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ARTHUR Scargill is sitting behind an iron-framed oak desk in primary school in wartime south Yorkshire. He is only six but already he stands out among his 50 or so classmates. Some of them call him *brissen* - cocky - always needing to be right - always verbally outsmarting them. Others admire his superior ways and he has already acquired a small but devoted following in the playground at Worsborough Dale school. They think he is something special. They are right.

Like many of the other boys, he will begin his working life at 15 at the pits. But he will soon escape. He will travel the world, discussing its future with Khrushchev in the Kremlin, Castro in Cuba; go on lecture tours of America; rap out orders in snazzy offices where his portraits hang on the wall; debate in the Oxford and Cambridge unions; stay in a flat in London's fashionable Barbican, close by Tory cabinet ministers.

He will be an important visitor to 10 Downing Street; have a chauffeur, luxury cars, Airedales, ponies, smart suits, a large salary and generous expenses. His verbal smartness will swell into forceful political rhetoric. His enemies will be some of the most influential people in the land. His devoted followers will be members of one of the country's most powerful unions.

Forty years on from the time the blue-eyed little boy sat behind that desk, he will be locked in a conflict that stretches the nation's political system, its method of maintaining law and order and its economy. He will be one of the most important, most admired, most hated, most feared men in the country.

HOW DID he become so special? The most obvious clues lie in his parents. Arthur was an only child. His father, Harold, still alive at 78, was a miner but went into the RAF in the war, so Arthur's mother, Alice, had her young son largely to herself. She doted on him. Years later, when he came home from work, his dinner would be on the table, his slippers waiting: if they weren't, Arthur would be upset. But mother didn't mind: to her Arthur was always on a pedestal. He was devastated when she died when he was 17.

The vital input from his father was political. Although the family's material circumstances were by no means bad - when Arthur was three, the family moved from the basic industrial cottage where he had been born to a comfortable crescent home with two bedrooms and a bathroom - Harold Scargill was a devoted

People

PROFILE

What drives Arthur Scargill?

Andrew Stephen probes the background and political philosophy of ARTHUR SCARGILL, the most controversial figure in Britain today

BY NOW Arthur was working. Although his mother had wanted to protect him from it, Arthur had gone to the pit at 15. It was a traumatic experience for him: the noise, the dust in the screening sheds (on the surface) and later at the coalface itself were almost too much. Yet the job made sense for anyone who wanted to change the face not just of industry but of Britain too. Increasingly sophisticated automation meant that the number of men needed was certain to decline, just as many pits where sooner or later stocks would be geologically exhausted and doomed. These constant threats miners simply strengthened the loyalty to both their industry and their union.

And at the busy Woolley pit, north of Barnsley, the young Arthur found plenty of reasons for struggle, straightforwardly coming a self-appointed leader of the apprentices who, he insisted, deserved better treatment.

Up to then it had been a relatively peaceful time for management-union relations at Woolley: the union leaders were



Richard Cole



visit Moscow again; spend a May Day with Mick McGahey, hardline CP man and fellow NUM executive member, in Cuba; surprise delegates at a TUC conference by clapping his applauders. East European-style, after a speech; approve the Moscow Olympics; denounce Solidarity in Poland; and criticise the dispatch of the Falklands task force.

But his international interests did not mean any relaxation in his efforts at home. He was committed to changing the Labour party, so that all the left could join it and change it. Being a social democratic party, Labour could only go so far along the road to socialism; it would then be replaced by a *real* socialist party. Power in the union could and should mean power in the party, for trade unions had constitutional links with the Labour party. Indeed, they were its paymasters.

In the late 1970s, the power of the miners' union within the Labour party in south Yorkshire - and beyond - grew rapidly. Miners' MPs such as Roy Mason, a moderate and former cabinet minister, found themselves fighting for their political lives when faced with the onslaught. Some, like Brian Key, Euro MP for South Yorkshire since 1979, were ousted. His place in Strasbourg is now held by a close political and union ally of Arthur's.

In the fight to take control of the Labour party, a new weapon had been invented by the miners - the flying delegate. Union men were delegated to attend party business meetings. If the delegates missed a mining shift to attend, they were paid by the union and given fares and expenses. A miners' caucus meeting was often held before Labour meetings, at which the line would be discussed; the area general secretary would notify delegates of the time and place.

Nationally, Labour's constitution changed and trade unions could have a major say in appointing party leaders. Things were going Arthur's way. And all these changes were completely legal, all above board.

IN 1982, the inevitable happened: Arthur was elected president of the union, receiving more than 70% of the vote. Straightaway the union HQ was moved from London to Sheffield: south Yorkshire, after all, was his power base.

Within the union there were surprises. He spoke out against making strikes easier still by lowering the majority needed to only 50%: that, Arthur explained, would always give the bosses the opportunity to say half the workforce opposed a strike.

met and organised the struggle with officials from other unions in technology, in argument. Reminding everyone of his part in a particularly contentious conflict was created, why there was struggle. Would there be trade unions after the revol-

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BUILDING that power
through struggle - had begun
almost as soon as Arthur
arrived at Woolley. Struggles
against management would
come, but first he would win
power by struggling against the
union bosses. The moderate
officials at the pit, sensing what
was happening, tried to expel
him from the union when he led
a strike against their wishes. He
was quickly reinstated by area
head office but he became
convinced that the management
and the union were victimising
him.

To play his chosen role to the
full he needed better tools: he
needed an education. He had,
after all, failed the 11-plus,
Marx had argued that the ruling
classes would provide the
workers with education which
would then become a weapon
for fighting them. He decided to
attend a day-release course at
Leeds University, funded by the
taxpayer, studying economics,
social history - and industrial
relations. Many of the other
miners on the course did it so
they could ultimately join the
NCB management; there was
some talk of Arthur taking that
route too (as assistant manager,
personnel, at one of the pits),
but nothing came of it. He was
still heavily involved in union
struggles; when he married it
was to the daughter of a
prominent union man.

Like Arthur's mother, his
wife Anne is a strong person-
ality: he has joked that she
would leave him if he changed
his politics. They have one
daughter, Margaret, now a
student.

He was beginning to get a
perspective, to see what some of
the problems would be in
overthrowing capitalism. Piece-
wages, for example, would be a
major hindrance. They meant
that miners were paid according
to how much coal they actually
mined: some would earn more
than others, some pits more
than others. It produced compe-
tition; it divided the workers.

But, like all young Commu-
nists, Arthur soon faced an
ideological dilemma: should he
take the struggles directly to the
people, and stand for election,
or should he keep them
confined to industry? When he
was 22, for the first (and, at

struggle; make it national. Cars,
minibuses, last-second switches,
changes of tactics, organised
chaos. The police could hardly
cope.

Strike vote

This particular struggle faded
away, but the new militancy
had given the moderate union
leadership a shock. They agreed,
as an appeasement, to make
future strikes easier after indus-
trial disputes in 1969 and 1970:
the majority vote needed in a
strike ballot was lowered from
66% to 55%. Before long, that
dry run, the struggle over the
eight-hour day when Arthur had
been in the forefront, would pay
off and 57% of the country's
miners would vote to strike
over pay.

It would prove to be a strike
that would not only irrevocably
change the miners' union. It
would also change the face of
British politics. It would ultima-
tely lead to the downfall of the
government and its prime
minister, Edward Heath: his
place as leader of the Conserva-
tive party would be taken by
Margaret Thatcher.

Arthur, now 33, was in his
element and became official
spokesman of the strike com-
mittee in his area. More
important, he was put in charge
of picketing. Initially there were
disagreements inside the strike
committee on the subject. Do
you send your troops to many
places, the enemy's vulnerable
points, such as power stations,
coke and coal depots, and
diffuse your effort - or do you
concentrate *en masse* some-
where? Arthur insisted on the
latter. Marx, too, had taught
that industry itself would create
better communications and
transport, which the workers
could then exploit to centralise
their numerous struggles.

Hundreds of men were sent
by Arthur to Ipswich docks,
where a heaving mass stopped
coal being unloaded. The flying
picket had been invented. Many
of them were put up in their
study bedrooms by students at
Essex University, where two
cultures inevitably clashed:
revolutionary women students,
having expressed solidarity with
the miners, were hurt and
confused to find themselves the
subjects of ribald sexual
remarks.

But this was only a rehearsal
for a greater struggle, as are all
struggles until the final victory
dawns. East Anglia was still out
in the boondocks. What was
needed was a mass demo
somewhere central, somewhere
visible. One rainy weekend
Arthur seized his chance. The
phone rang in the strike HQ in
Barnsley: more men were
needed at the Saltley coke depot
in Birmingham. Within hours,
Arthur had jumped in his car
and was on the way down
himself.

Everything was well set up
by the strike organisers. The
Yorkshire lads sent to Birming-
ham stayed at the city's
Communist party HQ. Arthur

Generators' Union.
Different workers from differ-
ent unions, after all, had to
centralise their struggle. Within
days, Arthur was directing the
outdoor struggles with a mega-
phone. Thousands of men
clashed with thousands of
police. Things became violent.

When Arthur saw, coming
over the brow of a hill, a silk
trade-union banner at the head
of thousands of approaching
miners, everything he believed
in crystallised. It was glorious.
The chief constable, fearing
death and destruction, ordered:
"Close the gates." It was
Arthur's finest moment, his
finest struggle, to date; he
clambered on to a men's
lavatory roof and addressed the
crowd through a *police* mega-
phone.

IT MADE ARTHUR, at the
same time it began the political
criticisation of the prime minis-
ter, Edward Heath, who the
following year was to try to
counter yet another miners'
strike with a three-day week.
The miners finally accepted a
£103m pay settlement, but
Arthur advised them to vote
against acceptance. He even
went to Downing Street to
discuss it all with Heath. Finally
Heath had to vacate No 10 for a
man Arthur was to regard as
another Tory - Harold Wilson.
But Arthur, the victor, had
become a media figure; his face
was always on TV. He was
nationally known.

Luck too played its part in his
rapid climb to the top. First the
union area's full-time compen-
sation agent, a Communist,
died; he left vacant a job vital to
anyone who wanted to advance,
because the agent was always
seen to be fighting the manage-
ment on behalf of "the lads",
always able to give the stricken
miner the good news that he
was getting compensation.
Arthur swept in with 28,050
votes, 18,000 more than his
nearest rival. When the area
president died in 1973 Arthur
quickly won his job - but kept
the vital compensation agent's
position too.

In Yorkshire he was now, at
35, King Arthur: the youngest
NUM regional president in
history.

He was working harder than
ever, sometimes on the verge of
workaholicism: at one stage he
had to take time off work, and
he also developed a nervous
twitch. But he would invariably
normally be reached, even at
weekends, at his office on the
phone. He had a lawyer's eye
for detail: he had skillfully
handled the inquiry into the
1973 Lofthouse colliery
disaster, when seven men died.
He revitalised the union offices,
rushing them into the 20th
century. Marx had predicted it
would be possible, that the
workers should take advantage
of bourgeois technology to fight
the class war.

Out went the ancient type-
writers; in came brand-new
IBM electrics. Calculators, tape
recorders, batteries of aides.
Arthur liked to be a step ahead,

ganda play by repeatedly
insisting that the coal board had
a hit list of pits to close. He
could not lose, because pits were
always closing because of
exhaustion and geological con-
ditions, and any competent
management would always
have some kind of list.

King Arthur did not get
everything right in the struggles.
The union held two ballots on
calls for industrial action in
1982 and 1983. But the miners
rejected them decisively.

Finally, however, a strike -
the current one - did come
without a ballot being held.
(Interestingly, during the dis-
pute, the union rules have been
changed so a strike could now
be called with a majority of only
50% plus.) The beauty of it all,
again, is that it is all legal and
above board, all within the
union rules.

And now the big struggle is
on. Arthur's followers believe
they have nothing to lose, but
their chains, and a world to win.
Marx said as much. But now,
each has lost an estimated
average of £3,000 in wages. Two
have been killed on picket lines.
There have been 4,000 arrests,
1,000 injuries.

Whatever the outcome of
Scargill's strike - as the
government has dubbed it -
further struggle inevitably lies
ahead, whether to expand on
success or to regain lost ground.

But before it came about
there was time for Arthur to

probably; but there'd be no need
for them, would there?

There could be no collabora-
tion with, no attempt to live in,
a capitalist society. Even
workers' control was diabolical,
because it implied acceptance of
a society that had, no question
about it, to be abolished. And
did you know that miners on
bonus rates were 7,400% more
likely to be killed than ordinary
miners?

Journalists duly scribbled;
occasionally some would check
Arthur's claims, and find out
that the 7,400% claim, for
example, was based on just five
deaths, four of them on the
surface.

But if Arthur was impressing
some of the NUM members, he
was alarming the two men at
the top of the miners' union,
Lawrence Daly, the general
secretary, took Arthur apart at a
union conference in 1975.

Machiavelli's princes were mere
amateurs compared with this,
said Daly, and he was not
having it. But that year Daly
was badly injured in a car crash.
Joe Gormley, a moderate and
union president since 1971, who
made no secret of his antagon-
ism towards Scargill, later
warned him that he was not
president - yet. But everyone
knew it was only a matter of
time.

But before it came about
there was time for Arthur to