LABOUR
BRIEFING
HAMPSTEAD and HIGHGATE - MARCH 1985

Don't Mourn- ORGANISE!

Thatcher's government came to power to inflict a crushing blow on the organised strength of the working class. Without doubt, the defeat of the miners strike is a significant step in that direction. But 1985 is not 1926. While the repercussions of the strike's defeat will be widespread, this is not the kind of devastating defeat which will prevent the outbreak of future battles - there are many more fights to be gone through before the Tories can acheive their objective of making the working class pay the cost of the capitalist crisis. The task of socialists is to strengthen our organisation and learn the lessons of the strike, the better to prepare the battles ahead.

The TUC and Kinnock sold us out

There is no question that a major factor in the defeat of the miners was their relative isolation. The prime responsibility for this lies with the TUC and Labour Party leaders who expressed their sympathy, but time after time refused to mobilise their members for solidarity action.

Many thousands of workers would have been prepared to take action if there had been a clear lead from the top. Of course, it would have been difficult to mobilise the membership given the demoralising effects of unemployment on trade union confidence and organisation. But the trade union tops, by and large did not try to mobilise solidarity action for the simple reason that they were opposed to it. The right wing trade union leaders fear mass working class struggle more than they fear Thatcher. They know only the trade union office and the negotiating table. Mass struggle petrifies them because it threatens their own power and priveleges.

The role of Kinnock and his friends has been particularly despicable. They should have filled their diaries with miners meetings and rallies. They should have been on the picket line every day. But while the battle was being fought out, and rank and file Labour Party members fought might and main to win financial and other support for the miners, Kinnock found that his diary was 'full' and crumpled under the press barrage about 'violence'. Now he can't even call call for a full amnesty for the sacked miners. It was left to people like Skinner and Benn - the left- to carry the miners case. They were the one who gave real leadership.

STILL
THEIR FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT



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Precious gains

No one can hide the fact that the strike has been defeated. But permenent gains have come out of the strike for the labour movement. For the first time a a major trade union has stood up and fought back against unemployment, an example to the whole working class. Links of solidarity between communities, between miners and other unionists and between miners and Labour Parties have been created which will be enduring gains.

The miners strike has been a gigantic blow for the struggle of women to be recogni ed as a central part of the fight of the working class as a whole. Through Women against Pit Closures and other groups, women played a leading role in the dispute, often way in adavnce of other sections of the movement and of the miners themselves. This is a dramatic change which will not be reversed.

The miners support groups which sprang up around the country won thousands to the side of the working class and for socialism. Remarkable throughout the strike was the way in which oppressed groups in society - black people, gays and lesbian women, rallied instinctively to the side of the miners. And no less remarkable was the way in which this support was accepted as natural by the miners - a giant blow against sexism and racism in the movement and society at large, and a step towards an alliance of all the oppressed. The vote of the NUM in favour of Black Sections at the Labour Party conference was a sure sign of this alliance.

The lesson is clear. The miners strike was defeated, but the miners were 100 per cent right to stand up and fight.

Fight against pit closures continues

At the time of writing the Kent miners are still out. Whether or not they stay out, McGregor and the Coal Board will still face stiff opposition before pit closures can go through. But now the resistance will take place in much more difficult circumstances. In Hampstead and Highgate we have to continue to make every effort to support the community in South Emsall/South Kirkby and any pit which faces closure. The miners support group continues. The fund raising and the practical support must continue. Most of all, the links which have been built up with our comrades in Yorkshire must be maintained.

Fight the Tories on every front

While continuing our support for the miners, the battle against the Tories goes on with a whole series of struggles of vital significance. Top of the list is the defence of local government against rate capping and abolition. Equally, this year will see an escalating campaign against the siting of Cruise missiles at Molesworth. At the same time the teachers are now locked in a long battle with Keith Jospeh and the government to earn a decent living wage. Each and every one of these struggles needs active Labour Party support, as does the campaign we need to wage to maintain, and increase, union affiliations to the party.

The miners strike enormously strengthened our local party. It took us nearer our goal of being a mass campaigning party. We have to build on this success.

Organise the left - in the unions and the party

The lesson of the strike, and the betrayal of the union and party leaderships, is to organise the left at every level of the movement. There can be no complacency or a cosy papering over of differences. The fight for a Labour Government committed to socialist policies requires an unremitting crusade to defeat the likes of Duffy and Hammand on their own unions by organising Broad Lefts. In the Party we need to organise to remove Kinnock and the others who betrayed the miners strike and replace them with left leaders. And that can't be achieved without the permanent organisiation of the left in every party, and nationally through initiatives like Labour Briefing and Target Labour Government.

Socialism means mass struggle not the parliamentary game !

'Coal not dole' was the popular slogan of the strike. It summed up the programme of providing useful jobs to meet human need, not private profit - exactly what capitalism cannot provide. There is no solution to the problems of the British economy without socialist planning. But socialism will not be acheived simply by Labour electoral victories. The vital mainspring of the fight for socialism is the self-organisation and struggle of the working class itself.

Socialism means breaking with the institutions of the capitalist state - the police, the courts, the judiciary and their friends in the media. And fighting for it means relying not on the genteel rules and antique institutions of parliament, and the craven respect for 'law and order' shown by Kinnock. The miners and their supporters have shown us what the struggle for socialism is. The embryo of socialism was there on every picket line, in the mass meetings, in the community kitchens, in the rallies and marches, in the struggle against the police, in the wonderful sense of solidarity and community which the strike built up. As Marx said: the emancipation of the working class will achieved by the working class itself. Neil Kinnock will never understand that if he lives to be 100.



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