their individual power and potentials.

It is this process of radicalisation that the NUM is determined to stop. They try to make sure that the women organising spontaneously follow their rulebook and respect their organisation. At Silverwood, Yorkshire, miners' wives and girlfriends only managed to set up an action group after battling with local NUM officials. The officials wanted to stop the women picketing,

(Continued next page).

saying that the NUM wouldn't pay their fines if they got arrested, and they wanted to go to the women's meetings and look at their record books. They invoked the rules and regulations, which the women thought "only obscured the real issues". The women were only meant to do what they were told, but soon they were picketing the NUM offices - to be allowed to be involved in the strike!

The NUM has also tried to stop women organising their own activities, by arranging something to keep them occupied which made sure they weren't radicalised. In May, Scargill proclaimed that "every miner and his wife should join the picket lines". Like so much of what Scargill says, this was just talk. In reality, at that very moment, an organisation called 'Women Against Pit Closures' was being set up, to organise all the women's groups into the sole activity of collecting and distributing food for striking miners. With strikers and their families existing on the lowest social security levels, this is obviously useful. And where communal kitchens have been set up for pickets, they provide a place for people to meet, discuss what is happening, and break out of the isolation many workers live in, and the restriction on information imposed by the union in the strike. At Bentley in Yorkshire, women are organising a food kitchen which has become the focal-point for debate and information. This has meant that many women there want to join the picket lines now.

But the reason for the NUM focusing on wives providing food is precisely to stop them doing anything else. In case there were militant women who were dissatisfied at being stuck behind a communal kitchen sink, the 'Women Against Pit Closures' campaign channelled their energies into planning for a national demonstration, culminating in handing over a petition to the Queen! This was certainly far enough away from the reality of the working class in violent struggle against the bosses to be 'safe' for women to take part in. The campaign centred on attacking the DHSS regulations on miners' strike pay - as if the state will pay for workers to fight against it!

Women have shown they can organise themselves but their actions have been taken over and diverted by the trade union. In the steelworkers' strike in 1980, women in Caldicott on the Welsh border became fully involved in the running of the strike. Every week, mass meetings of the whole community were held in a local club, to discuss the strategy for picketing and advancing the strike. Everyone took part in making decisions, and joining in the actions decided on. This was openly regarded as a way of exercising control without the union.

This small, isolated example nevertheless shows the way forward. Militant women will achieve nothing by simply challenging male supremacy within the unions. Their aims can only be achieved by the rejection of the unions and the traditions of trade unionism by the entire working class.

A COMMUNITY OF OPPOSITION

For many militant miners and their families the experience of the strike, despite the material hardships, is proving far more attractive than the daily grind of 'normal life' down the pit or in the home. The unhealthy, dangerous and boring conditions of work down the pit and the endless routine of housework in the isolation of the home are not what miners and their families are seeking to preserve. Like the rest of us wage slaves, so long as capitalism exists we need money to live and the threat of long-term unemployment is not much of a prospect even if you do have more time to yourself.

During the strike many have experienced the beginnings of a real community of opposition. The development of communal eating facilities, sharing food and household resources according to need, organising communal entertainments,

travelling around the country arguing the miners' cause, debating the strategy, demands and course of the strike on the picket, in clubs and political meetings, experiencing the solidarity of real comrades in arms against the police and the excitement of action against the Coal Board's property and officials All this is a far cry from the passivity and isolation of normal everyday life. There is the involvement of the whole mining community, men, women and children, strikers, unemployed and pensioners, and the beginning, at least, of a breakdown in the barriers between these different people which capitalism fosters.

This explains, in part, why some striking miners can actually contemplate destroying the pitface rather than face 'losing' the battle, even though that battle is officially to 'save the pit'. It also explains why some miners actively engaged in the

Wildcat Basic Principles

1. Opposition to capitalist society which exists in every country in the world; both in the form of "private capitalism" and the "mixed economy" as in the American bloc, and in the form of "state capitalism" as in the Russian bloc, China, and much of the "third world".
2. Commitment to the communist objective - abolition of nation states and the money/market/wages system, and its replacement by a classless society, common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources.
3. Rejection of nationalisation and other state capitalist economic measures as any solution to working class problems, or to the world crisis caused by capitalism.
4. Rejection of all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" organisations, such as the IRA, PLO, etc. For the internationalisation of class struggle.
5. Opposition to all capitalist and nationalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. Opposition to all joint work with these organisations, including participation in front organisations such as the CND.
6. Support and encouragement for independent working class struggle, outside the control of the trade unions (including shop stewards and "rank and file" movements), and all political parties.
7. Rejection of the use of parliament. For the active participation of the whole working class in its own emancipation through social revolution which overthrows all governments, bosses, and leaders.
8. Active opposition to all forms of sexism, racism, cultural and institutionalised barriers to working class solidarity.
9. Opposition to religion, pacifism, and all other ideological mystifications.
10. Support for principled co-operation among revolutionaries, and opposition to sectarianism.

strike nonetheless talk of never going back down again, even if the strike ends in 'victory'.

The possibilities of this 'community of opposition' developing further however depend both on the strike spreading and on the dead hand of union control being removed. It means going from an 'industrial dispute' with the Coal Board to a class offensive against the bosses. It is this experience of controlling our own struggle which gives us a glimpse of how it could be if we really did run society in our own interests and control our own lives.

WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?

The left wing hack politicians and union bureaucrats have made the term workers' solidarity empty and meaningless. To them, showing solidarity involves stating your support for a strike, giving up a days pay for a symbolic 'day of action', or giving the odd donation to the strike funds. To many workers, solidarity has come to mean making sacrifices for the sole benefit of another group of workers in struggle. For instance, the dockers have been called on to strike by their union to aid the miners, rather than to make their own demands as well. This is not what we envisage as solidarity!

Solidarity means different groups of workers organising and acting together for their mutual benefit. In the present miners strike we call on all workers to join the strike, not just to help the miners, but to make their own demands with respect to their own working conditions and living standards. Now is obviously the time when any industrial action is going most effective. British Rail workers were bought off by the government, receiving an increased pay rise recently, simply by threatening to strike at the same time as the miners.

The dockers can strike now for a pay rise and to force the dock labour scheme to be extended to all ports. This way they would be helping themselves at the same time as helping the miners.

By organising with other groups of workers, recognising our mutual interests and fighting the bosses jointly and effectively we can force our demands to be met. By striking simultaneously and refusing to return to work until the demands of every group involved are met, we can attack the divide and rule tactics that have restricted our efforts in the past. At the Lammell-Laird shipyard in Liverpool, forty workers have occupied a gas

rig and HMS Edinburgh in protest at redundancy threats. Up to two hundred miners have helped stop the management from forcibly evicting them. Also miners have been helping other workers' picket lines, for

example, during the Phillips Rubber dispute in Manchester.

True solidarity means acting as a united class for the benefit of all, and here, and only here, lies our real strength!

AUSTIN-ROVER WORKERS DEFY BOSSES & UNION

Workers producing the Montego and Maestro at Austin Rover's Cowley plant are in dispute with both management and transport and engineering unions over bonus payments. Assembly workers are demanding a £50 per week increase in pay. A week-long strike has recently ended and a factory-wide overtime ban is still on.

Twenty-two painters are at the centre of the dispute. The management and the union want the painters to work 30 minutes overtime on every shift. The painters are loyal to the factory-wide overtime ban and their refusal to work over reduces the production of the whole plant. The union sides with management in trying to maintain production levels, but their cleverly-worded recommendation to "allow the painters to work overtime" was thrown out by a mass meeting of 5000 workers.

The 22 painters were locked out by management on 6th September, causing 2000 lay-offs. Austin Rover management took a hard line on the dispute and waited for the union to arrange the sabotage of the painters' action. This the union tried to do, but after 120 unofficial disputes so far this year, the workers at Cowley have learnt that union recommendations usually mean working harder for less.

The bonus scheme which this dispute centres on is typical of union-negotiated schemes. Workers claim that 'the scheme is too difficult to understand' and that 'management can fiddle the bonus to pay what they like'. Bonus payments in the nearby

Cowley body plant were increased from £5 to more than £20 per week after a 13-week overtime ban.

Revealingly, both the national union and senior management are anxious to restructure the shop stewards' movement at Cowley. Both accept the capitalist rationale of profits at any cost; both would like a tame workforce under the control of the shop stewards. Experience has shown workers at Cowley what following the union and/or the shop stewards means: productivity becomes all-important and, however well disguised, higher productivity always means working harder for less. No worker has ever been paid the full value of what he or she produces. Productivity and profitability are words which mean screwing more work out of fewer workers.

WILDCAT PAMPHLETS

* LABOURING IN VAIN ... a communist critique of the Labour Party.

* HOW SOCIALIST IS THE 'SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY'?

* FRONT LINE NEWS FROM THE CLASS WAR ... four articles about recent (1983) class struggle in Britain and Europe: NGA dispute, Warrington; electricians' strike, Moss Moran; residential social workers' strike; general strike in Belgium.

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PUBLIC MEETING

Wildcat, in conjunction with 'A Communist Effort' will be holding a public meeting on 'THE PRESENT STAGE OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE' at 5.15 pm on Saturday 29th September at Islington Unwaged Centre, 355 Holloway Road, Islington. All welcome. Plenty of time for discussion.