



Rodney Bickerstaffe: Working Class Leader

I am devastated to learn of the death of my close friend and trade union colleague Rodney Bickerstaffe.

I first met Rodney fifty years ago when we were both trade union officials in Yorkshire. We were both elected national officials of our unions at the same time in 1981. We were not only trade union colleagues who served together on the TUC General Council but friends who were involved in fighting against inequality and injustice both in the UK and internationally, including the campaign against anti trade union oppression wherever it raised its ugly head.

Rodney was in the forefront in the defence of Britain's National Health Service and sought justice for both employees and patients. He deplored the privatisation of the Health Service by both the Tories and New Labour; a principled position admired by trade unionists and socialists.

Rodney played an outstanding role in support of Britain's miners in the historic 1984/1985 strike. He, together with trade union leaders Jim Slater, Ron Todd, Jimmy Knapp, Ray Buckton and Ken Cameron provided moral, practical and financial support which enabled our members and women's support group to sustain its monumental struggle against the Coal Board and Government for over a year; the longest national strike in British history.

I have always had the utmost admiration for both Rodney and his wife Pat who, throughout, have always campaigned as a team. Miners will never forget the role that Rodney played in support of the 1984/1985 strike but of his role in supporting both young and old in their fight for equality and justice.

The working class has lost an outstanding leader and I have lost a close personal friend who supported me and my members during the fifty years of our friendship. Today my thoughts are with Pat and her family.

Arthur Scargill

President, National Union of Mineworkers 1982-2002

3 October 2017