

The miners — is it back to 1972 and 1974?

Interview with Arthur Scargill



First, I'd like your views on what the miners actually achieved in the recent battle over pit closures, and what you think the wider consequences might be for future Government strategy, and for other sections of the working class.

I doubt whether the recent dispute between the coalminers and the Government can be described as a total victory for the miners; talk of victory is premature. The Government sidestepped the issue because they realised they could not win. The miners had an unanswerable case. There was massive public support but most important of all there was massive trade union support.

But what it did do — and this in a sense can be described as a qualified victory — was demonstrate vividly that if the working class are determined then they can win against this or any other government practising capitalist economic policy. To that extent the working class movement received a lesson, a lesson that provided they are prepared to back up their demands by militant industrial action they can force governments to change course and employers to concede demands which at one stage would have seemed impossible to win.

To that extent it was a victory; but nevertheless it's got to be recognised that the Government merely avoided an actual confrontation. Bearing in mind that the miners were only on strike in South Wales, in Kent, the majority of Scotland, 15,000 in Yorkshire and 4 pits in Durham — to concede the claim within 36 hours of that taking place appears to me to be a very premature decision on the part of the ruling class, and that's the reason I say that they avoided the issue. They were not prepared to take the miners on, and I think the main reason was because if other workers had become involved in the fight that the miners were spearheading for jobs it would have had wide political consequences that could possibly have brought down this Government. I'm convinced that other sections of the working class movement would have *joined* the miners and not merely supported their fight. They would have identified with the miners and recognised the same need to fight against a Government determined to sack them and to deindustrialise Britain. So I think that the wider consequences in that sense were recognised by the ruling class and the Conservative Government.

It clearly indicates that if the working class movement are prepared to understand and recognise that the Tory government and the class

Interviewed by Dave Priscott

enemy — in this sense the employers — introduce policies which lower living standards, which create a loss of jobs, which de-industrialise whole areas of Britain, the only way in which it can be opposed is by the same method demonstrated by the dockers when their jobs were threatened and by the miners when their jobs and their pits were threatened. So to that extent there's a very important lesson to learn for the whole of the working class movement. Mind you, it's a lesson that's being constantly brought to the attention of the working class — the Miners' Strikes in 1972 and 1974, and the Upper Clyde battle in the 1970s. Time and time again we've had the lessons brought vividly to the forefront and yet we still have not reached a point where the working class understands, or the trade union movement understands fully, that they need to be politically as well as industrially involved.

In some industries now unemployment and short time working has gone so far that there are very real problems in seeing how to develop industrial action. How should we try to build unity between employed and unemployed workers, to overcome the problem that some workers are not in the strong position that miners are?

One great feature of the mineworkers' union is that we do not sever the connection of an unemployed miner — or of a retired miner. We still regard them as members of this union, although we do not charge them any contributions. We charge higher contributions when men are working than we normally would do, and thus preserve their membership if at some stage they find themselves unemployed, retired early, sick or on compensation. Therefore, they're protected.

I think we need to develop an understanding in the trade union movement that our responsibilities extend beyond those directly at the point of production to those who have been made redundant and who now number over 3 million. There is an enormous reservoir of working class anger and frustration, which ought to be tapped, and utilised. The trade union movement as a whole has got to come to terms with this. I'm against making special unions for the unemployed. I think it is a dangerous diversion because all that happens is you organise people who really have not got effective industrial muscle. It is much better if the trade unions to which they belong recognise that they still belong. If they are still recognised as being in membership then they identify with those still working. And more important — those that are still working recognise these people as being members of the union, and therefore have an obligation to fight on their behalf. Of course the prime fight would be for the right to work. By doing this we could involve the tremendous reservoir of unemployed people in massive political action.

We went through the experience of struggle against the Tory government under Heath in 1970-74, and here we are in struggle against another Tory government not so many years after. Would you expect the present period to be a more or less simple re-run of the previous scenario, or do you think there are any important differences between the strategy of this Government and the strategy of the Heath government, and perhaps differences in the labour movement and in public opinion, that create new problems?

I think there are enormous differences between this Government and the Heath administration in terms of their application of Conservative policy. It's true that the working class movement learned a lot of lessons from 1970-74 but the ruling class learnt a lot of lessons as well. They were committed to introducing an incomes policy when they became the Government. This would involve new legislation covering the whole range of industrial relations and, in essence, curb opposition from the trade unions. Their new legislation has effectively been shattered and shown to be impotent by the resistance of the

dockers and the miners in recent months.

The fundamental philosophy of this Government is exactly the same as all other Conservative governments, but what's changed is that the nature of the system has become that much sharper because capitalism finds itself in an increasing crisis. The tensions and the contradictions within that system are now so apparent that they're having to utilise methods that they would not normally have used because they could have approached the thing more subtly. It's necessary that the trade union and labour movement understand that the fight against this Government has got to be conducted in a totally different way to the battle we conducted in the 1970s because of the changed circumstances, the involvement of the new legislation, and the fact that the impact of the media is absolutely incredible, which has a conditioning effect upon the outlook of ordinary men and women. So to that extent, I think, we have to recognise that the fight against this Government is more nakedly political because of what they're doing than at any previous time, probably since the 1930s.

The point you make about the impact of the media leads directly on to another aspect that I'd like your views on. How deep are the problems that government and media propaganda might have caused for us amongst sections of the working class — bearing in mind that the whole working class is not at the level of the miners and dockers? Miners and dockers can win a strike but they can't win a general election unless a lot of other people go along with them! So I'd like your views on how deep the problems might be, and what kind of steps the movement should take to overcome these problems and political confusions.

Political confusion is not something that happens accidentally; it is deliberately introduced by the mass media. The daily newspapers are constantly pouring out a campaign of hate and vilification against left wing Labour leaders like Tony Benn or trade union leaders like myself, and constantly conditioning the wider trade union movement not merely to dislike, but in many cases, to hate the people concerned, and to hate also the ideas for which they stand. This is the kind of confusion that is created, but it's deliberate confusion created by a very sophisticated ruling class. One of the things that sadden me is that in spite of the barrage of filth, smear and distortion by the capitalist media, the working class, the trade union and labour movement, has still not come to terms with the need for a mass circulation daily newspaper.

I know that we've got the *Morning Star* and that it tries to do a job in combating the media, but let me say quite frankly that the *Morning Star* at the present time has got a lot of problems. It's a paper that I would criticise very heavily in terms of its layout and presentation particularly the portraying of industrial matters and particularly in the kind of application day by day of the issues facing the British people. I'm saying that in a constructive way because I remember the old *Daily Worker* which was a splendid paper, and to me the way that the *Daily Worker* operated is, or should be, an object lesson to the *Morning Star* today. The *Morning Star* should be converted to a tabloid or its going to die. It's got to be changed in such a way that it becomes a more popular paper. It's got to carry better industrial news. There has been so much argumentation taking place in that paper on issues that are really not understood or talked about by ordinary men and women on the factory floor, that this in itself serves to put people off purchasing it. And therefore I think that the *Morning Star* has got to take stock of the situation and, sooner rather than later, change the whole format — making a popular presentation of putting across real socialist ideas.

But the second thing is probably more important, and that is that the Labour Party, the trade union movement and the whole labour movement has got to launch its own daily newspaper. Instead of

taking on the capitalist class in their own way we've got to have an entirely new concept. We've got in the National Union of Mineworkers a number of newspapers, including the *Yorkshire Miner*, doing a magnificent propaganda job, in combating the vile filth that comes out in the capitalist media. We pay for it through our contributions and we have a circulation to all our members and a massive readership of approaching 90%. We ought to launch a daily newspaper in the trade union movement on the same basis — paid for by the subscription of trade unionists, paid for possibly by the subscription of members of the Labour Party. You could have a newspaper circulating to at least 10 million people, and that really wouldn't cost all that much per week per member, but we would have a massive weapon to combat the filth and the vile smears constantly perpetrated in the capitalist media. This is a policy decision that's got to be taken sooner rather than later by the trade union and labour movement. But if they go along the same path as many left wing journals have gone in the past, it will be doomed to destruction because it will fall into the trap of presenting 'pure' socialist ideas in a way that nobody wants to read. We have to grasp that people want to read newspapers which are written in a popular way. I don't believe that socialist newspapers have got to be drab and dreary. There is no reason why we can't write our stories in a popular fresh way that will appeal, particularly to young people who don't normally read about politics. And if we do that in the way that we do with the *Yorkshire Miner* we know from experience that we can win the hearts and minds of ordinary workers.

I wasn't surprised that the aspirations and the hopes of many people in 1974 were dashed. If one looks at the history of our movement you can see readily that this was likely to happen. The Labour Party up to 1980-1 has been a party of social democracy, although its original concept was one of a party of socialism, and that's produced a conflict. We had the defeat of a Conservative government in 1974 and we replaced it by a Labour government not pledged to socialist change but merely to reform varying parts of the existing capitalist system.

There has to be a recognition that the trade union movement in the first instance has to change. We have to get trade unionists convinced of the need for political transformation of society. We have to persuade the Trades Union Congress to effectively fight for socialist alternative policies; that really is at the centre of the argument. If we can convince the TUC of the need for socialist change as opposed to social democratic reform, then we're on our way to a socialist society. If we believe that the left wing dominated NEC of the Labour Party is able to bring this about we're living in a fool's paradise. This is not going to happen and I think that the examples following the 24 January Wembley Conference when the constitutional changes were made, are a clear indication of this. The fact is that there are elements in the trade union movement who are determined, at all costs, to retain the status quo in society.

Time and time again you will listen on radio and television to trade union leaders who have said: 'I'm for the mixed economy, I'm for part free enterprise because it's essential to our way of life.' I'm not too sure what they mean by 'our way of life' but I do know the essence of what



In 1974 when the Heath government went out there was, by and large, a very good confident feeling on the Left — which didn't last very long! — and five years later we had a swing to the right and a Thatcher government in. It seems to me quite crucial not only to think about how we get the Tories out but how we avoid going back to the square one of 1974. Why do you think the hopes that many of the Left had in 1974 were dashed? What can we do to avoid a similar situation arising when we've got rid of this Government?

they say. The effect of what they say is that when Labour becomes the government of the day instead of it being committed to socialist change, it's merely a government of social reform within the existing system; when a Conservative government is re-elected it completely undoes all that's been done by the previous Labour administration, and that shouldn't surprise anyone. Because if you tinker with capitalism, if you seek to make it operate better than Conservative governments do, you will inevitably fail and will always produce the

conditions which lead to defeat in a general election of that government and its replacement by a Conservative administration.

I don't blame the working people of this country for the election defeat two years ago; I blame the Labour government for their determination to impose an incomes policy, their determination to impose public expenditure cuts, their decision to increase public expenditure in only one field, and that was in the field of defence. All these things were directly in line with the philosophy of a capitalist system. You will also find that their reliance on the International Monetary Fund became a cornerstone of their survival as they saw it. Instead of taking the challenge presented by the IMF as a direct challenge to the authority of the elected Labour government, and saying that, faced with that, we take into common ownership the means of production, distribution and exchange, they once again tried to reform the capitalist system under which we live. That's mainly why the hopes and aspirations of people in 1974 were dashed — because when we achieved the industrial victory we did not have the class understanding to translate that industrial victory into a political victory. Yes, we won a battle, in the industrial sense, but we certainly didn't win the war in the political sense.

Until we convince the whole trade union movement of the need to commit the Labour Party to socialist policies and to sustain them



when it becomes the government of the day in its decision to transform society, then we shall have difficulty in achieving a socialist Britain.

But things are changing. And that leads on to the second part of your question. An interesting phenomenon is developing in the sense that we can see — for the first time, I think — members of the Party taking a more left wing stand than members of the trade union movement. Up to the 1970s by and large the Labour Party National Executive was dominated by the Right, and right wing policies always

emanated from that body. Any left wing challenges that came, came from the trade union movement, whether it was on the question of unilateral nuclear disarmament when Frank Cousins took on the whole establishment or on the question of incomes policy when many trade union leaders opposed the concept put forward by the Labour government. Today we see it slightly in reverse. We see that the National Executive of the Party is more to the left than, say, the Trades Union Congress General Council, and this can be shown by the kind of policies that emanate from the two organisations. I've got a feeling that it's having its effect in the trade union movement but more slowly than I would like to see.

The overwhelming need is to try and win the hearts and minds of ordinary trade unionists for a fundamental alternative socialist philosophy. We have to convince our members that the struggle for wages and conditions is not in itself enough. It is not sufficient to win a struggle for a wage increase that can be eroded by a government decision a few days later. We have to convince our people that there is a direct political challenge that affects their standard of life, that affects their very existence. There will be pieces of legislation which require the mass mobilisation and opposition of the trade union and labour movement. For example, we have to oppose the Employment Act. A failure to do so is a betrayal of all that our forefathers fought for. We have to struggle against a Conservative administration that increases out of all proportion its defence expenditure and as a direct consequence lowers the living standards of ordinary people, and at the same time threatens the whole of our society by bringing us that step nearer to a nuclear holocaust.

It seemed to me the roots of the setback in 1974 to a certain extent rested with the Left themselves. The Left had been fairly united up to 1974 but the social contract divided the Left and led to great confusion at shopfloor level. It seems to me that this question of keeping the Left united, and of working for a situation where a pure con trick cannot again take in quite a lot of good left wingers as it did then, is one of the problems we have to think about in looking ahead to the next stage. Would you agree?

I think that it's perfectly true that a lot of left wingers or so-called left wingers were taken in by the social con trick in the 1974 period. It's also true to say that there are still a number of left wingers who firmly believe that this is an alternative to struggle. They are convinced that if we introduce some kind of an incomes policy the system under which we live will in some mysterious way regulate the wages system to pay those people, say in unions which are not noted for struggle, a similar increase to those which are noted for struggle. This never works and if one examines what happened between 1974 and 1979, in real terms the living standards of all workers fell dramatically. So, contrary to the argument that it would increase living standards and would enable the differentials between the two groups (those who are not so strong industrially or politically compared with those who are) to come closer together — what happened is that all those groups lost ground. It worries me that we still have people in our movement who believe that we can have some kind of a regulator, some kind of incomes policy, within a Labour government's election programme. I reject this absolutely and totally. You cannot plan one element of a totally unplanned economy. You can't have a system of free enterprise and then seek to regulate one factor within it. It just doesn't work, it's a contradiction in terms.

You can only struggle by the use of free collective bargaining and argue with your individual employer, be he private or be he the government, and demand the highest possible wage. If we do that, we also win the struggle for those so-called weaker sections of the working class. One of the greatest achievements that we had in the mining industry in 1974 was that we portrayed to our members a political

conviction that we hadn't been able to portray for 25 or 30 years. Our people became more politically aware in 24 hours than they had in 24 years because they were involved in the struggle.

Immediately after that strike the nurses were involved in a struggle for wage increases. It is often forgotten, probably because it is an object lesson in what we should do, that the Yorkshire miners took strike action in support of the nurses' demands. For the first time, to my knowledge, the Yorkshire miners took industrial strike action in support of another section, namely the nurses, whom they considered were least able to help themselves in the industrial sense. There was recognition that mass struggle on the part of other sections of the working class movement was the answer. You don't regulate by an incomes policy, by social compact, by social contract or con trick, call it what you will, the wages of workers, you only reduce the purchasing power of workers, while the dividends and profits of those who own and control society make very rapid progress. There is still no guarantee that the next Labour government will do any different to what the one did that was elected in 1974. But the fact that we now have had constitutional changes within the Party means that for the first time we have an opportunity of changing those people in Parliament who do not subscribe to the concept of socialism. I believe that each constituency should look closely at its MPs and say to themselves 'is this Member of Parliament going along to fight for an alternative socialist system in society; is our MP trying to put into operation the decisions of the Labour Party Conference, is he or she fighting in the interests of those of us who form the Constituency Labour Party?' If the MP is not doing those things, then they should change the MP as quickly as possible and replace him or her with someone who will. That, in itself, will have a fundamental effect upon the outcome of decision making at Westminster and the choice of Leader will be influenced as a result of that. That's the reason that the Left were not too worried whether it was the 50% of the PLP or the 33/33/33, or the 40% for the trade unions that went through at the special conference in January. It was better that it was the 40% that went through, but nevertheless any one of those constitutional amendments would have been acceptable because for the first time it gives the right to other sections of the movement to have a say in who the leader of the Party is. More important, you have to recognise that the election of the leader of the Party is inextricably tied up with the reselection process of MPs and if we don't recognise the power that we've now got in our hands — I say this as a member of the Labour Party — then we will be guilty of a monumental misunderstanding of the effect of the constitutional changes which have taken place.

How do you see a socialist, revolutionary change taking place in Britain? Do you see it purely by Act of Parliament or do you think we ought to storm Buckingham Palace?

Anybody who believes that we shall achieve socialism simply by electing a number of MPs is deluding themselves. We will win parliamentary power, we will win real political power, we will win working class power to the extent that we organise people in this country to fight for, and sustain, the alternative socialist system that we want to see. Parliaments do not necessarily reflect the views of ordinary people, and if you have a Parliament that is not being pushed by a working class movement demanding, expecting and requiring change, then you will not get that change.

The two programmes on television on the question of subversion, telephone tapping and the interference of the state machine in the private individual lives of trade union leaders, politicians and organisations, leave one in no doubt that the system will go to any length to try and defeat those organisations, political parties and individuals who want to see a change come about democratically. The

arguments about democracy are really laughable when you look at what's happening with the organised state machine. There is massive state intervention at the present time, in the whole process of democracy.

I think that the only way that we're going to achieve real working class power is by the involvement of all sections of the working class. The divisions that exist, the bans and proscriptions that did exist have got to be removed. All of us have to work together as working class representatives to bring about the political change that we want to see. I'm convinced that we can get it, provided in the first instance the trade union and labour movement are committed to it. If that happens it will inevitably commit the Parliamentary Labour Party to bringing about that change and in that sense I believe that we can bring about a political change through Parliament, but only if it's backed by mass mobilisation of ordinary working people desirous of change. If we do that then we've got the basis for a real revolutionary change in British politics that I want to see; the basis for the kind of system of society that the socialist pioneers in our movement dreamed about and fought for all their lives.

Now can I say one thing that's rather contentious but nevertheless I believe that it's got to be said. The labour movement has got to come to terms with the fact that it doesn't always practise what it preaches. We've got a lot of hypocrites in the labour movement. I am, and always have been, unequivocally for, the system of election known as proportional representation. It seems to me to be the height of stupidity, and certainly hypocritical, to argue *for* democracy — and then argue *against* democracy because you say that PR is a system that can't work in the interests of the working class. Those people who say that are really saying that we can't win 50% of the electorate in Britain for an alternative policy, and my answer is this: If we can't win 50% of the electorate in Britain for an alternative policy then quite frankly we ought not to be putting forward our political views and policies for their consideration. But of course we can give the lie to this. In 1945, 1950 and 1951, if you take into account the total votes cast for the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Irish labour movement parties and other working class parties, the total votes cast were over 50%. That, I think, is highly significant because in those three instances it was probably the most radical platform ever put forward by the Labour Party. The only time we began to lose votes was when we attempted to capture the so-called middle ground. We may have captured some of the middle ground but we lost a hell of a lot of the working class ground. It may well be that proportional representation in the first instance could be regarded as harmful in the sense that it may defeat some of our candidates, but in the long term it is the only real answer because people will then be faced with one stark choice. They will have to vote for a political party of the Left or one of the multifarious marionettes of capitalism on the Right, whether it be Shirley Williams' Social Democrats, the Liberals, or the Tories. There will be a clear understanding that all those parties stand for the status quo, and that the Left parties stand for a change in the system of society.

A consensus has emerged amongst many of the Left — Tony Benn, the Tribune Group, the Communist Party and a number of others — a consensus to the effect that it isn't enough just to say capitalism is bloody awful and you need a socialist revolution. The Left has got to be able to put forward, right now, an alternative economic strategy to that of the Government which is not a total socialist revolution but which begins to make inroads on capitalism. Most versions of the alternative economic strategy argue for some immediate extension of public ownership. One of the items of contention on the Left is to what degree, and at what time and under what conditions, would we go for workers' participation on the boards of nationalised industries. I'd like your views on the alternative economic

strategy as a principle, and on the particular question of the role of nationalised industries and the possibility at some stage of workers' participation.

There are two fundamental questions facing the labour movement at the present time. One is for an immediate alternative economic strategy and the second is for a long term economic and political strategy that will transform society. On the first one I think that we've got to say quite clearly that we want to see an extension of nationalisation. We need to introduce immediate import controls to protect industry in this nation and to protect worker's jobs. We require subsidies from the government. We need the restoring of all the cuts that have been made in public expenditure. We need to regenerate British industry. We need to build up our own car industry, our own manufacturing base. We need a huge cut, 50% at least, in our arms bill. We should argue for unilateral nuclear disarmament. There should be no Cruise or Trident missiles, no American bases.

We have to present a policy to the working class of this country that appears to be a credible alternative policy, without necessarily taking us to the political stage that we discussed before. In other words we want an immediate policy that can bring substantial changes in economic, social and political terms. That's why I'm arguing for a whole new policy on the part of a future Labour government — or even a Conservative administration — brought about by mass pressure.

The second question that you pose is far more fundamental and I might as well say right at the start I disagree totally and utterly with the concept of workers' control. Peggy Kahn and I wrote a booklet called *The Myth of Workers Control*. It's the apologists' alternative to socialism. It is a mythology that's grown up particularly in those who belong to the Institute of Workers Control, who see it as an alternative to the mass struggle of workers for alternative policies. A recent booklet written by Tony Topham in reply to our booklet demonstrates the inadequacy of their arguments. For example, he says that the miners' union has concentrated practically exclusively on the fight for wage increases, wanting to relive or recapture, he says, the achievements of 1972 and 1974, with hardly any attention being paid to the struggle for jobs. The booklet was published by the Institute of Workers Control in the very week that the miners in Yorkshire produced an 86% majority vote to take industrial action if any pits were threatened with closure and one week before the miners took strike action in defence of their jobs. The second thing he went on to say was that new tactics should be tried by the NUM. For example, there ought to be, instead of a massive national strike, a policy of stopping investment like the Vale of Beauvoir where it would 'hurt the National Coal Board most'. Had Topham done his research a little more thoroughly he would have understood that this is exactly what the National Coal Board want. They not only wouldn't be harmed by it but they would positively welcome any attempt by the NUM to stop investment because they don't want to develop at the present time — they've even slowed down the development at Selby.

I firmly believe that the struggle in our society today can only be advanced by putting into operation the principle and the concept of free collective bargaining. If we can win wages and conditions under the concept of free collective bargaining then there is no reason why we can't also win policy decisions as far as unemployment, investment, planning and expansion in industry is concerned. There has to be recognition that the trade union movement, through its normal processes of free collective bargaining, can bring about the changes that we want to see, even under the present system. The only

time we can really have workers' control is under a socialist system of society. I reject the argument that you can have some kind of workers' control within capitalism. What you *can* have is class collaboration within capitalism. Those who follow this argument in essence seek to perpetuate the existing system. It is only by politicising our membership that we will ever bring about the irreversible shift towards a socialist system in society. Therefore I don't agree that we ought to be talking about workers on the boards, irrespective of whether it is in private or nationalised industry. Once we've put workers on the boards they become bureaucrats for a start. Secondly, there is a conflict of interests. Thirdly, workers themselves distrust those people sitting on the boards. And fourthly, those who actually sit on the boards of directors, or boards of management, begin to think with a completely different outlook from when they were workers' representatives.

There must, in my view, be a quite clear distinct difference between those who own and control and those who represent workers. There *is* a class conflict, we *do* live in a class society. There are two classes in our society — those who own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange and those who work by hand and by brain. There is no middle class as is suggested by those academics and intellectuals who would like to stratify society. There are only two classes in the strict political sense. The only way in which we can achieve socialism, in the first instance, is by involving in mass struggle workers for an alternative economic policy now, but one that does not include or involve workers' control, seats on boards of management, or worker participation. I am for the trade union movement itself exercising power, exercising authority and compelling management, be it private or nationalised, to do certain things in terms of investment, planning, extension and development in the same way that we've been able to do on wages and conditions for many, many years. The very fact that miners, within 36 hours of 40,000 of them coming out on strike, were able to change a Government's course as far as pit closures were concerned is a clear demonstration that it can be done. If we sat on the board of management and looked at the economics of the coal industry many people would have been convinced, indeed there are those on our National Executive and in our union who have been convinced in the past, that if the Coal Board haven't got the money we can't have the wages or we can't argue a case against them. There is a failure to recognise that *political* decisions are required to save jobs, increase investment and change fundamentally the way in which our industry works.

I am for workers exercising real control through their union in the form of free collective bargaining. I am against the whole concept of participation which only serves to perpetuate the capitalist system. •

Housing Action in an Industrial Suburb

Ann Stewart

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This book focuses on Saltley in Birmingham where residents, owning long leaseholds, campaigned to obtain the right of purchase enshrined in the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967. The book assesses the role of law within the social relationships inherent in the provision of good housing in industrial areas, questions why the 1967 Act was not working, what action could be taken to make it work and whether owner-occupation can ever provide the basis for decent housing.

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