

“The Trades Union Congress let the miners down. They caved in.” Ex-miners and supporters speak on 1984-85 strike

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters interviewed former miners and their supporters who gathered on Saturday in South Yorkshire, England to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

Former miner **John** lives in Doncaster.

Jimmy said, “It’s a sad day that I’ll always remember—twelve months on strike where we tried our best to keep the pits open and not lose any jobs.

“I was on strike for a year. I worked at Markham Main Colliery in Armthorpe from 1972 to 1988. These were happy years, with good friends and a good community. All the villages surrounding us were fine until the pits started closing, which killed the villages and then things went downhill.

“I didn’t go to Orgreave, but I’m pleased with all the media that’s come out about the battle. It was a very dark day for the English government and they treated the miners very badly.

“I think the Nottinghamshire miners and then the area NUM [National Union of Mineworkers] let us down. As regarding the Yorkshire miners, we tried our best to keep their jobs as well as our own. And they ended up losing their jobs anyway. So tough titty.

“I’m an Arthur Scargill man, loved him since 1972 and always will. The knock-on effect of the pits closing... its decimated the area. Two hundred thousand men have lost their jobs. Then there is the knock-on effect of the factories supplying the mines, the clubs and the pubs, all lost.

“I wouldn’t vote Labour because I don’t like the look of that Keir Starmer.”

Becky’s father was a striking miner who worked at Bentley colliery in South Yorkshire.

Ray is a former train driver who helped raise money

for the miners during the strike.

Celia, a retired teacher from Leeds, said she attended the rally to commemorate the 40th anniversary as “I believe the experience of the miners’ strike resonates with a lot of issues today. It shows how ideological the attack on miners was. It was for neo-liberal economics as well as an attack on working class trade unionism.

“I’m not saying that working in mines was an ideal occupation—it was horrendous. But it was a job that passed through generations and they are the ones that were hardest hit by austerity.”

An active member of the Labour Party in 1984, Celia said, “It made me angry to hear Thatcher call miners ‘The enemy within’.

“We were very active in supporting the strike. We went to villages to support strikers with food parcels and toys for Christmas. We held political rallies to argue in support of the miners and what they were doing. As for the wider aspects of it, I despair at the role of the Labour Party which didn’t support the miners, but this did not surprise me.”

Following the defeat of the strike there was a marked shift to the right by the Labour and the trade union bureaucracy. Celia said, “I don’t understand why they had to move so far towards free-market economics.”

Speaking on the 2022-23 strike wave that was sold out by the union bureaucracy, she said, “The leadership always capitulates and offers some sort of outcome where there have been no significant gains. My view is that they get co-opted into the establishment, and in this way they undermine working class struggles.

“It’s gone on forever and when that doesn’t work as we now see with the current government and the opposition, they bring in anti-strike legislation. They

are racking up unnecessary fears about 'extremism', which is an absolute red herring and an excuse to crack down on protests they find embarrassing.

"Look at the way the UK funds supplies to Israel and pharmaceuticals in this country which are being used against the Palestinians. We have a compliant media, so trying to find out what is happening is difficult."

Discussing the fate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is incarcerated in Belmarsh high security prison in London and awaiting possible extradition to the United States, Celia said, "It is criminal what has happened to Assange and verging on evil and totally inhuman."

Stuart was a teenager during the strike. He said, "I've come here with my friend to support the miners and show my solidarity. I lived in Salford at the time and I was only young, so I didn't really understand what the strike was about and I didn't really understand the political struggle that was involved.

"But as I've matured into a grown man, I understand what that strike was about and the ramifications of what happened after that.'

Asked if he agreed that the strike could have been the basis for a mobilization of the working class to bring down the Tory government Stuart said, "I think that's true. And I think that's why they [the government] went hell for leather, with every dirty trick on the book, to discredit the miners.

"The strike was more than just defeating the miners; it was about defeating the fighting spirit of the working class.'

Asked his views on Assange, he replied, "Communication is power. Whoever can control the flow of communication channels has power. So anyone who goes against that needs shutting down. That's how they see it. And Julian Assange is one of those channels that needs shutting down."

Ricky is an actor/entertainer who campaigned for the miners and stood on picket lines.

The Socialist Equality Party has published a new pamphlet marking the 40th anniversary, The Lessons of the 1984-85 miners' strike. Order your copy here.



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