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MINER SURGERY

On March 1st, 1984, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party announced the closure of Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire - signaling her government's determination to ram through a massive programme of pit closures and destroy the power of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Miners had no choice but to fight, or see their lives and communities devastated. The longest major industrial battle in British history had begun - a battle that still defines the political landscape of today.

The full force of the state was used against the striking miners. 20,000 police were coordinated by Scotland Yard and they used massive computer-backed data gathering for intelligence. Tactics such as road-blocks, political questioning, curfews, beatings, illegal fingerprinting and photographing, snatch squads, phone taps, infiltration and agent provocateurs were widespread. Alongside this was the mobilisation of the media and the law. In the press, Thatcher compared the pickets to IRA bombers. James Anderton, Chief Constable of Manchester said mass pickets were "acts of terrorism without the bullet and the bomb," while the Police Federation warned that its members might be unable to serve the public under a Labour government after the Labour conference criticised police violence!

In pit village after pit village, mining communities were under siege. In August, at Easington Colliery in Durham, one scab went back to work - and for five days all hell broke loose as riot police were sent in to protect the lone worker. "The riot police arrive. Marching through the street, with helmets and shields, in through the pit offices, into the yard, staves drawn, advancing. Everyone running. everyone throwing things, fire extinguishers turned on. Stones, bricks, anything that comes to hand." Jack Dormand the local MP said the action by the police to get just one scab back to work had been unnecessary and irresponsible but that "the Home Office has told him (the Coal board manager) to get men into his pit at whatever costs."

Up to 3,000 police occupied the village. They stopped the buses and searched people. As one miner commented, "Easington was cut off from the rest of Britain for days while the police occupied it like a conquering army." As one woman resident put it, "I never ever thought I'd see scenes like this in Britain. I never thought I'd see what I've seen on the streets of Easington. We're occupied. We've been occupied by the police. We've had violence in this village. We'll never forget this - never. Not after this."

Motherlode

The strike involved enormous hardship, with many receiving no strike pay or benefits. Yet despite all the state could throw at them, for a year the miners and their communities stood firm in a magnificent display of solidarity. But it wasn't just the miners - the women also played a central role. They transformed the strike, and it transformed them. At a meeting at the Easington Miners Welfare, Mick McGahey, Vice President of the NUM, referred to the "housewives in the County who understand the problems." One woman replied, "We no longer regard ourselves as 'housewives'. We are soldiers in the struggle."

In mining villages, women played a key role in the soup kitchens and in the distributing of food parcels, but they also took part in the picketing and spoke across the country. Meanwhile, in every town and city in Britain, people formed miners' support groups. The 14 support groups on Merseyside, for example, sent over £1 million to the miners during the strike. It was estimated at the end of the strike that over £60 million had been collected in support. As important as money was the tidal wave of donations of food, clothes, toys for Christmas, and much more.

Solidarity took other forms too. Train drivers in many areas refused to move scab coal, despite a lack of firm support from their union leaders. Print workers twice refused to print editions of the Sun because of its attacks on miners. And twice during the summer of '84, Dockers across Britain went on strike.

All this solidarity could and should have been the basis for a movement which would have seen the miners win victory and drive Thatcher from office. The blame for the defeat of the strike lies at the feet of the trade union leaders and the Labour Party. They at best mouthed support for the miners while doing little or nothing in reality, and at worst actively opposed attempts to build solidarity. The key turning point came in the autumn of 1984. The TUC membership had voted to stop all coal and oil movement. But Trade Union leaders refused to implement this. Backed up by

Labour leader Neil Kinnock, the leaders insisted on sticking within the Tory anti-union laws. As the strike finally drew to an end in early 1985, the Coal Board's industrial relations director, Ned Smith, made a frank admission that had the TUC implemented the boycott of oil and coal, the miners would have won. By then, though, it was too late. The strike had met a tragic and unnecessary defeat.

But the miners strike wasn't just about protecting jobs and communities, it was a defining moment in the struggle between capital and labour. It was a class war, and unfortunately capital won. Prime Minister Thatcher made no bones about it. In her memoirs, she wrote, "The coal strike was always about far more than uneconomic pits. It was a political strike." At the pit gates at Easington, the pickets knew this all too well. "They've put us in a corner and if we don't fight our way out, there'll be nothing left anyway. If we lose this strike we can forget about the union; they'll be able to do what they like with us." Curbs on unions had come before 1984, but the noose was tightened after the miners went back to work. Employers began to feel confident in taking on any group of workers. And while British workers were once described by right wing economists, "as the laziest workforce in the world," we now work the longest hours in Europe for the lowest pay.

But struggles as epic as this are also an education and an inspiration. Women Against Pit Closures continued to fight and in 1994, in a squatted courthouse in Brighton, some of those women came to speak to a group calling themselves Justice? - part of a nationwide campaign to oppose the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The women told us we needed to be organised and to stick together; that to win we needed to break the law and embrace direct action, and that we needed our own newsletter to get our message across. Not so long after that meeting, the first ever SchNEWS came rolling off the press, promoting direct action and solidarity with people in struggle ever since.

* Banner Theatre's new play 'Burning Issues - The Miners 1984-2004' begins this Saturday (6) at the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. For other dates, 0121 682 0730 www.bannertheatre.co.uk

* Recommended reading: *People Versus State* - David Reed & Olivia Adamson (www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk). *State of Siege - Politics and Policing in the Coal Fields* Coulter, Miller and Walker (Canary Press 1984) Also check out www.minersadvice.co.uk for more books and general info.

HAITI TO SEE YOU GO

"The crisis in Haiti is another case of brazen US manipulation of a small, impoverished country with the truth unexplored by journalists," wrote Jeffrey Sachs of the Earth Institute this week. And he could not be more spot on. In the mainstream media line on the Haitian revolt, President Aristide is portrayed as an undemocratic leader who stole elections and refused to address opposition concerns. There is, however, another, hushed-up side to this well-rehearsed story.

George Bush's foreign policy team came into office hell-bent on giving Mr Aristide the boot. Why? Because many powerful US right-wingers were convinced that Aristide was "another Fidel Castro in the Caribbean." Aristide critics in the US were royally peeved when Clinton restored him to power in 1994 after the (US-backed) campaign of terror during the 1991-94 coup against him. They succeeded in getting US troops withdrawn soon after Aristide was reinstated, well before the country could be stabilised. In the meantime, the so-called "opposition", a collection of rich Haitians linked to the Duvalier regime and the CIA, worked Washington to lobby against Mr Aristide. And who are the Duvaliers? None other than a family of ruthless Haitian dictators. Now exiled Haitian dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier had been named president for life at age 18 after the death in 1971 of his father, Francois. Accused of human rights violations, mass killings and stealing at least \$120 million from the national treasury, however, Duvalier fled to France in 1986, thus ending a 29-year dynasty.

In 2000, Haiti held parliamentary and then presidential elections. Aristide's party won the election, although candidates who should have faced a second-round election also gained seats. Observers declared the elections successful, if flawed.

Mr Aristide won the presidential election later that year, in a contest the US media now says was "boycotted by the opposition" and so, not legitimate. The truth behind this seems to be that Duvalier thugs hardly constituted a winning ticket and so didn't even try. Nor did they have to, according to Jeffrey Sachs. The opposition party "in Haiti benefited from tight links with the incoming Bush team, which told Aristide it would freeze all aid unless he agreed with the opposition over new elections...the tragedy, or joke, is that Mr Aristide agreed to compromise, but the opposition simply balked." Because of this, the US cut off \$500 million of US and World Bank aid, and the country started its descent into economic chaos.

Colin Powell has said that allegations of US involvement in this week's kidnap of Aristide are "baseless and absurd", but Aristide claims to have arrived in Bangui, the Central African Republic capital, in a contracted US-airforce jet. Aristide described "white American, white military" agents arriving at his house and forcing him to sign a document relinquishing power and threatening bloodshed on his refusal.

Now the question is, what happens next? Haiti's Supreme Court Chief Justice Boniface Alexandre has been installed as interim leader and has kept a low profile since. Meanwhile, good old "Baby Doc" Duvalier said he wanted to return to his homeland. "This is my country," Duvalier said in an interview in Paris. "I'm ready to put myself at the disposal of the Haitian people." Why Baby Doc, you sound just about as sincere, democratic, and freedom-loving as George W. himself. Whatever else happens, one thing is sure—the US government has yet again tried to play puppet master with the world's governments, picking and choosing who should rule based on its own personal ideas of "good" and "evil" and getting even more blood on its hands in the process.

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CAMP UPDATES

All these camps need more people to defend them:

BLACKWOOD CAMP

A final eviction notice was granted on March 3rd, bailiffs could move in at any time. If you can't make it contact the land clearing contractor – Land & Water Services Ltd. of Guildford (01483 202733 www.land-water.co.uk) – to remind them of the criminal investigation around the trashing of bat and dormice habitat at St David's Wood which makes their work illegal. All this destruction just for an access road into an industrial area! Info: 07811 948764 or 07708 420446. For a map - www.schnews.org.uk/pap/blackwood-map.htm

SHERWOOD FOREST CAMP

Rob, the protester who fell 50ft from a treehouse last week, is back on the Sherwood Forest protest site with a broken arm. The camp still needs the usual tat – plus extra climbing harnesses to prevent any more falls. The planning committee meet at Mansfield Civic Centre, 5pm March 10th and all are invited to make comments! 07050 656410 http://mysite.freesevice.com/sherwood_camp/

NINE LADIES ANTI-QUARRY CAMP

The camp is under imminent threat of eviction, bailiffs paid a recent visit to the camp. The camp has been going since 1999 to stop the destruction of Stanton Moor hillside in the Peak District National Park from quarrying, and to protect the Nine Ladies Stone Circle. 0700 5942212

FORTESS ROAD

Today sees the opening of the second social centre on Fortess Rd., London, with a free film night and freshly baked pizza made on the premises! The new Social Centre, in what used to be the "Grand Banks" wine bar, is right opposite Tufnell Park tube station. www.wombles.org.uk

HASTINGS BYPASS

You thought it was over? No – East Sussex County Council are considering new routes for a A259 Bexhill Rd 'relief road', and make a decision in June. Originally the plan was quashed in 2001 (See SchNEWS 288, 313) when the govt rejected it on environmental impact grounds. Despite this, however, most of the newly proposed routes still trash the Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest, one of Britain's most important wildlife sites.

* **More Protest Camp Updates:** www.schnews.org.uk/pap/protestcamps.htm - www.roadalert.org.uk - www.indymedia.org.uk

BAYER SACKS

Bayer recently spent a lot of money getting injunctions out on campaigners who are opposed to their involvement in genetically modified food (SchNEWS 436 & 442). But all this must seem like a waste of money as they now seem to be scaling back things on their own. Last week, many of Bayer's top GM scientists were sacked, including Paul Rylott, head of their UK bioscience department and recent recipient of a pie-in-the-face. Hopefully all of this is an indication that Bayer know there is little acceptance of GM technology in Europe. www.stopbayergm.org

* Phytopharm, a drugs company who have been targeted by Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, has obtained a High Court injunction using the anti-stalking laws to limit protests close to their HQ to just six people for only two hours a week. The BioIndustry Organisation, the biotech sector lobby group, said the court action shows there was a need for a single piece of legislation to crack down on animal rights protesters. www.shac.net

RIP Chris Gorman

After a long battle with cancer, Chris Gorman passed away last Thursday at home in Germany. Chris, who was in her early thirties, was well known for her regular involvement in Reclaim the Streets and at the more recent Reclaim the Future events. Her memory will live on in the hearts of all who knew her and in our continuing struggle against capitalism.

VATAN AND ROBIN

The case against six people charged under Anti-Terrorism laws has been thrown out of court due to a ridiculous prosecution by the Home Office. The six were charged under the Terrorism Act for supposedly supporting the banned Turkish Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front, or DHKP-C (SchNEWS 392). They were arrested for selling copies of "Vatan," a radical Turkish-based magazine that criticises Turkey's human rights record. The prosecution said that Vatan is "terrorist property", even though it is sold legally throughout Turkey and Europe. A week before the trial, defence lawyers produced a letter from the Home Office confirming that the six were actually working for the similarly named DHKC which has never been banned. The prosecution went ahead with the case anyway, claiming that the six also worked for the DHKP-C.

Lawyers for the six were then told four days before the trial that the consent of the attorney general - a requirement for prosecutions under the Terrorism Act which involve another country - had never been given. At the last minute, the attorney general gave a rushed consent. But all of this proved too much for the judge presiding over the case, who said "Were this prosecution to continue, it would bring the administration of justice into disrepute amongst right-thinking people and offend this court's sense of propriety and justice".

* Last week, 19 immigrants became the first people to take part in a new ceremony where they all pledged their "loyalty to the UK and respect for its rights and freedoms" before becoming citizens. We hope Home Secretary Blunkett, also at the ceremony, was taking note of that last bit.

Inside SchNEWS

Robert Seth Hayes, a former Black Panther, has collapsed in prison ten times over the past few months due to lack of treatment for diabetes. He fears that unless he receives a transfer to another prison where they take his illness seriously, he may die. Write to the Correctional Services Commissioner to demand his transfer: Glenn S. Goord, Commissioner, NYS Department of Correctional Services, Building 2, 1220 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY, 12226-2050, USA. Letters of support to: Robert "Seth" Hayes #74A-2280, Clinton Correctional Facility, PO Box 2001, Dannemora, NY, 12929, USA. www.montrealabcf.org/hayes/

...and finally...

"The Miners of Silverwood, having been told they were confined to six pickets only, built themselves a seventh comrade in the shape of a large snowman, wearing a plastic policeman's helmet. Next morning, Chief Inspector Nesbitt appears on the scene and seeing the jeering miners and their snowy companion, ordered the constables to knock the snowman down. This order brought rebellion to the police ranks as PCs declined to, "look so fucking stupid knocking down a snowman".

"Very well," shouts the irate Nesbitt, jumping in his Range Rover and charging off to demolish the snowman. . . As the vehicle made contact, it came to a dead stop, smashing front grill, bumper and headlamps and hurling the shocked Nesbitt into the steering wheel. PCs found excuses to walk away or suppress body-shaking laughter while pickets fell about on the ground with side-splitting mirth. The snowman had been constructed around a three foot high two foot thick concrete post!"

From ex-miner Dave Douglass's book, 'All Power to the Imagination' published by The Class War Federation 07931 301901 www.classwaruk.org

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns readers despite miner differences we'll be back extracting the piss and slagging off from the coalface of the pits of capital... Honest!