

COAL NOT DOLE!

What's the position at this pit?

We reckon there are about 130 production workers in regularly. This would mean about 1 500 to 2 000 per week is being produced, compared to a normal production of about 15 000 to 20 000 tons. Yet all the newspapers say we're working normally!

The newspapers also say there is a drift back to work. What is the position?

One or two have gone back. But these are single men who have nothing to live on at all and are being thrown out of their homes because they can't pay the rent. For most of us the first six weeks were the worst. After that you learn to manage, you get used to it. We can go on now for a year or more without getting bothered. It's a way of life

What support are you getting locally?

A lot of support from other union branches and from Labour Party branches, and from the Labour Council in this area. Most families are getting food parcels of basic necessities worth about R12 per week, and the women's committee has organised a soup kitchen which provides dinner everyday to those who need it. This is all organised by the local strike committee. They liaise with the region and the National NUM offices (National Union of Mineworkers).

What motivates scabs? (The scabs are miners who are ignoring NUM's call for a strike and who are still working)

It's hard to say. They appear to have no brains at all. They won't look you in the eye if you try to talk to them and if you persist, they call the police - who are everywhere - and we get hammered for 'intimidation'. They do it for the money too: they're getting around R400 a week for not very much work. A lot of them live in the village and are now trying to sell their houses and move to different areas because the atmosphere is bad. But they're stupid - when the strike's over they'll be down the pit with those of us who were on strike, and they'll have to talk to us there. There'll be no policemen down the pit, you know.

There have been reports of scabs taunting strikers by waving money at them, ten and twenty pound notes, as they drive through the picket lines on pay day.

There was plenty of that earlier on. The police were doing it too. But the police are not as happy as they used to be either. At the beginning they were boasting about all the money they were making with the overtime and they away-from-home pay. Some of them were getting R1 000 a week. They were talking about holidays in exotic places. But with the strike going on so long and no end in sight, there are other problems. They are getting fed up with being away from home all the time; their wives are complaining; and what's the use of all that money if you don't get the chance to spend it?

What has been the attitude of the police to the strikers?

At the beginning of the strike we

An exclusive interview with a British miner

TO: ARTHUR SCARGILL, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS.

FROM: JOE FOSTER, GENERAL SECRETARY, FEDERATION OF SA TRADE UNIONS.

THE FEDERATION OF SA TRADE UNIONS FULLY SUPPORTS THE NUM IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST PIT CLOSURES. WITH THE FORMATION OF A WIDER FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS NEXT YEAR, WE HOPE IN FUTURE TO BE ABLE TO OFFER YOU MORE CONCRETE SUPPORT. THE FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO WORK IS PARTICULARLY UNDERSTOOD BY SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS AND SUPPORTED BY OUR FEDERATION. WE BELIEVE THAT YOUR VICTORY WILL BE A MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN THE WORLDWIDE WORKER STRUGGLE FOR JOB SECURITY AND FOR A RATIONAL SOCIETY. AMANDLA!

used to talk to the police. Now we don't. They are from different areas of the country and are housed in barracks while here. The worst of the lot are from the big cities like London and Manchester. This sort enjoy being bullies. They even tore holes in our canvas picket shelter and knocked the support down, late at night when they thought no-one was watching. For them it's all just a big laugh.

What about your legal right to picket?

That's a joke. Look there's no law which says there may be only six people on the picket line. That is only a police recommendation. But the police won't allow any more than six. If anyone comes to talk to us while we are on the picket line - so making up seven - the police stop them. 'Too many pickets,' they say.

What if you ignore the instructions on the ground that they are not legal?

You get lifted (arrested). They pick you up bodily and dump you in the van. You're kept overnight in the police cells and then charged with any offence the police like to think up. If we stand in front of the gates on picket duty, we are arrested for 'obstruction'. If we shout 'Scab!' at the scabs, we get arrested for 'intimidating behavior'. There are miners here, men in their 40's and 50's, who have never been in trouble with the police before, who suddenly find themselves arrested four or five times in as many weeks.

What is the attitude of the courts to such trumped-up charges?

You get released on bail on the

condition that you don't picket. The court case is set down for four months later. So there's no way you can challenge the illegality until four months have gone past. This means that the police can do what they like, and they do. But it's not just the illegality of it. It is also the violence. When we go to demonstrations or mass pickets in other part of the country, we often find we are not allowed to get off the motorway, and are forced to turn around and go home. When we do get to demonstrations we have to be quick about getting away at the end. As soon as most of the men have gone home and the police feel they are in a clear majority, they start beating up those who are last to leave. There's been all this stuff in the newspapers about 'injuries to policemen', but it's them that started the violence. From what we've seen, the most likely injuries are bruised toes and cracked knuckles - the results of kicking and thumping miners.

Here in Coventry, the local police have been at it too. Down at the pit village, the local police raided a party last weekend at the home of one of the strike committee. They got told to piss off and get off private property. So they went and got reinforcements and waited outside till the end of the party. As the people came out, they were grabbed one by one on their way home and beaten up. One bloke had his neck broken through having his head hammered against a car bonnet. After they had finished their dirty work outside, they went back to the strike committee bloke's house, bust in, pulled him out of bed and beat the hell out of him. And they say this isn't a police state!

There are reports that the army will be used to open ports if the dock strike continues.

AS Britain's coal reserves begin to dwindle, the strike by hundreds of thousands of coal miners has begun to swing in their favour and victory could be on the horizon. The National Coal Board is getting desperate and has begun a campaign to try and get the miners to return to work by sending letters to their individual homes. But the miners are not budging. Under the slogan 'Coal not Dole' (dole is the money paid by the government to the unemployed), the miners are fighting plans to shut 20 mines and axe over 20 000 jobs. Bitter battles are still being fought between pickets and the police and over 5 000 miners have been arrested. FOSATU Worker News spoke to one of the miners on a picket line outside a mine in Coventry.



British coal strike enters fifth month

Well, the army have been in the coal strike from the beginning, so if they come in at the docks at least the public will see what is going on! There are all sorts of stories going round about miners seeing their sons - who they thought were away in the army - appearing in police uniform on picket lines. We have seen 'police' on duty here who have no numbers on their uniforms. One 'policeman' here had one number one day and another number the next day! But at the mass pickets you can see who the soldiers are: they're smaller than the minimum height allowable for a policeman, and they're often just kids too.

What is the feeling about the strike among the miners here at this pit, especially among those who are not picketing?

We have a rota here for picket duty. About 100 do four-hour shifts. A lot of blokes you never see - they stay at home and do odd jobs. Every few weeks we have a mass meeting organised by the local strike committee. Last time 300 to 400 came. We are solid here. We're not going back till we've won. This strike has to get a settlement that lasts for the next ten years, so now we're out we'll stay out till we get what we want. If it takes another year, so be it. And while we're out we'll settle the wage dispute too, and we won't go back to work while the scabs are still employed here.

What will they do with the scabs?

They will probably move them so as to concentrate them in particular pits. But lots of scabs will resign after the strike.

What is the effect of the media propaganda on the strikers. The talk of huge reserves of coal, the promises made by the coal board that there will be no compulsory redundancies?

They think we're stupid but we are not. We have seen the actual report of the coal board where they talk about massive closures and redundancies. We know they are lying in the newspapers. We reckon the coal will run out in September or October. We'll want to make sure that none gets imported from places like South Africa, or Poland.

What is the attitude of the lorry drivers who bring supplies to this pit? How do they justify crossing the picket?

Well, we don't get a chance to talk to them, the police stop that. But sometimes they do stop when they come the first time. Then they say they'd lose their job if they turned back, or they've got to pay off debts and cannot refuse any work. They often say they support us, but then drive right past us into the yard! There are some that are only delivering toilet rolls. You would think they'd say 'Sod it' and forget this delivery, but no, they come in too!