

tending the Voting Rights Act in 1982, its attempts to lessen the protection against sex discrimination in education under Title IX and the removal of some remedies for victims of job discrimination. Until the majority of Americans are ready to take up the unfinished business of providing equality of opportunity in this society, the commission is unlikely to contribute to any further progress in civil rights. □

■ THATCHER'S 'ENEMY WITHIN'

British Miners Are Hanging Tough

JANE DIBBLIN

London

In March the strike by 120,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers (N.U.M.) will be one year old. Unlike the last strike, in 1974—when there were massive power cuts, when British children were sent home from school, factories worked a three-day week and people ate by candlelight—the general public has so far experienced only minor inconveniences. That is because the Conservative Party, which began planning for a showdown with the miners even before it gained power in 1979, had accumulated large stockpiles of coal. (The Ridley Report, drafted by a Tory policy group and quoted in *The Economist* in 1978, indicates that the government had been planning for this confrontation for years.) There have been a number of brief outages, but the National Coal Board attributes those to “technical hitches.” By burning oil reserves and rushing nuclear power plants into operation, the government has managed to avoid major power failures.

The brunt of the suffering has been borne by the strikers themselves. They and their families are surviving on tiny welfare payments (a mere £6.50 a week, or \$7.60, for each child). Yet despite economic privation and police brutality, their support for the strike remains strong.

Most U.S. press coverage of the strike has failed to explain the issues involved. The strike was triggered by the closing of five pits. Miners felt that action ran counter to an agreement titled “Plan for Coal,” intended to increase production in the mines. Although the plan was drawn up by the N.U.M. and the Labor government in 1974, it was ratified by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher when she took office. Last year, the board ordered the pits to shut down, saying they were “uneconomic,” that is, unprofitable.

But there is much more at stake for both sides than the continued operation of five mines. For the Tories, the closings are part of a strategy to denationalize basic industries. Ultimately they would like to sell all the pits to private investors, as they plan to do with other government-owned concerns. Last year, for example, British Telecom was put on the block.

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The Tories would also like to utilize oil and nuclear energy to a greater extent in generating electricity. Powerful multinationals like Shell Oil and British Petroleum have been lobbying strenuously for a switch to oil, even though it costs one-third more than coal. As for nuclear power, Thatcher favors it because with its development, Britain would be able to produce its own nuclear weapons. Also, the traditionally militant miners would lose their decisive hold on the nation's energy supply. The government would be dealing with white-collar employees at nuclear power plants, and Thatcher could break a strike—in the unlikely event that one should occur—by declaring a national emergency on the ground that the industry was vital to defense.

Perhaps most important, the government wants to bring the miners' union to its knees. Thatcher boasts that she once beat the “enemy without,” the Argentines in the Falklands war; now she has her sights set on the “enemy within,” as she calls the miners, who in the past have humiliated other Tory leaders, including Thatcher's present adversary, Edward Heath, whose government fell because of the 1974 strike. Breaking the miners would set an example to other unions and enhance her image as a strong leader who is disciplining the British for their own good.

The miners are equally determined. Many pits are located in areas with unemployment rates of more than 20 percent. Some of those communities have been hard hit recently by steel plant shutdowns. In Barnsley, Yorkshire, a quarter of the jobs are in mining and many others are dependent on the industry.

The miners' union contends that the coal board's reason for closing so-called uneconomic pits is specious. Because the bulk of British coal is sold to the government-controlled Central Electricity Generating Board (C.E.G.B.), they say, market considerations do not apply. And Oxford University economist Andrew Glynn has published a report demonstrating that the mines' apparent lack of profitability is a result of clever accounting by the coal board.

Britain's coal production has been declining for years. Between 1954 and 1978, it was cut nearly in half because of competition from imported oil, which was cheaper until the 1973 oil shock. The “Plan for Coal” aimed to increase production to reduce Britain's reliance on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Then in September 1983, Ian MacGregor, former head of British Steel, was made chair of the coal board. MacGregor, who had halved the steel industry work force, set about “rationalizing” the coal industry in a similar fashion, laying off workers at the rate of 450 a week and ordering the five pits to close. The miners concluded that their survival was at stake and resorted to their only weapon, the strike.

The British media has portrayed the mineworkers' union as a one-man show, suggesting that fiery, outspoken president Arthur Scargill has forced a reluctant rank and file to strike. Although Scargill is indeed powerful, the strike was sparked by local walkouts in traditionally radical strongholds in Yorkshire and Scotland. Moreover, it began in March rather than in the winter, when it would have had the

maximum impact, as a wily leader like Scargill is well aware.

That the majority of union members support their chief is borne out by opinion polls. After the strike had gone on for six months, three different polling agencies, including one commissioned by the rabidly right-wing *Sunday Express*, found that between 61 and 68 percent of the miners favored staying out.

One reason they have been able to hold on for so long is that they have tapped new sources of strength and solidarity. This will go down in history as the women's strike. In the United States, workingmen's wives formed effective auxiliaries during the great automobile strikes of the 1930s, but no such tradition exists in Britain. Last March, however, the miners' wives opened soup kitchens. Then they began raising funds and "twinning" with local branches of the Labor Party and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which provide financial aid and encouragement. As the women gained confidence, they joined the picket lines and addressed rallies around the country and abroad.

The miners appreciate what the women have done. Oller-ton union organizer Jimmy Hood told a miners' meeting that women have been the backbone of the strike. "When I visited a women's support group to boost their morale, I came away with my own morale boosted," he said. "They're even stronger than us lads." But everyone on the platform with him was a man. And at another meeting, when women challenged a decision by the picket managers, one man exploded, "Who's running this bloody industrial action, the miners or the women?"

The important thing for the miners' wives is that for the first time they are working together. They now express their views publicly and have gained confidence in their abilities as organizers. The question is whether this political activism has affected the women's perceptions of themselves and of their power to influence events. Many of them say that the strike has changed their relationships with their husbands and families.

A cooperative relationship has developed between the mining women and the women at the Greenham Common peace encampment [see Sally Belfrage, "Down Among the 'Wimmin,'" *The Nation*, June 30, 1984]. The Greenham women have donated food and money to the mining women's organizations. Last summer, some children from Welsh mining villages vacationed with the families of a Greenham support group in London, and the Welsh parents have extended a reciprocal invitation to the London youngsters.

In addition, minority organizations have offered their support. The Camden Black Workers raised money and sent delegations to the pit villages. A Turkish group from North London brought shish kebab. Most mines are located in largely white areas, and although many families living there are deeply class conscious because of their own histories, they have had little exposure to people of other races. The black delegations' visits have shown them that workers of all backgrounds have common interests.

That awareness has been intensified by the miners' introduction to police brutality. Previously, such treatment

was reserved for black people in Britain and Catholics in Northern Ireland. As of mid-January, there had been 9,114 arrests. The government has charged miners with breach of the peace, obstruction and more serious offenses like criminal damage and intimidation. Some of those arrests resulted from clashes between pickets and the police, but a large proportion occurred while striking miners were going about their everyday business or while they were traveling to other pit villages to picket. The purpose of the arrests is to discourage picketing. Miners who have been arrested and released and who show up at another strike site violate the conditions of their bail and could be arrested again.

The brutality of the police has come as a shock to many miners. In Grimethorpe, Yorkshire, townspeople were so angered by wholesale arrests by police in riot gear (even children had been handcuffed) that 200 of them attacked the local police station. On August 20, twelve writs were issued against two chief constables of other towns for various acts of brutality; one of them had handcuffed a 70-year-old retired miner so tightly that the man's hands had sweated blood.

Striking miners convicted on criminal charges receive a letter of dismissal from the coal board. Yet despite the longest and largest-scale police operation in British history,³ neither the government nor the coal board has invoked the draconian Tory employment laws, which forbid secondary picketing. The enforcement of those laws could shock the rest of the labor movement out of its apathy, something that applying the criminal code has failed to do.

As it is, other unions and the Labor Party have not provided the miners with the support that they expected—and that might have enabled them to win by now. Politicians and union chiefs utter fine words at national conferences,



but no action results. Some members of the rail unions have refused to handle coal, oil or iron ore; there were two nationwide sympathy strikes by dock workers and a short-lived threat to strike from mine safety inspectors. But that has been it. The Thatcher years have taken their toll on union solidarity, what with right-wing leaderships and a rank and file fearful of losing their jobs.

The strike has exacerbated splits in the Labor Party, both in Parliament and in the local branches. It highlights the differences between those who think the party should be courting moderate voters (who get their information about the strike from the largely hostile press) and those who want it to be militant and maintain strong links to the unions.

The N.U.M. has also been damaged by its own mistakes. Scargill's consistent refusal to legitimize the strike with a national referendum has been criticized not only by the media but by the left as well. And a union official's foolish trip to Libya to meet with Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi severely dented morale. Mining families have made huge material and emotional sacrifices to continue the strike, and as a result, communities and families are bitterly divided. In December, the coal board, which has consistently exploited the miners' poverty, took out full-page advertisements promising Christmas bonuses and tax-free earnings for miners who returned to work. Reportedly, several thousand miners took up the offer, but the coal board and the union make such conflicting claims of the number involved that it is impossible to know which is right.

The fact that they made it through the Christmas season has instilled hope in the miners, but the strike seems to have settled into a long war of attrition. The stakes on both sides remain high. Many people in Britain see the strike as an important test of the left's ability to resist Tory attacks on trade unions. A defeat for the miners would be a significant

spiritual as well as political blow. The miners are facing a government that views the \$123 million a week the strike costs in additional oil purchases, lost industrial productivity and police overtime as a worthwhile political investment. It seems that investment may pay off. □

■ DARPA'S BILLION-DOLLAR BET

Are 'Intelligent Weapons' Feasible?

PAUL N. EDWARDS

If the dreams of high-tech defense planners come true, future U.S. weapons will be able to see, talk and reason. Perfecting computerized artificial intelligences capable of guiding unmanned vehicles, understanding spoken English and planning battle strategy is the goal of the five-year, \$600 million Strategic Computing Initiative (S.C.I.) announced by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in October 1983. The initiative is by far the largest and most ambitious coordinated artificial intelligence project in U.S. history. In all the world, only the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry's ten-year \$850 million effort to develop such "fifth-generation" computers exceeds it. And if the first phase is a success, DARPA may pour an additional \$400 million into university and industry research on strategic computing for five more years, between 1988 and 1993.

DARPA is no stranger to the field of computer science. Although explosive growth in the computer industry has been widely touted as a shining example of the virtues of private enterprise, DARPA money has backed a major proportion of advanced research since the agency was created, in 1958. Until recently, however, DARPA funded mainly basic research. Not until the Strategic Computing Initiative was unveiled by the weapons-minded Reagan Administration did the agency begin seeking computer technologies with specifically military applications.

The S.C.I. research is supposed to develop a high-tech weapon for each branch of the armed services. DARPA has promised the Army a robotic land vehicle able to navigate unfamiliar terrain and identify objects while traveling at sixty kilometers an hour. Such a machine might make reconnaissance missions or transport supplies without any human involvement. Suitably armed, it could function as a tank.

For the Air Force, DARPA plans to develop an intelligent "associate," a sort of electronic co-pilot. The system, which could be "trained" to serve an individual pilot's needs, would perform routine flight chores, monitor the plane's

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