

An Act of Avoidance

I must respond to Raphael Samuel's contribution (*Marxism Today*, September) on the miners because of its historical inaccuracies, its suspect analysis and essentially *anti-communist* tone, outlook and content. Underlining it all is a brash metropolitanism which does not address itself to the reality of the strike and its aftermath.

Even the small errors are revealing and give some clues as to the shakiness of the contribution. Firstly, there is no such organisation as 'The South Wales Campaign for the Defence of the Coal Communities'. The correct title is 'The Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities'. It was not set up on the initiative of the Communist Party but by the South Wales Area NUM leadership. Party members have however played a prominent role in its work and its strategy of building a broad democratic alliance is clearly the approach of the CP's programme, *The British Road to Socialism*.

Secondly there is the question of Michael McGahey. He was not the chairman at the party congress in 1985. It was George Bolton although it is perhaps forgivable and understandable that Raphael

Samuel should confuse them. McGahey's role in the congress was limited because he was still recovering from the physical attack made upon him at the end of the strike. He was therefore from time to time absent but he *did* make a contribution on the miners' strike (there was no specific debate as Samuel suggests).

But much the worst implied inaccuracy is that Michael McGahey is somehow manipulated against his will to obey some party line or other on such matters as analysing the strike or the *Morning Star*. That betrays an incredible ignorance of the man and his party. Michael McGahey is a communist, and as such he constantly emphasises the importance of analysing

problems scientifically, of the need for a *Communist* daily newspaper (in the style that Lenin described in his famous letter to Tom Bell) and always argues for the need for collective responsibility - one of his favourite ways of describing 'left adventurers' is to label them 'dilettante' for not accepting collective decisions.

Most of all he takes pride in being an intellectual, in the mould of other Communist miners' leaders before him - Les Ellis, Horner, Paynter, The Kanes and the Moffatts - who were never afraid of proposing unpopular solutions for the tackling of difficult problems. That is why at the recent NUM annual conference he said in the debate on unity:

'I joined this industry in 1939. It was two years after Spencerism. There were Spencerites around. But we had to build that unity that created the conditions for the creation of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1945. I would remind you, had those compromises - yes - compromises - not taken place - we would not have had the National Union of Mineworkers . . . Be careful - the approach of certain of my colleagues whom I respect very much could create the conditions . . . for non-unionism in the industry. It's a question of *how* we campaign . . .

We need one united union in this industry. We need it not only for the miners, we need it for the political unity of the movement. We need it to secure a Labour victory at the next election. We need it to defeat Thatcherism.'

This brings us to the two main criticisms of Samuel: the inter-related questions of the role of the Communist Party and the meaning of unity. The Communist Party still stands for unity of the miners and of the whole movement. That is why from the earliest days of the strike it identified the need to work out strategies to achieve the unity of *all* miners, the unity

of the miners with the wider movement and the winning over of public opinion.

These were essential pre-conditions for any progress in the struggle. The very fact that the party publicly identified these problems and continued to do so after the strike is not a reason for alleging that the party created them! The same can be said of *Marxism Today*. My view (which is obviously not detached - but then again neither is Samuel) is that during and after the strike proper attention was given to the real issues of the strike. There were roundtable discussions on women, on strategy and on the lessons as well as long and short articles which attempted some constructive criticism and analysis. It has always been the view of the Communist Party and many others in the labour movement that we cannot maintain, build or rebuild unity on silence, on 'loyalty' or on an uncritical view of leadership. Yet this is the approach which underpins all of Samuel's contribution.

When Des Dutfield, the new president of the South Wales miners and a prominent Labour Party member, addressed his first annual conference this year he made some very perceptive comments concerning *how* unity could be rebuilt upon long-standing and obvious democratic practices:-

'I will expect the opinions and the viewpoints of our members through our lodges to be reflected as accurately and sincerely as possible . . . It is of great importance that these views be expressed whether they appear to be supportive, contentious, unpopular or downright unpalatable at times . . . Silent acceptance on certain crucial questions is not satisfactory . . . I give you my word that you will receive the proper respect, when declaring your lodges' position on such issues and you will also receive all the assistance you may require in presenting your views.'

Such an honest outlook, informed as it is by the real world, is what the Commun-



Mick McGahey - facing facts

ist Party and *Marxism Today* has tried to adopt, obviously not always successfully, but it has tried.

In this view, if Arthur Scargill says, as he did in his 1986 annual address, that the 1937 settlement which ended the breakaway in Nottinghamshire created a 'false unity', then he must be publicly challenged. That is opinion not historical analysis: he and others would do well to read and re-read Page Arnot's official history of the period to get an understanding of the appalling problems and very real achievements of those times.¹ The unity which ultimately resulted in all the improvements under early nationalisation and then in 1972 and 1974 was achieved not simply through industrial action alone: this anti-intellectual posturing on the Left which, Mussolini-like, demands at all times action *instead of thought* (rather than both) is of course a fairly recent phenomenon. Will Paynter called it a fetish.

I find it wholly misleading for Samuel to suggest that the thoughtful and incisive close-up of Michael McGahey by Don MacIntyre (*MT* September 1986) was in

any way divisive. Samuel suffers from the old stalinist trait of describing leaders as 'towering figures' who must at all costs not be criticised. No doubt Michael McGahey would be the first to agree with another 'towering figure', James Larkin: 'The great appear great because we are on our knees: let us rise.'

This constant canonisation or deification of left leaders (the worst example is of Arthur Cook who, if the truth were told, was not a 'fighter-to-the-finish' at all as even a cursory scrutiny of 1921 and 1926 reveals). This need for inventing 'great leaders' is necessary for the authoritarian Right but on the Left we should be extremely wary of this lionising of past and present 'heroes'. Paynter hated it and constantly worked against such fawning tendencies.

Finally, I would like to make a few points about unity and this strange notion that on the Left there must be only criticism of the Right. It may sound 'revisionist' but I no longer subscribe to the old left-right divide (I do not think many of the early broad left leaders in the NUM did either - how else would we have had the unity of 1972 and 1974?). Two of the greatest problems which beset the labour movement today are racism and sexism - and I do not think that the Left is necessarily any less immune to them than the Right. The 'hard Left' has a third weakness: a rabid intolerance of other views within the movement.

Beyond this I believe that our understanding of unity in recent years has become flawed and the miners' strike did not help matters. Shortly before he died Will Paynter said that he, and others in the early formulations of the broad Left, worked out a seemingly simple strategy which we need to reflect on today: the building of a left-right unity on a left programme.

Those strident voiced badge-festooned Oxford lefties (elsewhere, Kim Howells has called them 'Clapham colliers') should

also reflect on the fact that it is the so-called Right which won the key ballot victories for the NUM against the UDM in Leicester and North Wales. They way we work out that strategy for unity has as much to do with form as it has with content. Norman Willis, at a recent South Wales miners' residential school, talked of the need for leaders to stop 'assuming' the loyalty of their members and of the need also to stop 'demanding' solidarity: listening is more important than preaching.

We should welcome a debate on the Communist Party and on unity within the movement. The opportunities for unity for the miners and the whole movement are better now than for some time particularly with the passing of the amended Scottish resolution on unity at the NUM annual conference which calls for one union for the miners as a first priority and projects an energy workers' alliance. Allied to this are the extremely important decisions on energy policy taken at the TUC and the Labour Party.

This is the context within which a debate should now take place. Unfortunately Raphael Samuel's contribution does not address itself to these questions facing miners and their families - which they themselves have never stopped debating and discussing particularly now that their disunity is having such a debilitating impact on their wages, their conditions, their industry and their communities.

If we do not seize the new opportunities for unity before us, history will never forgive us. The time for left posturing is over. The time for thinking through our problems has only just begun. Out of it all we may get not a miners' charter but, an energy workers' charter, implemented by the next Labour government. ●
Hywel Francis

1 R Page Arnot: *The Miners in Crisis and War* volume 3 of the official history of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (Allen and Unwin, 1961). See in particular the chapters on 'The Campaign against Company Unions' and 'A Single Union'.



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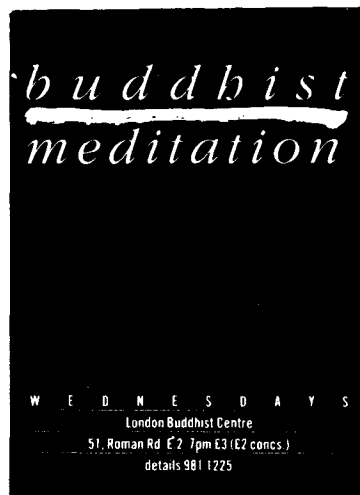
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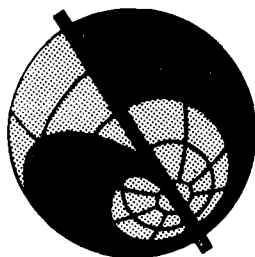
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Duke Hussey

A few days into the bitter dispute which followed the move of all the Murdoch newspapers to Wapping, an official car drew up in Grays Inn Road.

The tall man who got out was greeted cordially by some of the pickets camped outside the former *Times* and *Sunday Times* buildings, most of them sacked print workers; he came over and chatted briefly to them, saying 'Hello, how are you?'

What is remarkable about his exchange is that the man in the car was Duke Hussey, then still a director of Times Newspapers and the man who, as chief executive and managing director, played a key role during the 11-month shutdown of the two papers in the late 1970s. A more obvious target for trade union ire would be hard to find. Yet Hussey is probably the only senior management figure whose appearance after Wapping did not automatically provoke the wrath of the pickets.

There is perhaps a clue revealed by this incident that the new chairman of the BBC may not be the man to effect the radical overhaul of public broadcasting that many on the Tory right wing might have hoped for. The BBC is one of the few key institutions to have resisted the onslaught of Thatcherism with any degree of success. A mark of its achievement is the anger that some of its drama and current affairs programmes excites on the Right, and the frequency with which calls for its commercialisation are made.

Lord King, the abrasive and Thatcherite chairman of British Airways, was widely tipped to take on the role of BBC revolutionary. Duke Hussey is of a different mould – a paternalist, happier to operate in the traditional corridors of power than in the brisk winds of the free market.

Duke Hussey's relative popularity with print union members, is an important key to understanding a man

who might otherwise appear contradictory and enigmatic. So are his close establishment links.

During Harry Evans's stormy editorship of *The Times*, one of his most controversial innovations was placing a caricature on the paper's court page. Although this may seem a pretty minor move, the reaction was predictable. Letters of complaint poured in; Evans learned that Lord Drogheda, one of the national directors, had complained to Murdoch.

Evans was braced for a storm. Just then, Duke Hussey intervened. 'Funnily enough', he said, 'I saw Queen Elizabeth's private secretary Martin Gilliat at dinner last night and he is a very avid and discerning reader of *The Times* – as is his boss! I asked him what he thought about the court page and the cartoonist and he was very enthusiastic. So I don't think you need worry about those letters'.

The point of these stories is, of course, that Marmaduke James Hussey is a quintessential, polite member of the British establishment. People who know him describe him as affable, not pompous; one former union official from Times Newspapers remembers him as 'a pleasant chap, jolly, fairly straightforward'. A gentleman of the old school, in fact. Nor does his relative obscurity until his appointment to the BBC – until then, he was a little known figure outside the national newspaper industry, despite successfully chairing the profitable radio station Great Western Radio – matter at all.

It is precisely those people whose names mean nothing to the average person in the street who wield the most insidious type of power in establishment circles. You may not have heard of Hussey, just as you may not have heard of the Queen Mother's private secretary, but that doesn't make them any the less significant. And Hus-

sey's connections, which derive largely from his marriage, are very good indeed.

He comes from a fairly standard upper middle-class background: son of a former colonial civil servant, educated at Rugby and Trinity College, Oxford. His war service was spent in the Grenadier Guards, where his courage was not in doubt (he lost a leg, and suffered great pain, after being wounded at Anzio).

But then, in a curious parallel with the former editor of the *Sunday Times*, Frank Giles, he married into the aristocracy. His wife, Lady Susan Katharine Hussey, is the fifth daughter of the 12th Earl Waldegrave; her *Who's Who* entry describes her occupation, without irony, as 'Woman of the Bedchamber to the Queen, since 1960'.

More recently, Lady Susan had a hand in grooming Lady Diana Spencer before her marriage to the Prince of Wales, and is godmother to Prince William. During one of the many disputes at Times Newspapers, Hussey telephoned print union leaders to say he had good news. But instead of a new offer, he wanted to keep them up to date with the latest royal birth.

Lady Susan is also the link in Hussey's only known political connection – she is the elder sister of William Waldegrave, the dampish junior environment minister. Other than this, his political leanings can only be surmised from his background, and from his track record at Times Newspapers. It may be his reputation there, as the man who stood up to the print unions by closing down the papers for 11 months, that explains why he was the prime minister's first choice for the BBC job.

But two caveats must be entered here. The first is that the shutdown failed. The second is that the little that is known about the 63-year-old Hussey suggests that his Toryism is likely to be of the consensus, not conflict, variety.

That this is so may lie behind the vigour with which the new chairman has been



Duke Hussey: Well connected

attacked by the *Daily Telegraph*, whose leader writer judged his credentials to be 'unlikely to command respect on the upper floors of Television Centre, where a firm hand is so badly needed'. It is difficult, the leader went on, 'to cast him as the strong man hewing a path to Thatcherite rectitude'.

This is not to say that Hussey's appointment to the most powerful post in the BBC is anything to be pleased about. But the Corporation has at least been spared Lord King. And, according to one trade union leader, there is a glimmer of hope.

Hussey, according to this analysis, embodies all the characteristics of a product of the British establishment, including that of not being an intellectual: 'Mrs Thatcher may think he is a medium through which messages can be passed. He'll get the message at a dinner party, and carry it along to the BBC. But then he can be persuaded by the more cogent arguments of a governors' meeting. The trouble with putty is that it bears the imprint of the last finger that touched it'. ●

Joan Smith