

The NCB is winning, says David Hart: the advantage should be pressed

Help the miners beat Scargill



Coalfield conflict: working miners at two demonstrations reject the Scargill line. Right, Notts miner Les Carter, his window broken by strikers

June saw a great increase in the scale and scope of the violence in the miners' dispute. Near-riot conditions at Orgreave; at least 80 injured, 94 arrests. NCB employees in Doncaster attacked by a mob of nearly 1,000; policemen thrown to the ground and kicked; a 15-year-old threatened with rape; 16 arrests, 36 injured. Elsewhere, miners wanting to go to work have been beaten up by NUM militants. A lorry driver has brain damage caused by a brick thrown through his windscreen.

In 1975, Arthur Scargill gave an interview to the *New Left Review*, reprinted in *The Times* last week. His tactics in this strike confirm that his calculation has not changed. Sufficient, predominantly young, disaffected workers, by no means all miners, are to be forged into a large enough street army to so destabilize the nation that Britain will be cowed into submission to his political will. Step by step, year by year, until there is no need for him to engineer a formal revolution.

There can be only one outcome to this dispute: defeat for Scargill. No sane government could possibly countenance a settlement that was seen in any way to reward this kind of premeditated, Marxist-inspired mob violence.

Scargill will be defeated. But what of the miners themselves, most of whom epitomise the best of British working-class virtues? They are loyal, hard-working, courageous, open-faced, principled. What effect will the strike have on their working relationships? Miners, more than most other workers, depend on one another for their safety. Trust is at a premium.

The big set-piece confrontations with the police are only part of the Scargill operation. In several villages last week - particularly, but not exclusively, in north Nottinghamshire - working miners were under virtual siege. They spoke of contin-

ual threats and acts of physical violence, not just against the men; many miners were refusing to work nightshifts for fear that violence would be done to their wives and children at home.

Windows were smashed, doors were boarded up. In one barricaded household a woman, clearly on the verge of a nervous breakdown, explained that her husband, an assistant safety officer, a member of Cosa, not the NUM, was working because his union was not on strike. Her son, by a previous marriage, was on strike. They had received consistent threats. Their windows had been smashed. They were shunned by their friends. Their world was in ruins.

Elsewhere, in a small tin hut beside the entrance to a colliery, a group of union officials: one was paying pickets by cheque. Less than £2 a day. I asked him and his colleagues what would happen after it was all over. Two of them raised their clenched fists. "There will be a great sorting out," one said. "You can't prevent accidents down the pit," said the other.

And it is not just the working miners who are suffering. Those on strike but who do not picket are sitting unhappily at home, running out of hope and of money. The record of attendances at GPs' surgeries in mining areas has increased significantly. Many complain of nervous problems. The money lenders are prospering.

Even the pickets are disheartened. The local men standing outside their collieries no longer believe they can win. There is much bravado. But many pickets agreed that they would leave the industry with alacrity if they could find another job: eloquent testimony to fundamental pessimism. No picket was in the least convincing in his protestations of expected victory. They know that Scargill has not had a single "result"

since he became president. Most now have no idea what would constitute victory.

And the pickets see the change in the attitude of the police. Police morale has increased greatly since the spring. Then they were grimly determined but somehow shell-shocked. They knew they had to win. They weren't quite sure that they would. Orgreave was their biggest challenge and their greatest victory. Now they have confidence that they can and will keep order for as long as needs be. Their senior officers, despite the obvious temptation to be *macho* in the face of such unprecedented attacks on their men, refer instead to the terrible social damage that is being inflicted on close-knit mining communities.

The NUM is the only organization that can bring peace and discipline to the coalfields after the strike so that miners who have been at each other's throats can regain confidence in one another. The aim of the NCB and the Government must therefore be to do everything they can to help the vast majority of decent, law-abiding, wanting-to-work miners to rescue their union from the man who has hijacked it and bullied them into striking.

The oft-repeated NUM propaganda that by going on strike the majority have effectively voted for a strike is simply untrue. Of the counties that have been allowed to ballot their members during this dispute the following voted *against* a strike: Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, North Derby, South Derby, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Lancashire, North Wales, Cumbria. Only one voted in favour: Northumberland.

Miners in Nottinghamshire are already rejecting the leadership of their union. In the past few weeks, as they have come up for re-election, 34 officials who are on strike have been thrown out and been replaced

by non-strikers. Even more committee members have suffered the same fate. Out of the 31 delegates on the Nottingham Area Council of the NUM, only three are active supporters of the strike. That is why the NUM leadership is threatening to set up a "star-chamber" disciplinary committee at its national conference next week.

Miners who go to work should be rewarded, even if they cannot be persuaded to abandon their overtime ban. The NCB should pay the increase that they have already offered to those miners who are working in fields where, say, 80 per cent of the men are at work. They should bring new and generous redundancy terms into operation. In most pits where most men are working, the majority of those still on strike are the men who have the highest record of absenteeism. Pay them off.

So far, legal action against secondary picketing has not been taken, presumably for fear of alienating the Nottinghamshire miners. All the pickets and all the working miners I spoke to last week were agreed on one thing: nothing now would persuade the Nottingham men to stop working. Not even a national ballot majority in favour of a strike, if it could be obtained.

The Government should insist that British Steel, and any other state industry that is affected by actionable secondary picketing, uses the courts to obtain redress. There is absolutely no reason why the NUM should escape the legal consequences of its actions. The sooner it is attacked financially the quicker the non-militant majority will be encouraged to take steps to recover their union from its Marxist president whose vision of the future bears no relation whatsoever to their own.

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The Times (London, England), Friday, Jul 06, 1984; pg. 16; Issue 61876. (1213 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS268799718