

# **A Socialist ACTION**

**Socialist Woman Supplement**

10p

# **WANTED**



**FOR  
BETRAYAL OF HER SEX  
ON BEHALF OF HER CLASS**



**'women against pit closures'  
national demonstration ~ 11th august 1984**

# When this strike is over can I have my wife back



...the full significance of it was not in Scots miners' leader, Mick McGahey recently said that if women had been involved in 1926 the way they are today, then the general strike would have been won. He could well be right. But the most important thing is for the NUM not to forget what it has learned over the last months, so

...the lives of the miners' wives. In a round table discussion VALERIE COULTAS discusses many aspects of the mobilisation of women with miners' wives from South Wales. We also reprint evidence of the particularly degrading way in which the police have treated miners' wives on the picket lines in an attempt to frighten them back to the kitchen sinks.

'Please Mr Chair, when this strike is over can I have my wife back? Not this one, the one I had before'. (quoted by Bea Campbell in *New Statesman*)

**MARY DAVIES** is a member of Penrhwi-ceiber Women's support group. **HAZEL JONES** is a member of Mountain Ash Women against Pit closures group. **STEVIE JACKSON** is the Women's Officer for Cardiff Central Labour Party and **VERA McELHONE** is Women's Officer for Cardiff West Labour Party. **Stevi and Vera** are also members of Cardiff Women Against Pit Closures.

**Why do you think women have played such an important role in this strike, compared say to the 1972/74 strikes?**

**Mary:** Well in 1972 my generation had never known another strike. We'd heard all about 1926 of course but 1972 was my first experience of a national strike. I was involved in the strike only to the extent of writing a letter to the newspaper and going on the demonstration in Cardiff. The men went picketing but not on the vast scale of today. But women didn't go.

**Can you say more about why you think women are coming forward so confidently in this strike? Many of the miners wives I've met are not simply wives. They're workers themselves. Do you think this has effected their self-confidence?**

**Mary:** Yes. More women work today in the mining communities than ever before. They've got used to being in-

dependent. A lot have got part-time jobs mainly in factories or as school cleaners, working in the bakery or in the hospitals. We supported our husbands last time just as much as now but we didn't have as much freedom. I think women feel stronger minded today. Like the Greenham Common women who've shown that women can do things that men can do and even some that men perhaps can't... like survive all that hardship at the camp and still be there...

**Hazel:** Yes women have shown a lead in every battle.

**You seem to have made strong links here with Cardiff Women for Life on Earth.**

**Mary:** Yes they came to the first regional meeting and explained about the links between coal and nuclear weapons. For every mine that closes you'll have a nuclear power plant opening. Pits would be used to store nuclear waste rather than producing coal.

It was at this meeting that we made the decision to have a women's picket. Women can often be more effective in taking action. They tend to use their brains rather than their brawn. The whole point of us going to Port Talbot was to draw attention away from the men and let them picket.

It's amazing how the police will follow women whatever they do. We all got together and started to walk down the motorway. The police started marching alongside of us. They didn't know what to do and one policeman told me it takes five officers to handle one woman. After a while we decided to turn back and to cross the road to walk on the other side of the motorway. By then the convoys had come roaring out. They're real cowboys these firms. The lorries have their number plates changed and their tyres are bald.

**Vera:** We sat down at the beginning of

this picket. We held them up for an hour and a half. There were 28 arrests, seven women and 21 men.

In some ways this action was good and in some ways it wasn't. The women were just picked up and left at the side of the road but when the miners sat down they were immediately arrested. I'm not surprised at that. I think the actions women have taken at Greenham have been very effective but you can't mechanically apply the same tactics to the picket line where the class conflict is so sharp between miners and police.

**Mary:** I don't think these tactics work with men. They can't afford to be arrested in these numbers.

**Hazel:** Women are used to keeping their tempers and men are not.

**Vera:** You can sit down when there's not much traffic but in front of those lorries...

**Stevi:** I think it's quite hard to unravel all the different things. Greenham women have been arrested in blocks. There's been a lot of brutality. But I think you're right that a picket line is a different ball game. You've got to have thousands to stop the lorries. The police were being far more brutal to the men than the women.

The Greenham women went relaxed. The men stiffened instinctively and the police picked the men up differently with their hands twisted behind their backs.

**Hazel:** That comes back to the imagery of the miners. I just can't see miners sitting down.

**Vera:** But we could do it with women.

**Stevi:** I think one of the problems is that Greenham women are used to getting arrested and miners' wives aren't. The non-Greenham women didn't really have a chance to discuss and influence the tactics and what it would mean to sit down.

**Vera:** Yes but how do you stop that convoy.

Surely by a mass picket properly organised by the NUM and the women?

**Mary:** The police lines were seven deep. I think there's a real problem here. The suffragettes had a strategy of getting individual women and groups of women to disrupt meetings, smash windows and even burn property. The women that were able to get arrested and deliberately get fined, often were middle class women. It was different then and it's still different now for working class women to afford huge fines. Not all Greenham women are by any means rich, but I really can't see miners wives adopting these tactics.

**Mary:** I think the main worry women have is getting arrested.

**Vera:** There's also the kids waiting for you at home.



Women have come more and more to the

**Hazel:** And if women are unemployed and on supplementary benefit it's very difficult.

**Mary and Helen tell me you're attitude to sitting down.**

**Mary:** To be honest if a policeman came up to move me I'd be violent in my reactions.

**Hazel:** I'd be prepared to sit down and be moved even though I would feel violent — if I thought it was disrupting them I would do anything to win the strike.

**Mary:** What I did notice is that going down us older women said 'Don't forget girls be careful'. But when it came to the crunch and I saw four or five police onto one miner I got heated. The flats of my hands really hurt afterwards from hitting the police. They elbow you out of the way as if you're of no account at all.

**Hazel:** Yes the state wants to put across it's the miners who are violent.

**Mary:** I can vouch for it, not one miner on that picket attacked a policeman.

**What do you think of the support the NUM has received from the rest of the labour movement?**

**Mary:** I think there could be more support.

**Hazel:** Yes where is the TUC?

**Mary:** Some people contribute money every week and that's it. They've done their bit.

I certainly think Mr Kinnock could have come on the picket lines with the miners.

**Hazel:** Yes he didn't speak out until 11 weeks into the strike.

**Mary:** And then he'd have been better off keeping his mouth shut with what he said.

## At the start

## I just cried

**DEBBIE AINSWORTH** is from St Helens. Her husband Steve has been on strike since the beginning. They have two young children. The miners wives' support groups meets every Tuesday evening at Bold miners club.

**MARTINE BONADONA** asked her about her involvement in the strike.

**How did the strike change your life?**

At first I was totally opposed to the strike. I did not know anything about it. I used to listen religiously to what I heard on TV. It's only Steve's involvement that got me involved.

At the beginning all I did was cry when the bills came through the door. Steve altered me. We had to get used to no money so I don't go to the supermarket any more. It is too tempting.

Many times the bill was bigger than the giro, and you still need to keep some money for the children.

I've lost my job because I was working at weekends and if there was a rally, I went to the rally. The rally came first.

Things are just not the same anymore. We have no family life. We can't live the same life. We don't go out anymore. We get a lot of stick from the neighbours because Steve is picketing. But I have learned politically. I understand the strike now.

**How did you get involved?**

By going to the first meeting in St Helens Town Hall. It was about ten weeks ago, well into the strike. There were social, welfare, DHSS and council workers.

The discussion was incredible. All the wives wanted to know. I discovered that I did not know anything about our

needs and our rights, so then we set up a support committee. We started the food parcels and the help to children.

It was good for women not to sit in a house seven days and seven nights a week listening to the junk on TV. Steve went to rallies, then they said some thing on TV and Steve said it wasn't true, he was there.

We had constant arguments at the beginning. The children were suffering. The beginning was the hardest. Now I still worry about the mortgage but there are other people.

**Did your husband help you in your involvement?**

We have quarrelled about it. It's alright for him to be out all the time, but he said I was neglecting the children when I got involved. Did I say he was neglecting the children? But we don't argue so much now.

# ck?"



ore in this strike.

**Mary:** But the Cardiff Labour Parties have been great: Asking you to speak, collecting food, giving us money and moral backing.

**Hazel:** And Mid-Glamorgan Education authority gave us free school meals, including in the holidays and free bus passes.

**Mary:** I heard Eric Heffer on the television this morning. He said he'd be down here demonstrating outside the offices protesting at the sequestration of NUM funds with the miners. I've always thought Tony Benn was a bit eccentric but I've changed my mind. I was really surprised at the way he's stood up for the miners. Him and Dennis Skinner have been really good so has Ray Powell one of our local MPs.

But there have been a lot of complaints about Neil Kinnock. He comes from a mining community after all.

**Vera:** This brings me to something else about this strike. What are the women going to do afterwards. You can keep the miners support groups but what status will they have? What political alignments are women going to make.

**Mary:** But we're all Labour!

**Vera:** Yes but what about the fight in the Labour Party. What about dealing with people like Neil Kinnock.

**Mary:** It's very difficult because he's our only hope of getting back in power yet he doesn't support our battles.

**Hazel:** If they put Tony Benn where Neil Kinnock is I'd join the Labour Party tomorrow.

**Have you thought about joining and carrying on the fight you're waging now in this strike?**

**Mary:** I'm too busy.

**Who looks after the children when you are both out?**

My family is very good to us, so my parents or his take the children.

**What does your involvement consist of?**

Going to wives' meetings at the club. I am on the committee of the group. We try to make life easier for the children, in particular now with the summer holiday.

We help feeding the pickets. I also do my share for the women on toiletries, baby foods, nappies and so on. We have a rota for the distribution. And also I go speaking at meetings when we are invited. But it is a problem to go to meetings. To go to the club the bus fare is about £1, that's 50p each way. That's a lot of money.

**Hazel:** The leadership is too weak. If you're a good socialist you get expelled. I don't think you can move them fast enough for what's needed.

**Vera:** But the Women's support Committees have moved a lot. We've got women's organisations inside the Labour Party. I think you've done us a great favour because in this strike you've won the argument for women's autonomy.

**Stevi:** That's true, at the Wales Labour Party Conference we won the support of the NUM for our demands for greater representation. The miners have got the power to influence the selection of MPs in Wales. The reason why the witch-hunt of socialists is possible is because there are too few people confronting the right-wing in Wales.

**Hazel:** That's why I haven't joined you, I feel isolated in the valleys.

**Stevi:** But the Women's Organisation is to the left of the Party as a whole. Women are taking the lead in the Party as well as outside so it's vital we have more women joining.

**Hazel:** But although it appears everyone is united so many women are right-wing. They seem to believe everything they read in the newspapers.

**Yes of course the majority do and that's not going to change until something happens that really affects them. But look at women in this strike. How many of you went to meetings every night, how many went on demonstrations and pickets, discussed politics in this way. Look how many women are getting involved surely that's a big step forward?**

**Vera:** Do you think the NUM will allow women to participate in lodge business after this strike's over?

**Mary:** I think a lot of things will change after this strike's over. They won't be able to keep women out. We've played such a big part that we're getting invited to more and more meetings I think we should have honorary membership of the NUM. We service the miners to go down the pit. Why can't we be members?

**So would you say that the organisation of women in this dispute has contributed to the building of the broader movement for women's liberation? Have you had any discussions around feminist demands like childcare, equal pay, abortion on demand?**

Yes definitely we're part of the women's movement. But we haven't discussed those things because we haven't had time. That will probably come later.

I don't think the miners' wives realised they could do as much as they have done. Now I don't think you're going to be able to stop us.

With the baby who doesn't sleep very well, I am very tired at the end of the day. Steve's never here. He believes in the strike.

**Had you been involved in anything before?**

No, I had never been to a meeting before. I enjoy the challenge. I'm going to be bored after the strike.

**How do you see the strike being solved?**

There is not going to be an easy solution. She's made it into a political strike. I don't think Scargill is going to get everything he wants. MacGregor is not going to get everything he wants. But it is going to take a long time.

They underestimate the fellows and wives.



'Our gallant police' in action — brave lads!

## Police take it out on women

UP AND DOWN the country women from the mining communities have been joining the miners' picket lines, meetings and demonstrations. Here they have learned first hand about the violence of the police, and have been themselves victims of the specially refined types of violence that the police have reserved for women, in an attempt to drive them out of activity and back into their homes.

Below we publish extracts of a letter from miners' wives from Calverton sent to Alec Woodhall, MP for Hemsworth, which he has circulated around the PLP.

It was a lovely sunny evening and we gathered on the pavement in a jovial mood, sang a few songs, shouted a few slogans, and joked with the half-dozen police officers present. Most of the women had no experience of picketing, and went partly out of curiosity, partly out of a desire to show our menfolk our support.

The atmosphere was relaxed and jovial until police reinforcements arrived. They at once surrounded the picket and told the women to move to a different part of the pavement. Women who questioned this or who resisted being pushed were arrested. Women who intervened when their friends were arrested got arrested too.

### Changes

Many women did not know why they were being arrested. 'Why me' yelled one young miner's wife as she was being dragged away. 'I've fancied you all evening,' the arresting officer told her. Another woman, charged with using foul and abusive language, was told by a police officer: 'Call yourself a woman — I wouldn't even piss on you.'

The women were dragged to the police van with a brutality quite out of proportion to their size or any resistance they were offering. One woman in her mid-forties, who offered no resistance, was dragged by two officers, one of whom had his arm

around her throat. 'Let her walk', said one of the officers. 'No, let's drag her,' said the other.

They did drag her, face downwards, so her knees and the tops of her feet in open sandals were all battered and grazed. She blacked out, and had to be taken to hospital.

At about 11pm the police van left Calverton for Hucknall Police Station. It was quite dark inside, and the women locked in their individual cages were shaken and bruised as the van raced at high speed down the winding country roads, swerving and braking sharply. By now they were very frightened and confused.

At Hucknall Police station things did not get better.

Women were at last allowed to go to the toilet, but they were escorted by male police officers — this made it very difficult for some women to take advantage of the relief offered. Besides which the toilet, which was in an open corridor, was filthy, apparently did not flush, and was caked with excrement.

### Miners

At the police station, a number of the women asked to make a phone call, which they believed to be their right. They were refused. In some cases, the police did in fact contact the woman's husband, but they did not tell them their husbands had been contacted; nor were women told that husbands and friends had contacted the station to enquire after them.

This was very distressing, especially for the women with children, who did not know what arrangements if any had been made for their children to be looked after. One woman who had a sixteen-week old baby said: 'I've always thought the police were supposed to care about people, but when I told them I wanted to speak to my husband because I was worried about my baby, they just laughed and said if I really cared about the baby I wouldn't have gone on the picket line.'

The women were taken one by one for questioning. In addition to the usual questions, they were asked very detailed questions about their family circumstances, HP and mortgage com-

mitments and their 'attitudes'. Interspersed with the questions, were all sorts of 'humorous' remarks such as: 'Did you know Arthur Scargill's just had three tons of coal delivered to his house.' 'What do you think of this new Jaguar Arthur Scargill just bought himself' and 'We're hoping this strike is going to go on — the overtime's great — we'll be having two holidays abroad this year.'

### Deep

By about 2am, most of the women had been interviewed and were locked up in individual cells — these are the cells normally kept for drunks and vagrants, and were filthy, with mattresses and blankets stinking of urine, and some with traces of excrement.

They were given a cup of tea — their first refreshment during this ordeal.

Some women were fingerprinted (without warrant) during their interview. Others were woken up periodically through the night to ask them whether they had 'changed their minds' and would consent to being fingerprinted.

They were told they would appear in court at 10am. Then it was changed to 2pm. Then to 4pm. Then to 5pm. Finally, at twenty minutes to five, they were allowed to see a solicitor.

In court, before a single Magistrate, the usual notorious bail conditions were imposed, and at last the weary bewildered women were allowed to go home.

From all the catalogue of horrors they experienced, perhaps the most horrific thing was that these were not isolated incidents where individual policemen overstepped the mark, and where it would be appropriate to make a complaint — but every encounter with every officer, from the rough handling, to the constant taunts about 'overtime' to the disregard for privacy, comfort or basic legal rights — all these seemed part of a total pattern. A systematic attempt to bully and degrade.

These are 'respectable' women, whose respect for the law had been unquestioning. Their faith in our system of justice has been totally shattered.

# A Socialist ACTION

## Mines not missiles

More and more women are getting involved in radical activity. We have watched the Greenham Common women challenge the Government on its Nuclear Arms policy. We have seen women come forward in the Labour Party and urge it to adopt more militant policies. And now we are seeing a deep radicalisation of miners' wives and women against pit closures.

Imagine these women and many others linking and taking their struggles together. We need to grasp the major significance of these developments which involve a wide layer of women and encourage these links at every possible opportunity.

That is why the initiative taken by Leicester Womens' Action Group must be given all our support. Linking the issues of the Nuclear Arms/Power industry with the threat to our Coal Industry is important. There are large coal resources in Britain, but wouldn't the Tories love to extend nuclear energy to crush the power of the miners! Wouldn't the Tories also like to hide from us the exploitation of black South African workers mining plutonium for Rio Tinto Zinc. The Leicester Womens' Action Group wants to highlight these issues and many others.

As miners' wives now like to remind us, they are fighting as women, not miners' wives and they are fighting to defend their own living conditions and communities, not just to save men's jobs. Both Greenham women and miners' wives have experienced police harassment and hostile media coverage. They have inherited a labour movement which is not always willing to support those in struggle and which has allowed anti-union laws to be established and allowed strikers' families to be reduced to poverty during their period of struggle.

But these women, through their personal experience have learnt the importance of strengthening the labour movement and acting in solidarity. They are not only willing to defend their own communities but they want to go further. They are asking 'What Next?'

**WOMEN FOR MINES NOT MISSILES** will be their slogan for these events. Three marches are likely to take place:

★ Capenhurst Uranium processing plant to the Mansfield area starting and finishing with Women's rallies following the route from Capenhurst — Chester — Crewe — Stoke — Mansfield. Women are asked to go on any part or all of the event. There will be rallies, leafletting, collections and marches through towns. Transport will be arranged through rural areas.

Contact Leicester Women's Peace Action c/o Leicester Women's Centre, 13 Welford Road, Leicester or Tel Andrea (0533 702585.)

★ Linking up the Welsh pits with the Bristol Nuclear Power Station. For further information contact Welsh Miners' Wives or Women for Peace.

★ For information about events taking place in Scotland, contact Anne 041 423 1485 or Irene 041 632 0420.

Raise as much financial support as possible and send to 'Women for Mines not Missiles' at the Leicester Branch of the Yorkshire Bank, A/C No 29797100.

# Court threat to NUM TUC MUST CALL STRIKE ACTION

By Janine Inglefield

PRICE AND Waterhouse have sequestered two relief funds in South Wales and £1 million of the Welsh NUM's money from an account in Jersey. Some £290,000 of the latter was donated to provide food and clothing for the families of striking miners. As Gwyn Williams secretary of one of the relief funds said: 'If the court intends to get its money by starving our kids, it will have a big fight on its hands.' And now, encouraged by this attack, two Yorkshire NUM members plan to take their union to court claiming the strike is illegal.

For those, like Neil Kinnock, who argue that trade unionists must stay within the law we ask the following question. *When a law is as blatantly unjust as the Tory government's trade union legislation must it still be obeyed?* The Tory government is saying that trade unionists do not have the right to express solidarity with one another, to engage in 'secondary' action. Both the NGA and the NUM have come under attack. Yet through every week of the miners' 21 week long strike with our money they have used their courts, their police, their government and the boards of their nationalised industries to break the miners' strike to defend jobs. And then Maggie Thatcher has the nerve to suggest she's protecting the right to work!

*They are now using this law to try and starve miners' families. Should they be allowed to get away with this? We say no. Now is the time to stop the talks and start taking action.*

Eight leading members of the TUC General Council met with the NUM last week to discuss winning support for the miners at the TUC Congress in September. But the attack has come now and the movement must respond now. In 1972 when the five Pentonville dockers were jailed under a previous Tory anti-union law, 250,000 workers struck without waiting for the union leaders. Now, because of the setbacks the movement has suffered over the past five years, a clearer lead is necessary.

The TUC must be forced to call action. Emlyn Williams, president of the South Wales NUM, has called for a General Strike and a 24-hour general stoppage is the best way to begin to force the ruling class to step back. Those eight unions should be organising now to fight for such actions in the ranks and the leadership of the union.

THE EIGHT UNIONS ARE: NUPE, NUS, NUR, NGA, SOGAT, ACTT, ASLEF, T&GWU



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Is this man due for deportation?  
'This country will not tolerate professional criminals coming in from abroad' — Judge Stable at an Old Bailey Trial.



## MODEL RESOLUTION FOR UNIONS/CLP'S.

This union/CLP notes:

- 1) TUC policy of opposition to Tory anti-union legislation.
- 2) The use of that legislation by employers against the NGA and the South Wales NUM.
- 3) The action taken by Price and Waterhouse to cut off funds for food relief going to miners' families under that legislation.

Urges: 1) The Labour Party and the TUC to set a date for 24-hour industrial action in protest at this unprecedented attack on the South Wales NUM and the British trade union movement.

2) To call a National demonstration in South Wales to demonstrate solidarity with the miners and their families.