

A strike for Britain's future

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by Arthur Scargill

The Government and National Coal Board have taken a deliberate decision to prolong the miners' strike. The Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, speaking in the last days of the parliamentary session, summed up their determination neatly. The cost to Britain of this damaging dispute "represents a worthwhile investment for the nation", he said.

Both Government and NCB have taken a political decision which disregards Britain's future energy requirements and the effect on the economy of crippling a precious resource while adding massively to unemployment.

Miners and their families believe that society and the economy are meant to serve the people who contribute to them. A nation's destiny is determined by human beings with tangible lives. Unless the welfare of families, communities, entire regions provide the steering star for government policies, today's children face a bleak future, marked by the despair, poverty and violence which have become the trademarks of Britain in 1984.

The strike action that swept the coalfields on March 12 was sparked off by the NCB announcement on March 6 that 20 pits were to close, with 20,000 jobs vanishing, to

reduce annual coal output by 4 million tonnes.

But today, with 14 times that 4 million tonnes "taken out" as a result of the dispute, the Coal Board refuses to withdraw its pit closure programme. Why? The answer is that the closures and job losses announced on March 6 were only one move in a far-reaching, politically motivated strategy, prepared in complete violation of the Plan for Coal.

No government can hope to combine economic stability and social welfare unless it plans ahead. It is on such a commonsense approach that the Plan for Coal was based in 1974, and reaffirmed by the Conservative Government in 1979 and again in 1981.

As oil and gas near the end of their respective life-spans, as the perils of nuclear energy become ever more clear, the need to protect and expand Britain's coal industry (the safest and most technologically advanced in the world, producing the cheapest deep-mined coal) becomes crucial.

Decades of mismanagement, and a criminal lack of proper investment are the factors which have kept the Coal Board from showing strong, steady profits. It is a fact that Britain's nationalized industries, since

their inception, have been controlled by people who do not believe in them.

Miners, however, see no logic in quietly surrendering the coal industry, in sacrificing the futures of our children and grandchildren, or in jeopardizing the nation's stability. Pits and jobs are not ours to sell: they belong to Britain, to the next generation of British workers, and to the generations after them.

This dispute has seen within mining communities the flowering of something new in our time: a quality and level of solidarity which inspires all who experience it. Mining families, with magnificent support from the rest of the labour movement, have assumed responsibility for their future and for the nation's welfare.

All this, I acknowledge, is difficult for the press, trying desperately to portray the miners' strike as the handiwork of one individual. Those who participate in it - not only mining families, but thousands of people throughout Britain - know the truth, and know what is at stake.

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