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THE COMPANY THEY KEEP

It is hard for anyone who has not been down a coalmine to appreciate why the experience, particularly on a daily basis, so often makes miners feel like men apart from the rest of society. There is something totally pre-emptive about work down the mine. It results in many miners, if not their wives, being less susceptible to normal economic influences than other citizens engaged in more familiar and visible forms of work.

The successful management of coalfields thus calls for sensitivity and skill of a higher order than, say, that required for a supermarket. That is particularly so during periods of prolonged unemployment such as the National Coal Board is undergoing. The NCB has shown such skills at every level of management; and Mr. Ian MacGregor, in spite of many attempts to portray him as a politician's hatchet man, is clearly endowed with impressive qualities of industrial leadership.

Mr. MacGregor is there to make the NCB a vigorous forward-looking industrial enterprise in the highly competitive world of energy production. The economics of coal in the energy equation may appear uncomplicated, but his task is bedevilled by the emotions which attach not to coal itself as just one among several sources of energy available to this country, but to the idea of coalminers, as talismen of a particular type of society and culture which has great symbolic appeal to the Left.

It should be in everybody's interest to contain this emotional dimension so as not to aggravate the task of reconstruction in the coal industry. That is difficult enough already, as with all monolithic industries when afflicted with a changing economic environment. Yet the emotional attraction to the idea of the coalminer, rather than to coal, leads some people to romanticise the work of the coalminer, at the risk of perpetrating serious economic, and even moral fallacies, as Mr Enoch Powell rightly pointed out yesterday in his criticism of the Archbishop of York's well-intentioned but ill-considered plea to keep old pits open.

It leads others to exploit the

coalminer for their own ends, which have less to do with the plight of coalminers at uneconomic pits, and more to do with broader political objectives in which the coalminer becomes so much cannon fodder in a fight for political power.

One would expect the Mineworkers' Union to fight for its members in order to mitigate the hard reality of closing down uneconomic pits and the strains of a shrinking workforce. It has done so not unsuccessfully, to judge by the unprecedentedly high redundancy terms on offer to miners - always hitherto on a voluntary basis - and the phasing of the run-down during both Labour and Conservative administrations.

That limited but important industrial and social task has now instead become an increasingly rancorous political issue, in which the Labour leadership, surely against its better judgment, has effectively joined forces with Mr Scargill. Have Mr Kinnock and his colleagues not been listening to Mr Scargill since last year's election? He has consistently stated his intention to use the mineworkers as shock troops in a much wider war than the question of pithead economics; hence his impatience with the idea of a pithead ballot. And at every station along the line the Communists have been with him. It cannot be wise for the Labour leadership to keep such company.

Only two days after the election Mr Scargill was telling the *Morning Star* that the trade unions would now have to take extra-parliamentary action against policy decisions of the elected government. "Arthur is right" commented the revolutionary paper *Socialist Action*. A week later the *Morning Star* endorsed statements by Mr Scargill and his Communist vice president, Mr Mick McGahey, stating: "The miners... are in the firing line... We must all get ready to stand alongside them."

Mr Scargill has made no secret of his view that the trade unions should use their muscle to acquire political power, regardless of electoral niceties. He warned the mineworkers that the fight against this Government's policies would have to take place

outside Parliament, and was warmly supported in this view by Mr George Bolton, the Scottish NUM's vice-president and soon to be elected chairman of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Before the Trades Union Congress last year the *Morning Star* interviewed Mr Scargill and two leading trade unionists who are official members of the Communist Party, Mr Ken Gill and Mr Ben Rubner. Mr Scargill there warned against the possibility of "class collaboration" which would be involved in any contact with the Government. His campaign has been fully orchestrated by Communist Party spokesmen in support, distributing 60,000 leaflets and giving repeated endorsements in the columns of the *Morning Star*. It was in that newspaper on March 28 that Mr Scargill spelt out his view of the class war which he hopes to wage on the British people, in which, "every sinew in every factory, office, dole queue, docks, railway, plant and mill will need to be strained to the maximum. Waiting in the wings are four million unemployed whose numbers could swell the picket line at any time. What is urgently needed is the rapid and total mobilization of the trade union and labour movements to take positive advantage of a unique opportunity to defend our class and roll back the machinery of oppression, exploitation and deep-seated human misery."

By associating his Party so directly with the miners' struggle, by laying more emphasis on allegations against the police than in criticising the violence of flying pickets; by ordering a Labour Party levy for mineworkers before any sign of a strike ballot, thus making it clear which way he hopes or expects the ballot to go; and by a reluctance to hear what the hard Left and the Communists are saying and then to stand out against them, Mr Kinnock and his colleagues have been skillfully manoeuvred into following the militants rather than leading the party away from militancy. They now share a platform with the Communists though that surely cannot have been what they intended. Is there a leader in the House to get them off it?

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