

and file were fully convinced of the necessity to take this on, we could then call a national ballot. Wrong, although a special conference was convened in Sheffield, and a rule change had gone through conference to change the rule requirement for national action from 55% to 51%. The members now on strike could see no need for any ballots. They thought we in the leadership of the union were trying to sell them out, were looking for an excuse to call off the strike. So they instructed their delegates at pit after pit to vote against a national ballot and to continue the strike to victory. It was an entirely understandable reaction, but in retrospect a mistaken one. A national ballot at this stage of the struggle, with emotions running high and the bulk of the collieries at a standstill would without any doubt whatever have won a massive strike mandate. Of course this wouldn't have stopped the hardened scabs going in, nor stopped the reactionary forces operating in Nottingham trying to break the union and the strike, but it would have robbed them of their legitimacy, and taken some of the edge off the excuses put forward by other unions showing only lukewarm support or outright scabbing.

For a time, the pickets spreading out in brilliant manoeuvres from coalfield to coalfield and pit to pit, rolled all in front of them, the sheer buoyancy of confidence of the pickets won over by far and away the bulk of doubters in coalfield after coalfield. Even in Nottingham where only a minority, perhaps a third of miners actually actively supported the strike, men refused to cross picket lines and were, if not happy to go home, at least went home without too much fuss. Solidarity started to come through strongly on the railways, and among the seafarers. Some power stations started to realise that our jobs were literally their jobs too and took blacking actions. Thatcher's reaction was the drafting of a de-facto national police force, which would be given its head to do anything it had to do to stop the pickets getting through, and to break up picket lines. The police were signed up as the NCB's own security firm to ensure scabs got to work on time and in one piece regardless of numbers and costs. Roadblocks and

curfews were imposed and the striking villages were saturated with an occupying police force. Government strategies were then based around getting at least one scab into every pit in Britain. In Yorkshire, this would be the major diversion, along with the Orgreave steel coking plant. These police second fronts would stop the pickets in Nottingham and allow the scabs to work and coal to be produced. The bitterness of escalating violence and counter-violence is now legendary, but what it did was open up political ideas on class violence, on counter violence, and the justification for armed struggles. The IRA, for example, only lost sympathy during the strike when they failed to kill Thatcher and her cabinet. The scab herding taxi driver's death in Wales was seen and justified almost everywhere as a legitimate action which had simply gone wrong, a casualty in a war which had already claimed two of our pickets without any such fuss in the press. The hypocrisy over Libyan financial assistance for the strikers, when Thatcher was pouring extra oil in from every despotic country in the world, all were educations in the real class divide in world events.

Across the world, working people mobilised in solidarity with the British miners and their families. The scale of the operation is breathless, Tens of millions of pounds were raised and distributed through rank and file networks of women, and local support groups. Families fed, clothed and cared for 12 bitter months of struggle. Sympathetic councils suspended rents, kept school canteens open during holiday months, and did what they could, whilst on the other side the DSS stopped benefits and found ways to force real poverty on people's welfare entitlements regardless of age. The nature of this state started to be revealed in very real terms, and that wiped some mist from the eyes of many about places like Ireland, and what was going on there, the struggle of black people down in London and other places. Social roles were starting to be challenged. Women not only 'manned' soup kitchens and the welfare



Several policemen pile on top of a picket

infrastructure but argued among themselves about strategy, pickets, slogans, marriage and kids and ideas in general. Would groups be 'ladies' or 'wives' or 'women'? Sexual stereotyping, attitudes to gays, religious groups, everything which had been taken for granted was now no longer taken for granted.

Victory was within grasp, we could feel it and taste it. Thatcher and MacGreggor have both admitted as much. If the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfired union (NACODS) had implemented either of its mass pro-strike mandates, if the dockers had continued their blacking actions just days longer, if the TUC had implemented its national conference decisions, we would have won hands down.

Just think of what that victory would have meant in political terms, in class terms in social terms, coming at the end of such a polarisation of class forces and determined action on both sides. Twice in ten years an industrial union based on a community would have smashed a government policy and almost certainly would have smashed the Thatcher government too. Think of the consequences of that. The other side, not just the Tories and their establishment, but the whole parliamentary circus, of Labour and Liberal trembled. That we didn't succeed was a consequence of conscious traitors in the trade union leadership, particularly in power stations, and steel works and among NACODS who saw and chose a side, consciously joining in to ensure the defeat of the miners. But it was also action by those individual workers who could not see the consequences, refused to see anything but their own selfish greed, which derailed us. At the end of the day, the dockers at Immingham, who allowed non union non dockers to load coal onto scab lorries, and in the process smashed their own dock labour scheme, and most of their jobs nation-wide. The power station workers who scabbed every day, and ultimately saw two thirds of their own jobs go with the closure of the coal fired stations. The coking coal plants like Orgreave that worked on through the cavalry charges

and pitched battles at their gates. The blackleg miners in Nottingham and Leicester, thrown on the scrap heap and their own pits closed and communities decimated. The armies of female office workers, whose wages and conditions came from being part of the white collar section of the NUM. Whose allegiances and inflated self opinion however kept them working right through the strike, collecting money and donating flowers to the nice policemen only to discover if you don't need coal mines, you don't need coal mine HQs and blocks of offices, and finally joined the miners... on the dole queue. The scabbing steel workers in Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire, all closed down and dead and buried. Scab mercenary lorry drivers spreading strike breaking, from the miners, through the dockers, and the print workers, through animal activists, through nuclear campaigners and presiding over destruction of social communities and solidarity and compassion.

Certainly it was a fight we had no choice but to undertake, a battle the working class will never forget, and one we certainly didn't deserve to lose, for these ordinary folk, not trained soldiers or wild eyed zealots, had laid everything flesh and blood and even life could offer on the line. They had no more to give. Visit the former pit communities today and you will still see the results of that defeat, although come to think of it, visit almost any workplace in Britain and you will see it too. We must never forget who were our friends and who were our enemies in that war, nor the need to start seriously looking for the means of taking our revenge. Yes we will cheer when Thatcher kicks the bucket, but it's the whole stinking system she fought for and defended which needs to go to the grave with her. That would be a lasting legacy for the pit communities of 84/85.

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First published in *Black Flag*. Lightly edited by libcom for typos, grammar and some clarifying information such as full names and acronyms. [www.libcom.org](http://www.libcom.org)



Miners and police clash near the coking plant while police on the right dance the conga