

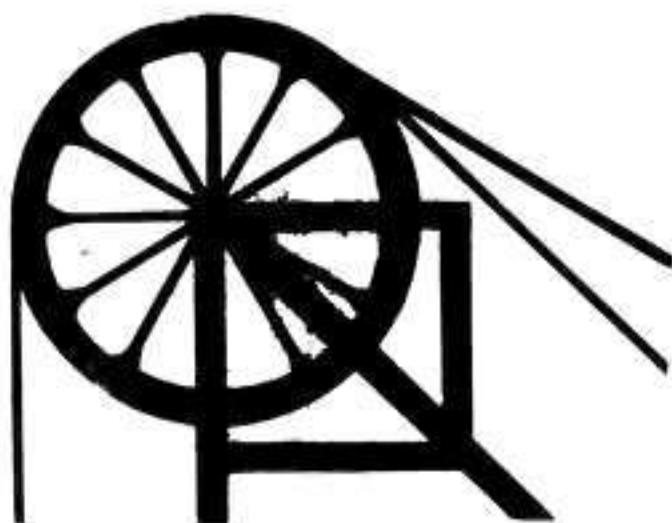
- Brazil -

Neves, also chosen by the college, died before he was ever sworn in. Sarney and other bourgeois political figures have been stalling on the question of when direct elections for a new president would be held.)

In late April, PT leader Lula called for setting a date for direct elections and full trade union rights, including the right to strike. On May 6, while introducing a one-hour PT programme on a national television and radio network, Lula declared, "We are struggling for a direct balloting system for the election of mayors in the capitals. We are struggling for the convocation of a national constituent assembly." The PT's main concern, he said, centred on social questions: "We are being hit by unemployment and land and housing shortages." The PT, he said, has proposals "on new labour laws, on labour union freedoms and on the right to strike. Without these things, Brazil will not be a democratic country."

(Sao Paulo correspondent, June 1985)

British Miners - A Reply



The miners' strike is over, but its analysts rumble on. And so they should, for it is only by analysing the strike that the appropriate lessons can be drawn from the dispute. Yet in looking at the strike it is important not to mythologise what

took place. Although the strike had the backing of almost all sections of the British labour and trade union movement, this emotional support was not translated into real support. In trying to find out why this was the case we should not try to fool ourselves or others, as Jeremy Krikler attempts to do.

For in his article he concludes that "the conservative bureaucracies of many unions, of the TUC and the Labour Party must bear a great portion of the blame for the miners defeat." This analysis is itself a version of the ritual denunciation that is peddled by the British ultra-left at the end of every

unsuccessful industrial dispute. The normal version goes something like this. The working class are in a militant, pre-revolutionary frame of mind (there is always some apparently good reason for assuming this) and is champing at the bit, only waiting for a lead from the leadership of the labour movement before they leap forward and devour capitalism. Sadly the leadership, either because of its inherently conservative nature, or because it has sold out, is unwilling to give the lead. And so the struggle is not escalated to its natural conclusion (the general strike and the overthrow of capitalism), and ends in defeat and confusion.

This version of events is particularly attractive, since it allows one to continue to assert that the working class is in a militant, pre-revolutionary phase, only waiting...no matter how many defeats it has suffered, or how many reverses it has sustained. No time is ever spent actually analysing what workers actually think or want (since they are by definition revolutionary) and no thought is wasted as to why they continue to be so foolish as to elect a leadership that is bent on betrayal.

After Scargill took what Krikler rightly calls an uncompromising position, and continued to call for escalation, the ultra-left had to seek another scapegoat. So they turned on the leadership of the rest of the labour movement. The problem with this position is that it ignored (and apparently continues to ignore) a number of pertinent facts. For it is far from clear that "the brilliance of the NUM's initial strategy developed it becomes clear that the decision not to hold a national strike ballot was the Achilles heel of the entire dispute.

In saying this one has to remember that the NUM is a federation. Each area is more or less an autonomous unit, with its own history, tradition and elected officials. It is an autonomy that is jealously guarded by every area.

Only by holding a national ballot can the union feel assured that local level decisions will be overturned in favour of a national consensus. So although Yorkshire may have voted for a strike in its area, Nottinghamshire had voted (again on an area basis) not to join the strike. And just as the Yorkshire miners were stubborn in defending their decision, so the

- debate -

Nottinghamshire miners backed their position. So when the Yorkshire miners arrived outside the Nottinghamshire pits, and put pickets across their gates, it was a direct challenge to the autonomy of the area, and the democratic process within Nottinghamshire area NUM. The result was a split in the union, with each side feeling that it was the aggrieved party. The situation then escalated with larger and larger pickets attempting to stop the Nottinghamshire miners from getting to work. So far from being "brilliant", the strategy split the union.

With an increasingly bitter split within the NUM it is hardly surprising that the rest of the labour movement was less than enthusiastic to be drawn into the dispute. Even when the union leaders called for support for the strike they were on the whole unable to convince their members that they should do more than pass resolutions or give money to those miners out on strike. Support was therefore fatally flawed. Calls from union leaders were repeatedly ignored, with some notable exceptions, such as the railwaymen. It was the refusal of the truck drivers to heed the call from the leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union, not to take coal into the power stations, that broke the stranglehold on the power supplies that industry depended on. Without this rank and file support the strike, although heroic, was doomed.

It is this reality that the ultra-left refuse to face. Instead they invent traitors. The Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock is singled out for particularly venomous attacks. Krikler argues that Kinnock opposed the strike from its inception and left the miners politically isolated. This is simply not true. Kinnock used every opportunity to argue the case for coal, and did his best to oppose the government in its attempt to use the full might of the state against the miners. He did, it is true, condemn the use of violence against working miners, but anyone who thinks that violence is a good substitute for argument and debate knows little of the long tradition of democratic decision-making in the British labour movement. It is this tradition that is the only sound foundation upon which the labour movement can rebuild itself, after what has been a shattering defeat.

(Mike Hale, London, June 1985)