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Scargill's challenge to us all

Readers of the magazine *Marxism Today* in 1981 were left in no doubt of Mr Arthur Scargill's contempt for democracy: "Anybody who believes that we shall achieve socialism simply by electing a number of MPs is deluding themselves. We will win parliamentary power, we will win real political power, we will win working-class power to the extent that we organize people in this country to fight for and sustain the alternative socialist system that we want to see. Parliaments do not necessarily reflect the view of ordinary people".

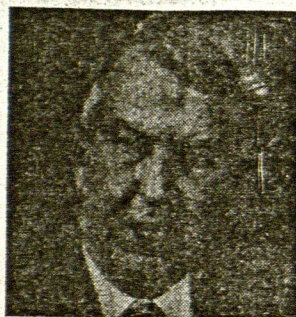
This contempt for parliamentary democracy and desire to seize power through the militancy of the mob has been the constant theme of Mr Scargill's activities since he became president of the National Union of Mineworkers. In another revealing interview, with the *New Left Review*, Mr Scargill described what he thought was his greatest day when, by the use of the organized mob, the police decided in 1972 that they had to close Saltley coke depot: "Here was the living proof that the working class had only to flex its muscles and it could bring governments, employers, society to a total standstill. I know the fear of Birmingham on the part of the ruling class. The fear was that what happened at Birmingham could happen in every city".

Mr Scargill is well aware that he will never realize his Marxist dream through the ballot box. Instead, for the past four months he has attempted to mobilize the industrial muscle of the NUM to damage an economic and social system that he detests, and that he would like to overthrow. The British people need be in no doubt that we are facing a challenge to our whole way of life.

Consider how different the present scene would be for the miners and their families if the NUM was led by a union leader who was not concerned with playing the political fanatic, but instead put their interests first.

The power workers show what could be done. They have been led by able, tough, negotiators with the desire to see that those employed within that industry have good conditions and good pay. The number of power stations in Britain in recent years has been reduced from 243 to 100. But productivity has shot up. So the leaders of the power workers have demanded improved conditions and pay for their collaboration in, and contribution to, the success of their industry.

The same opportunity is there to be grasped by any sensible leader of the National Union of Mineworkers. The Government has already invested more than £2 million a day in new capital expenditure in the pits and agreed to invest a further £3 billion. This taxpayers' money will allow the development of new coal faces and new collieries with updated machinery to create a coal industry which produces coal at prices which energy users are prepared to pay. The result will be an expansion of the demand for coal, both at home and abroad, and a growing, prosperous industry. That cannot be done, however, if we continue to squander scarce resources in a handful of pits which are grotesquely uneconomic. The



most uneconomic 10 per cent lose something like £1 million per working day. That is a waste of effort and capital which could be used to develop successful pits.

A shrewd, tough union leader would quickly see the benefits of moving from a high to a low cost coal industry and seek to grab some of that benefit for his members. Higher productivity and expanding markets spell higher living standards and greater job security for miners - that is the prize waiting to be negotiated.

But at no stage has Mr Scargill ever been interested in negotiating such progress. But then he is a political activist first and a union leader second. His problem is that he is not very good at either. Look at his remarkable list of failures.

First came the failure to unite the miners. Almost all of the those coalfields that had a ballot, in accordance with the traditions of their union, have been at work - 60,000 men, or nearly one-third of the work force, daily do their jobs despite intense intimidation and organized mob violence. They have continued to produce coal and, as the weeks have gone by, slowly but steadily, more men have joined them, and more pits have started producing coal again.

The two smaller unions connected with the mining industry, unions involved with management and the maintenance of safety, voted not to strike and have continued to maintain the pits.

Then there is Mr Scargill's failure to obtain the practical support of any other union, until the recently contrived dock strike. Every week he announced that the Transport and General Workers Union had agreed not to move coal; and every week hundreds of thousands of tonnes of coal have been moved by train and lorry. Every week he declared he was going to close down the steel industry. He sent his mobs to Ravenscraig, Scunthorpe and Llanwern to do their worst. And every week all Britain's steel mills have carried on producing.

Mr Scargill's third failure came when his mobs were sent to close power stations. Every power station has remained operating. The mob moved on to the coke workers at Orgreave. For several weeks, with Mr Scargill present on the days of greatest violence, thousands of organized mobsters endeavoured to stop the flow of coke from Orgreave. Every day, every single lorry load of coke departed on schedule from Orgreave and was delivered to its destination.

Then there was Mr Scargill's

Peter Walker, Energy Secretary, defends the Government's policy on coal and urges Labour and the TUC to denounce a dispute whose clear aim is the imposition of a repressive political system

failure to tell the truth. Remember how often he told us that stocks of coal at the power stations were going to run out. In February he said there were only eight weeks supply left. In March he said there were still only eight weeks supply left. In April we were down to five weeks, according to him. More recently he has gone back to eight weeks. The fact is that the movement and production of coal has kept power station stocks high throughout the dispute. Over the last month they have fallen by only 1.5 per cent a week. No striking miner should be in any doubt that we have enough to last well into 1985.

Mr Scargill frequently refers to the mining communities. During these last four months, working miners have been beaten and abused, families intimidated, windows broken, children threatened, bottles of ammonia thrown through windows, and never a single word from Mr Scargill condemning any of it. To him, violence in what he describes as a "noble cause" is justified. Let nobody be in any doubt that his "noble cause" is the Scargill socialist state, to be forced on us because we have the temerity to reject it every time we go to the ballot box.

There are seldom winners in industrial disputes. There are always plenty of losers. My father was a shop steward. He always considered his task was to argue and negotiate and persuade, but to prevent if possible the need for industrial action. As a one-nation Tory, I have always believed that national unity and industrial cooperation go hand in hand.

The Cabinet has agreed to continued massive investment in coal to secure the industry's future. It has agreed to provide the miners with early retirement and voluntary redundancy payments. Any miner wishing to continue to work as a miner would be offered a job in another pit, and helped with the cost of moving.

I saw to it that if there was to be a reduction in the labour force from 180,000 to 160,000, nearly all of the loss would be covered by early retirement, men in their late fifties with no desire to take another job, but who would receive a substantial capital sum and weekly payments as high as £104. A new enterprise company, financed by the National Coal Board, has been created to provide advice, accommodation if necessary, and finance to get new enterprises into the local communities.

And, despite the industry's losses, miners' earnings remain 25 per cent above the industrial average.

The conditions were therefore created where there could be no justification for strike action. As a result, Mr Scargill knew that, if he went to a ballot, the miners would reject his call for the fourth successive time. They would recognize that his motives were political, and not designed to improve the position of the miner.

Being described as a moderate in British politics is sometimes associated by those who are critical of such positions as being weak. But in this struggle it is the duty of all who wish to see progress and prosperity to be passionately strong in rejecting the use of violence, intimidation and the imposition of industrial chaos, for the purpose of imposing a political system that only a small minority desire.

It has been argued in the past months, and will be argued until sanity prevails, that there is very considerable cost, financially and in economic terms, for this dispute to continue. But it is nothing like the economic, political and social cost of allowing all pits, no matter how uneconomic, no matter how high the cost of producing coal from them, to be kept in production for eternity. It is a demand that no Labour government or any government throughout the history of the coal mining industry could, or ever would, adhere to.

But Mr Scargill was out to make a totally unreasonable demand, knowing that it could never be accepted and hoping that, with the help of the mob, he could keep the industrial action going and keep imposing damage.

There is no way that Mr Scargill can, will or should win this battle. Those many miners who wish to take advantage of the early retirement or voluntary redundancy provisions will be able to do so. Those mines that have no contribution to make to a successful mining industry will close. As the dispute continues, many pits that would be viable will, for geological reasons close. When the dispute ends, many more miners will desire early retirement and voluntary redundancy programme than when it started. They will know there will be fewer industrial firms willing to convert to coal. They will know that many mining communities are more divided and angry than ever before. All that will be Mr Scargill's contribution to the mining community.

It is time for the Labour Party, if it is going to survive as a party believing in parliamentary democracy, to denounce both the political objectives and the violence. It is time for the TUC, having declared that peaceful picketing consists of six men at a factory gate verbally trying to persuade people to support their view-point, to condemn the violence and the mobs that have been mobilized to try to prevent men who have voted to go to work from doing so. It is time that there was a national spirit, cutting across party boundaries, to see that parliamentary democracy prevails. This is not a mining dispute. It is a challenge to British democracy, and hence to the British people.