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IMPRESSIONS FROM THE COALFIELD.

I spent Wednesday in Nottinghamshire and Thursday in Sheffield with the miners last week.

The Notts miners are very angry with Scargill. They do not like the way he is playing with their right to vote on important union matters. So angry that pickets from Yorkshire are unwelcome in many Notts Miner's Welfares. The present determination in Notts to continue working is not simply because they want the money. Though many do, if they were offered an honourable reason to strike, many would. For some, possibly most, a positive ballot would provide such a reason: loyalty to the union. This does not mean that they will vote for a strike. The longer they are not given the opportunity to ballot the less likely they are to vote for a strike.

Sheffield was very different. Standing in a crowd of miners - not the seven thousand of the press reports, more likely three thousand - I could not escape thoughts of Nuremberg. Though they were better humoured the other elements were there. The stink of fascism. Admiration bordering on adoration for their leader.

A scaffolding platform at the head of the square. Quantities of free beer financed by the union. Speaker after speaker making extravagant personal attacks on you. And on the police. Flannery MP saying that the police had broken the 'Law of the Land' and that the miners should make up their own minds what they were going to do about that. The next speaker urging the crowd to get 'stuck into the police'.

The police behaving immaculately despite grave provocation.

I stood talking to an Inspector when a young miner approached and started to insult him to his face. He called him a pig, a Thatcher lackey, etc. The Inspector ignored this provocation with heroic stoicism.

It's not just small fry who are inciting the militants to violence against the police. Scargill himself said at a meeting two weeks ago, when fighting broke out amongst miners inside the hall, that they should save their energy for the police outside.

To add insult to injury, the mainly communist South Yorkshire Police Committee were present watching for the slightest over-enthusiasm from the police from the top floor of a nearby building.

Scargill's address was appalling. Stilted, read from a prepared statement, utterly without inspiration. He is no orator. Still the young militants cheered and roared at almost every sentence.

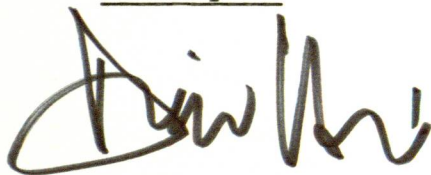
For they have found a Messiah who promises to lead them out of the dark valleys of decaying pits, declining industries, feelings of personal hopelessness, into a promised land which is still to be defined positively but which, negatively, will certainly not include such 'luxuries' as freedom and democracy.

They have no grasp of the Wenceslas economic argument. Many miners genuinely believe that the government could and should subsidise coal. None had any thought of where the money was to come from. This point could be put more forcefully.

As could the pledge for no compulsory redundancies. Very few miners believe MacGregor on this even though they admit that the NCB has always kept its word in the past.

I detected amongst the more thoughtful miners a sense of impending failure, amongst some, the dangerous ones, of desperation.

26th April.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Hart', with a large, sweeping initial 'D'.

David Hart.