

British miners suffer

by Bill Doskóch

A representative of the British National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) told Edmontonians that despite the hardships and setbacks they've suffered, the miners will not give in to the Thatcher government.

Frank Clarke has lived in mining communities all his life and has worked on mines since he was 15.

He came to Canada to explain his union's position on the strike, to raise support from concerned Canadians, and to raise money for the miners hardship fund.

He said that the main issue of the strike is the decision of the National Coal Board (NCB) to close 70 pits and make 70,000 miners redundant by 1988.

The only factor the NCB considered was short-run economics, said Clarke. While the profitability of each individual pit could not be guaranteed due to differing geological conditions, the profitability of the industry would return if the Thatcher government would change its economic policies.

Halting coal imports, increasing coal prices by the same percentage as other energy sources and increasing subsidies to the same level received by the rest of Europe are some examples he cites.

Clarke claims that keeping the pits open would cost £2.2 billion (\$3.5 billion Canadian) less than closing them. This figure did not include the social cost of destroying communities, lifestyles or the waste of human capital.

He explained why this strike has been more bitter than most. The presence of Ian MacGregor, 72, as NCB chairman is a sore point with the miners. Clarke said MacGregor is unqualified because he has no previous background in coal mining.

Working conditions have worsened under MacGregor, he said, and massive job elimination pro-

grams have always been associated with MacGregor's involvement in other industries.

Clarke said the Thatcher government has used heavy-handed tactics in its attempt to break the strike.

Government assistance to miners' families has been slashed by two-thirds. Single miners get no government assistance.

Miners have been assaulted and have had their vehicles smashed by police after refusing to answer questions about their movements.

To date, there has been five miners killed, 3,000 seriously injured, and more than 7,000 imprisoned.

Clarke said 95 per cent of the violence is the result of police and management provocations.

The British Parliament passed legislation restricting miners' freedoms of movement.

The police now have the right to arrest people anywhere at any time without reason and hold them for 96 hours without charge.

In comparison to the restriction placed on NUM members, he said representatives of the National Working Miners Committee get passes from the state allowing them free travel anywhere in the country to organize against the NUM.

The leaders of the NWMC also get time off with pay, a salary and expenses for their efforts.

The NWMC represents the Nottinghamshire Area miners who are the only ones still working to date.

Clarke said they are still working for several reasons, one is that they are the highest paid miners in Britain, earning between £10 and £15 more per week than the average miner.

Another is that before the strike the NCB stated that no pits in the Nottinghamshire area would be closed.

Finally, miners in that area have traditionally been more "moderate"

and have almost never joined their more militant counterparts on strike.

This, combined with the decision for the pit foremen not to walk out, has hurt the miners and will prolong the strike.

The savings of the union and its membership are almost exhausted, with some miners at the brink of starvation, said Clarke. Items such as shoes are becoming luxuries.

National and international aid has helped to alleviate the hardships. £100,000 worth of food was recently donated to the miners by other British unionists.

Almost \$2,000 was donated by Edmontonians on Wednesday.

Despite their problems, the miners remain determined. Clarke pointed out that this is the 150th anniversary of the Tolpuddle martyrs, six men who were exiled to Australia for trying to organize miners to fight for better wages.

Their leader had his right hand chopped off to dissuade him from writing home.

This grim reminder of their past fights now serves as a reference point for their present fight. Clarke feels losing would mean the destruction of their industry, communities, livelihoods and unions.

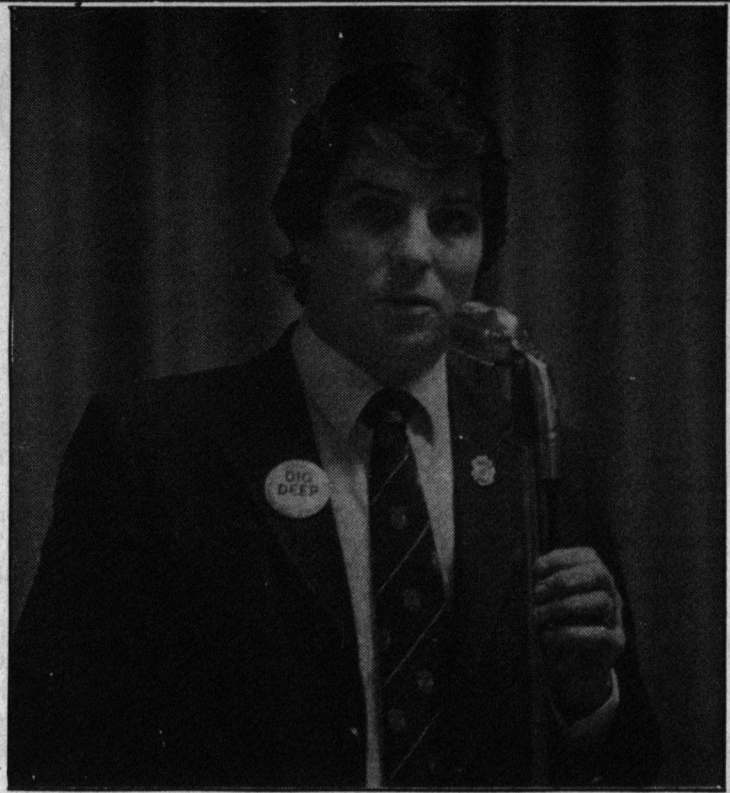


Photo Tim Kubash

Mining leader Frank Clarke addresses an Edmonton audience on the hardships endured by the English mining community.

He also feels a defeat would seriously damage British trade unions and might also adversely affect the world trade union movement.

Clarke concluded that "We (the miners) will not capitulate and lose

the rights and policies that our fathers and grandfathers fought so hard for to gain."

Clarke will be speaking at a political science undergraduate association forum Oct. 31 in Tory 14-9 at 2 pm.

Yard Apes



by Hans Beckers

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