

# British miners end strike



**T**HE great mining communities of Britain, which ended their year-long strike on March 6, point the way forward for workers in all countries.

They have shown the world the power of the organised working class.

The miners are less than two percent of unionised workers in Britain. But to defeat them, Britain's bosses and government had to use thousands of police and they had to spend over R10 billion — much more than it cost Britain to defeat Argentina during the Falklands war.

If this is what only two percent of the working class can do, it is clear that the united working class can achieve much more.

The miners went on strike to defend their jobs and communities. The coal bosses wanted to destroy 70 000 jobs.

But they also went on strike to defend the working class as a whole by struggling against an anti-worker government and its laws.

Since coming to power the main aim of the British prime minister, Thatcher, has been to break the power of the organised working class and to destroy its independence.

Before the miners, Thatcher has attacked steel, car and hospital workers. But it was always the miners who were seen as the main enemy.

In the 1970's the miners' struggles brought down the conservative government and since then the ruling class in Britain has wanted to crush them.

For this reason, the bosses and the government prepared their attack on the miners very carefully and over many years:

- They built up their coal stocks to 55 million tons.
- They made sure that the power stations could use oil as well as coal.
- They employed non-union lorry drivers to move coal around the country.
- They were ready to use thousands of police to stop picketing.
- They took away most of the social welfare payments from striker's families.
- They tried to divide the miners through a bonus scheme.
- Finally, the miners were attacked many months before the winter (when most coal is used) so that there would be no chance of power cuts for the first months of the strike.

The bosses and the government were sure that the strike would be lost very quickly, that it would not last more than a few weeks.

The miners and their families proved them wrong. Within weeks they had organised themselves and their supporters all over the world for a long fight.



Led by a brass band, 2 000 miners march back to their jobs through the streets of Grimethorpe in the North of England

Together they created one of the greatest worker struggles of this century.

The way the mining communities were organised for the struggle was very important.

The women set up committees which helped in picketing, in getting support from outside the mining communities, and in providing food for strikers' families.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) set up miners' support groups all over Britain.

These groups collected money and food for the miners and organised demonstrations, rallies and picketing in their areas.

Without their help, and the money which came from British and international trade

unions, the strike could never have gone on for a year. Supporters from all over the world gave R120 million to the British mining communities.

The strike showed how important international links are. Workers from outside Britain gave as much money to the NUM as workers inside Britain.

In Australia workers refused to load coal carried to Britain. In France they emptied trains carrying coal to ships sailing to Britain and dumped the coal on the railway lines, and in Poland, Solidarity criticised the Polish government for selling coal to Thatcher.

But the strike also showed how the weakness of workers in one part of the world, weakens workers in another.

Because the Polish miners do not control their industry, they could not stop their government from selling coal to Britain.

Also, the British coal bosses said they were closing their mines because they could buy cheaper coal from countries like South Africa where the miners are even more exploited than they are in Britain.

When South African miners are strongly organised and well-paid, the British coal bosses will not be able to use cheap coal from here to destroy jobs and break strikes.

During the strike 10 000 people were arrested, 1 500 miners were hospitalised because of police violence, some were killed, and others committed suicide because of what the govern-

ment was doing to communities.

The police rode their horses into the picket lines and bashed the miners. They let loose dogs to chase pickets across fields. There were battles between whole communities and the police.

In some areas, miners were under house arrest and curfew. Miners were not allowed to travel freely around the country to get support from other miners.

The court's took away NUM's funds and, in the end, took away the union from its members and leaders and got unelected businessmen to run it.

The strike showed that a group of workers cannot successfully fight alone when their bosses and the government are determined to crush them.

However, the miners may have lost their strike, but they did win many other important victories.

They created a new political movement which will fight in other workers' struggles and they have weakened Thatcher.

Her anti-working class government is now less popular than the Labour Party and it has much less money to defeat other workers.

The British miners have reached out to workers all over the world and they have shown them the kind of struggles which must be fought to win power for the working class.

Most important of all, they have shown the need for workers' unity both nationally and internationally.



NUM supporters wait as the union executives vote to end the strike