

THE NUM AND THE BRITISH PEOPLE.

Module by Alfred Sherman.

What is at stake in the dispute between the National Union of Mineworkers and the Government? It is not basically an industrial dispute. To call it a strike is misuse of words. A strike is collective withdrawal of labour by wage and salary earners. The present dispute is basically a lock-out imposed on workers miners by the Union through the use of intimidation. We have never questioned the right to strike within very broad limits. The NUM is denying miners the right to work.

Secondly, the dispute is part of an attempt by the NUM and like-minded unions to impose their diktat on the British people, over-riding parliamentary democracy. The NUM chiefs and their political allies have frankly admitted this, even boasted of it. So how can third parties who wear their hearts prominently on their sleeves, their left sleeves, dare accuse the government of intransigence? The government's job is to govern. How can anyone be so crass as to play at calling a plague on both their houses, when this is the house they all live in, the house of the rule of law, of freedom under the law?

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Is it true that we are trying to destroy our coal industry? The exact opposite: we are trying to save it at the eleventh hour. The coal industry which should be a national asset has been allowed to become a national liability. Over the past few years, it has been absorbing an increasing share of our national resources. The deficit has been growing year by year. The real deficit, if you take into account all the resources exacted from taxpayers and electricity consumers by dear coal, now stands at about two billion pounds a year. Do you know what that means? It is as if we took hospitals, medicines, schools and school-books, clothe, cars, food, houses, and tipped them into holes in the ground. And this figure of two billion does not take into account the enormous write-offs of past debt, which means public money sunk into the pits or miners' wages, for which taxpayers are still paying debt service till kingdom come.

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We have been very patient with the coal industry, whose ills go back partly to failure to adjust to the switch over to oil for ships' bunkering over sixty years ago, partly to the folly of nationalisation and creation of a monolithic industry after the second world war. There is no industry in the country where the union has such a say in management as the coal industry. This was designed to buy social peace. What have we got for this Danegeld?

In everyone's interest, including the miners, we need to re-shape the industry, so that it becomes a national asset, as it could well do, instead of a national liability, which it has become.

The miners will have to accept change like everyone else. Many have already done so. In the Notts field in particular miners are like other working people. they dress the same, live the same, go into the mining industry from other industries and out to other jobs. That is what we want: normalisation of the miners' existence, normalisation of the industry. The NUM's aim is quite different. It is to keep them segregated, a form of industrial and residential apartheid, to use them as shock troops for revolution.

The miners are exploited by the Union, denied their civil rights, above all the right to decide for themselves, the birthright of every Briton. In this dispute we are fighting for the miners' rights.

End of module.