



The Durham Miner



NO 13 DEC 2013

The Durham Miner is the newsletter of the Durham Miners' Association, General Secretary, Dave Hopper PO Box 6, The Miners Hall, Red Hill, Durham, DH1 4BB. Tel: 0191 3843515

www.durhamminers.org

Making a Difference in our Communities

Last year's hugely disappointing and unjust decision of the High Court to deny our case for compensation to be awarded to miners suffering from osteoarthritis of the knee is still creating uncertainty with regards to the future finances of the DMA.

Although we have already paid £1.4M, the government's solicitors are pursuing us for a further substantial payment of costs. However, the Association and the other funding bodies are disputing the amount they are demanding and have employed an expert cost lawyer to conduct a forensic examination of the costs with a view to reducing our liability.

As we have previously explained, this haemorrhaging of funds has put in question our ability to finance the Gala but we are delighted at the response we have received to our appeal to save the Gala. Over 750 individuals and trade unions have joined the Friends of the Durham Miners' Gala and we thank them all for their generosity and hope that the donations continue to grow so we can all enjoy the day year-on-year.

And what a great day this year's Gala was – fantastic weather, massive crowds and the most impressive speeches for a decade. In my opinion, it was one of the best I have been involved in during my twenty-nine years as a Durham Miners' Association official.

The year brought other things to gladden the heart. Thatcher died and we were able to honour the promise we made at the end of the miners'

strike in 1985 and enjoy a huge party at Easington. Then, the self-confessed fascist, Paulo di Canio, was sacked as Sunderland AFC's manager. He predictably brought his political philosophy onto the training ground and, instead of inspiring the team, just bullied them like the fascist dictator he so admires.

However, while these events brought brief moments of celebration, the attacks of the Tory-led coalition continued relentlessly, pushing our communities to the brink. The coalition's policies of low wages, unemployment and the erosion of benefits are creating conditions not been seen in our towns and villages since the 1930s.

It is for this reason that the DMA embarked on a series of public meetings to contact our people directly and discuss how we can help. In order to continue this work, we have joined forces with UNITE the Union and opened a Community Advice Centre in the Miners' Offices at Red Hill which will be a campaigning centre, working in the wider communities in the county and helping people to learn new skills and fight against the cuts.

We also held two educational schools in conjunction with our Solicitors, Thompsons, to help keep our activists and former lodge officials up to date on welfare legislation, social issues and injury claims in order to improve the advice they are able to give our members.

Over the last year, we have been increasingly concerned at the activity of the extreme-right-wing English



Dave Hopper

Defence League (EDL) which recently organised a march in Shotton Colliery. The strong stand we have taken against racism and fascism has attracted a number of anonymous threatening phone calls to one member of our Executive Committee and to a local MP which has only increased our determination not to tolerate these thugs who preach hatred against minorities. We must be clear: the problems we face are a direct result of the economic and political system of this country and not the fault of ethnic minorities and we appeal to all members to stand firmly with us on this issue.

Finally, I would like to thank the new Chairman of the Association, Alan Cummings and the Executive Committee for their assistance during the year and Janet Leadbitter, our sole full time member of staff for her dedicated efforts.

I wish you all and your families a Happy Christmas and Peace and Prosperity in 2014.



Alan Cummings

Tory Coalition Piles On The Misery for the Sick and Disabled

By

Alan Cummings, DMA Chairman

Over the past year there has been no respite in the Government's campaign to attack and stigmatise the sick and disabled. As a result the Durham Miners' Tribunal Team now spends the majority of its time fighting cases where our members' Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) has been stopped.

The Work Capability Assessment process, which our disabled members are forced to attend, is now totally discredited and fundamentally flawed. ATOS, a profit-making organisation, is employed by the Government with the express purpose of reducing benefit payments. There is, therefore, an obvious conflict of interests between the assessors and the claimant, which makes an objective assessment of the claimant's condition problematic to say the least.

ATOS has also been heavily criticised for its uncaring attitude and for using assessors who are often unqualified to make judgments on complicated medical conditions. Nurses and physiotherapists are regularly asked to assess people with serious mental health issues – a task far beyond their professional capabilities.

Now, a further obstacle has been created for those who have been assessed fit for work. Since 28 October 2013, the Government has introduced a new rule. Before a claimant's case can proceed to a tribunal, the case is now subject to a 'mandatory reconsideration', which takes one month to complete.

At first glance, this may look like a measure designed to redress obvious mistakes. However, during the period of 'mandatory reconsideration', the claimant receives no benefit

payment, whereas, before this measure was introduced benefit, would be paid up to the decision of the tribunal.

Despite these problems, our Tribunal Team has won many tribunals ensuring that our members have retained the benefit they are entitled to. This is a testimony to their dedication and hard work and I thank them for all their efforts.

I would like to think we could look forward to a New Year with a more humane Government attitude to the sick and disabled but I fear that is not to be.

However, in wishing our members and their families a merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year, I can promise that the Durham Miners' Association will be here to support you in what may prove a difficult time ahead.

Durham Miners' Gala, 12 July 2014

The greatest celebration of trade union and community spirit in Europe and probably the World

Chairman Wins Compensation

Durham Miners' Association Chairman, Alan Cummings, has won a Personal Injury Claim against supermarket giant ASDA for an injury sustained at their Hartlepool store.

Durham Miners' Association solicitors, Thompsons, successfully pursued the claim against the multi-national.

ASDA admitted liability for the Chairman's injuries.

Alan Cummings urges any member or their family members who have had an accident at work, an industrial disease, a road traffic accident, on public transport or in a public place within the last 3 years to take full advantage of the Durham Miners' Association's legal service by contacting Thompsons Solicitors direct on free phone 08457 125495

Dupuytren's Fascia Disease

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council is currently taking evidence to ascertain if the use of vibratory tools causes Dupuytren's Contracture in mineworkers.

Any former mineworker who has been diagnosed with this disease should give their details to our Area Office at:

Durham Miners Association,
Red Hill, Durham, DH1 4BB
Telephone 0191 384 3515



Gala 2013

Durham Miners Honour Senghenydd Dead

One hundred years since 439 men and boys perished in the worst pit disaster in the history of British mining



Senghenydd Disaster Memorial

A DMA delegation, with black-draped banner and led by General Secretary, Dave Hopper, attended, alongside thousands of local people, the 100th anniversary commemoration, in Senghenydd, of the disaster at the village's Universal Colliery in which, at 8.00am on 14 October 1913, 439 men and boys were killed when a methane blast ripped through the pit. With 950 miners underground, the explosion was so violent it was heard 12 miles away in Cardiff and blew the cage in the Lancaster shaft (downcast) into the headgear, causing a banksman to be decapitated by a chunk of wood.

For weeks, rescue teams struggled to find survivors but it was not until November that the search was halted: 300 bodies having been discovered, the last eighteen survivors brought to bank and a rescue worker bringing the total of dead to 440. Nearly every household

in Senghenydd was hit, the disaster leaving 205 widows, 542 children and 62 dependent parents. Mine manager Edward Shaw and the owners, Lewis Merthyr Consolidated Collieries, were prosecuted. Shaw was fined £24, provoking a local newspaper headline "Miners' Lives at 1s 1½d". Today, that amounts to five and a half pence. The coal owners were also fined £10 with £5 and 5 shillings costs for not fitting the required reversible ventilation fans! The 1913 disaster followed an earlier one at the pit, in 1901, in which 82 miners were killed.

The memorial – an injured miner supported by a rescuer – is the centrepiece of a beautiful memorial garden with a wall of remembrance bearing ceramic plaques, each with the name of a dead miner and a path of memory at whose sides 150 stone flags individually commemorate a Welsh mining disaster. The DMA, whose presence was warmly welcomed, laid a wreath to honour the dead and stood proudly next to the banner and representatives of the South Wales Area NUM.



Durham Miners' Beneficial Membership

Membership of the DMA will entitle you to the following benefits of membership:

Legal Support

Through the Association's solicitors, Thompsons, the Association can offer expert support on the following issues:

Legal advice and representation where deemed appropriate in any litigation concerning an injury or disease incurred or contracted whilst working as a miner in the Durham coalfield.

Legal advice and representation where deemed appropriate for you and the members of your family if you suffer injury in a road accident, whether as a driver, passenger, cyclist or pedestrian.

Legal advice and representation where deemed appropriate in any other litigation concerning an injury or disease incurred or contracted outside the workplace.

Free initial legal advice on any matter.

A free will for you and your partner.

Low cost conveyancing.

Representation

Through our network of branch representatives and full time officials we can provide expert and experienced support and assistance with:

Mineworkers Pension Scheme entitlements.

Social Security entitlements including representation before Social Security and Medical Appeal Tribunals.

Durham Miners' Association

Tel: 0191 384 3515

Fax: 0191 386 6824

Email: admin@durhamminers.



Community Support On Its Way

Grand opening of the DMA/Unite Community Centre Friday 15 November

The Durham Miners' Association (DMA) and Unite The Union have combined forces to provide a valuable community resource to tackle the devastating effects of the Government's austerity measures in the towns and villages of County Durham.

In welcoming well over 100 community volunteers and supporters to the opening of a community centre at the DMA's Red Hill offices in Durham, Joe Rollin, Unite Community Coordinator, stressed that although the centre was to provide education and training and practical help, it was to be much more than that – it was to be a campaigning centre.

This sentiment was reinforced by Howard Beckett, from Unite's Legal Department, who explained that the aim of Unite was, 'to give communities a voice – to give hope where none exists'.

He said that Unite could teach the DMA nothing about community work but could learn every thing from them because the DMA had been looking after communities since 1869.

'It is with complete confidence, he said, 'that I can say that this project is going to be a huge success.'

Dave Hopper, DMA General Secretary, said that this was probably the most exciting time of his trade union career.

'Our communities', he said, 'are under incessant pressure every day to survive a Government which is getting away with, in my opinion, even more than Thatcher got away with.'

He thanked Unite for joining forces with the DMA and said that without its help and generosity the DMA could not have launched this venture.

He continued saying that it was heartbreaking to see the lack of opportunity and hope in our communities especially for young people. 'And this,' he said, 'in a country which is one of the richest in the world'.

He pledged that the Durham Miners' Association would support the project with 'every endeavour and all the support we can muster'.

'We have come through a lot in our time but we still have mountains to climb. Our aim is to protect our communities from abject poverty'.

'All people want is a house to live in, a job and a decent living wage.'

Dave finished with an appeal to the Labour Party: 'I only hope that if we are successful in the next election that the rewards come back to the people who support them, and who always supported them. Labour must not turn its back on the trade union movement'



Dave Hopper

The Durham Community Centre will initially be open two days a week on Wednesdays and Thursdays 10am to 3pm. If you would like to volunteer or take advantage of the services provided Ring 0191 372 7137



Howard Beckett Legal Officer Unite

DMA Denounces EDL Intimidation

Leading members of the Durham Miners' Association have received threatening telephone calls from supporters of the English Defence League(EDL).

These threats followed a march through Shotton Colliery of 200 supporters of the EDL, mostly from outside the area, on 9 November 2013.

Many who made up this tribe of fascists and racists had travelled from as far as Edinburgh and Sheffield. Only a handful were from the Shotton area and what seems to have incensed them was the flying of the DMA Blackhall Lodge banner at a counter-demonstration.

Dave Hopper, DMA General Secretary, said, 'We cannot allow these right wing extremists to intimidate us.'

'Throughout history, fascists have used the same tactics. They wait for periods of economic hardship and then play on the genuine concerns of ordinary working class people. Instead of blaming the capitalist system, the banks and greedy employers as the source of our problems, they try to channel popular discontent against minorities



and to foster racial hatred.

'Durham's miners have a proud history of opposing fascism and encouraging the international solidarity of all people. Many miners died fighting fascism during the Spanish Civil War and in every one of our villages there is a war memorial to brave men who died fighting German and Italian fascism in World War II.

The EDL is opposed to all the values

that the Durham miners have fought for throughout their history. The EDL hates socialism, the Labour Party and the trade unions. It praised Thatcher when she died and has called on people to vote for the ultra-conservative UKIP.

'We appeal to all right-thinking people in our communities to reject these bully boys and make sure that the politics of hatred never again triumphs over working class values.'

MEMORIAL MEETING IN HONOUR

of the NORTH EAST MEN of the
BRITISH BATTALION
who laid down their Lives in Spain.



Com. BOB ELLIOTT.

IN THE

CITY HALL

NEWCASTLE upon TYNE

SUNDAY, 15th. JANUARY, 1939.
at 7.30 p.m. Doors open at 7 p.m.



CLIFF LAWThER.

Speakers—

Sir CHARLES TREVELYAN,
WILL LAWThER, (M.F.G.B.)
HAMILTON FYFE,
F. M. GRAHAM, (British Battalion)
JOHN GOSS of London, will Sing.



WILF JOBLING.

Supported by—

Miss ELLEN WILKINSON, M.P.
J. CHUTTER EDE, M.P.

DAVID ADAMS, M.P.
J. J. LAWSON, M.P.

WILLIAM WHITELY, M.P.
SAM WATSON, Agent D.M.A.

LYALL WILKES, Prospective Labour Candidate, Central Division, Newcastle.

ARTHUR BLENKINSOP, Prospective Labour Candidate, East Division, Newcastle.

JAMES BOHMAN, Sec., N.M.A.

WILLIAM HEPPLE, (A.E.U.)

Miss ENID ATKINSON.

Lest We Forget

The miners' lodges of East Durham played a vital role in the fight against Spanish fascism in the late Thirties. Despite the hardship of those hungry years miners' lodges collected money to send medical and food aid to the anti-fascist forces and many young volunteers joined the International Brigades to fight against the fascist General Franco.

One such Durham miner was Clifford Lawther from Chopwell (pictured left), brother of Will Lawther, Durham miners' agent, who became President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1944.

Cliff fell at the famous battle of Jarama in February 1937 and was remembered at a memorial meeting held at the City Hall Newcastle on 15 January 1939. By the end of that year many more miners were leaving the pits to fight German and Italian fascism.

We have a right to be proud of the sacrifice our fathers and grandfathers made and we owe it to them to make sure that the pernicious and anti-working class ideology of fascism never takes root again.



Above: A section of the Big Meeting paying tribute to former President of the Durham Miners' Association, Dave Guy, who died shortly after last years Gala.

Below: Fishburn RMT Band play the Miners' Hymn, Gresford, in memory of all who have perished in the mining industry. The Miners' Hymn was composed by Durham miner Robert Saint who named the composition Gresford after the Gresford colliery explosion which killed 266 men and boys on September 22 1934. It was first played at the Gala in 1938 and has been played on the racecourse prior to the Big Meeting ever since.



A Gala to Remember



If it is true that the sun shines on the righteous then it was the most devout people of the land who made the pilgrimage to the ancient city of Durham for the 129th Durham Miners' Gala.

Under a cloudless sky, a relentless sun beat down on Durham's narrow streets thronged with the biggest crowds for half a century.

Over 50 bands and a mass of colourful banners created that deeply moving atmosphere unique to the Durham Miners' Gala – an atmosphere which veers between the sheer joy of community and a deeply felt reverence for past struggles and tragedies.

This year, however, past struggles assumed a new significance. Beyond the uplifting music, the dancing and general merriment, there was a more sombre undertone – the realisation that the working people of Britain were facing, for the first time since the Second World War, a catastrophic reduction in living standards and the destruction of the welfare state.

No amount of sunshine could burn off this grim reality that transformed this Gala from a celebration of past achievements into call to arms in defence of past victories.

No doubt it was this sense of foreboding that ensured that before one o'clock a huge crowd, thousands strong, assembled to hear the platform speakers who, for the first time in 107 years, did not include a Labour Member of Parliament. Whether by accident or design, this omission reflected the current crisis in relations between the Labour Party and its founding father, the trade union movement.

Dave Hopper, General Secretary of Durham Miners' Association (DMA), in opening the Big Meeting asked for a minute's silence for David Guy, the former president of the DMA, who died shortly after last year's Gala, after which the Fishburn RMT band played the miners' hymn *Gresford*.

Before introducing the first speaker, Dave paid tribute to Nelson Mandela who was in hospital in South Africa fighting for his life. It was, he said, 'In the best traditions of Durham Miners' internationalism that we salute the great man and wish him a speedy recovery.'

Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror and the first speaker explained that he was the son of a Durham miner who worked at Westoe Colliery in South Shields and how he well remembered the strikes of 1972 and 1974 when he received free school meals.

He also remembered the 1984/85 strike when his brother was on strike for the full year. 'And that', he said, 'was probably the most heroic dispute because it was about the jobs of future generations'.

He continued, saying that there were

no tears in his house when Thatcher died. 'It may be hot today,' he said, 'but it is a damned sight hotter where she is'.

'Cameron is no better. He is just Thatcher without the handbag. He knows nothing of the lives of ordinary people and he cares less.'

'It has become a travesty when the bottom 20 percent pay a higher rate of tax than the top 20 percent'

'Austerity measures are what Tories do and they would not be able to get away without the aid of Nick Clegg who was totally void of principles. He claims to be a brake on the Tories but he is not. He is a collaborator, a conspirator and allows them to get away with what they do. The more you look, the worse they are and the sooner they are out the better.'

Turning to the question of the Labour Party, Kevin said 'It pains me what Ed Miliband has done in the last 10 days. He has completely lost the plot. The trade union link strengthens the Labour Party. I think the Labour Party gets more out of the trade unions than the trade unions get out of the Labour Party. How on earth can he be embarrassed by working people

paying six pence a week to the Labour Party? It's the cleanest money in British politics. Its open, it's transparent and every body knows about it.'

'The dirty money,' he explained, 'comes from the hedge funds that pay millions of pounds to the Tories who don't pay tax on the money in the first place.'

Kevin emphasised, however, that not all Labour MPs were ashamed of Labour's link with the trade unions and, to demonstrate how



Kevin Maguire

proud some MPs were, he said he had a cheque for £1,000 from Denis Skinner as a donation to the Gala fund. Denis had said to him that it was not a donation but a block vote grant.

Kevin concluded: 'The sun's out, we're out, let's get the nasty Tories out!'

Hillsborough Justice Campaign

Margaret Aspinall, of the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, then gave a heart-rending account of how the families of the bereaved had suffered the lies and deceit of the South Yorkshire Police, the press and the Government following the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy.

'The Sun newspaper was a disgrace at the time and is still a disgrace,' she said. 'We know where the story that the fans were to blame came from.'

'The police took blood samples from the dead bodies and when the results didn't fit in with their story they even looked into the criminal records of the victims.

'Now the truth was coming out after 24 years and the press were now on their side'. She said, 'We did not achieve this by ourselves but with the support of all you people.'

In particular, she paid tribute to Jimmy McGovern whose drama documentary had been largely responsible for the decision to have



Margaret Aspinall

a new inquest into the tragedy and thanked Ricky Tomlinson for his contribution.

'They had', she said, 'been let down by the Tories and the Labour Government.'

However, she explained the campaign still had a long way to go. 'The inquest on the 31 March will be difficult for all the families as they will be hearing about things they didn't previously know of both on the medical and the legal side.'

'I'm hoping with your strength, the strength of the people backing us will give us the strength to carry on and get the right verdict on the death certificate.'

Owen Jones

Journalist and author Owen Jones was introduced by Dave Hopper as the youngest speaker, at the age of 29, ever to address the Big Meeting in its 132 years of existence.

In an inspiring speech, Owen paid tribute to the history of struggle which the Gala represented and urged the working class into action against the Coalition's vicious attack on living standards and rights.

"Let's learn from our history. Let's remember the struggle and the sacrifice and let's remember always that it is possible to fight back."

'... Like our ancestors we too must take a stand because working people face the biggest cuts in their pay packets since records began because half a million people are now dependent on the only booming industry – foodbanks. This is the seventh richest country on earth and apparently we can no longer afford to feed our poorest people. What an absolute stain on austerity Britain. ...We demand a living wage, no ifs and no buts!'

'Let's learn from our history. Let's remember the struggle and the sacrifice and let's remember always that it is possible to fight back. We don't have to resign ourselves to how things are. We can stand up for each other and ourselves and fight for a tomorrow that is better than it is today.

'We stand together. We fight together. Friends,



Owen Jones

we will win this together!

Ricky Tomlinson

Actor and former building worker, Ricky Tomlinson who was jailed after the 1972 national building workers' strike gave a passionate plea for the case of the Shrewsbury 24 to be revisited.

He explained that the building workers were convicted on a split decision of the jury after the jurors had been told that a conviction would result in a fine of just £50 that the union would pay.

They now know that their telephones were being tapped during the strike and it was clear that they were set up, as on the day, that was the subject of the prosecution, no arrests were made despite the fact that all the incidents were witnessed by 18 policemen who accompanied the pickets at all times.

When the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign applied to see the papers relating to the dispute after 30 years had lapsed, it was told that they could not be





Ricky Tomlinson

released on the grounds of national security. Now, after 40 years, the government still won't release the papers and they had just received a letter from Michael Gove saying the issue would not be reviewed until 2021.

'...What are they hiding, what have we done?' said Ricky, '...I'm just a City and Guilds plasterer and a bit of an actor on the stage. What the hell are they frightened of?'

Ricky urged everyone to sign the paper petition, calling for the documents to be released, which supporters were handing out.

'We were,' said Ricky, 'abandoned by the unions in 1973 but I'm glad to tell you we've got some real working class leaders of the trade union movement now and I don't think that could happen again.'

Bob Crow was introduced by Dave

Hopper as one of the most steadfast supporters of the miners. He was one of the most enthusiastic members of the RMT Executive Committee to get behind the campaign for coal in 1992.

Bob explained that over a hundred years ago before the formation of the Labour Party, his union and the miners supported the Liberal Party. But the trade union movement came to realise that since the Liberal Party supported capitalism, it could not support the interests of labour and so the trade union movement formed the Labour Party.

But now, Bob asserted, there was no difference between the main three parties in Britain. They all support privatisation, anti-trade union laws, illegal wars around the world and the European Union.

Bob posed the question: 'Would you join the Labour Party as it is to day?'

'No, Of course not', he said.

'What we want', He said, 'Is a party that will get out there and fight for you'.

'What we really want, at the end of the day, brothers and sisters, is pretty simple

'We ask for a job for every single person, a national health service, comprehensive education, decent pensions.

'We ask for a world that lives in peace and all that can't happen under capitalism.'

'Capitalism', he said, 'had failed, and should be smashed and every rotten thing it stands for'. He ended with these words: 'I'm proud to be a socialist and I'm proud to be a militant and I'm proud to be on the side of working men and women.'



Bob Crow

Frances O'Grady

In introducing Frances O'Grady, the first women General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, Dave Hopper recalled that it was 42 years since a General Secretary of the TUC had spoken at the Big Meeting and that was Vic Feather in 1971.

After thanking the chairman and expressing that she was proud to share a platform with trade union leaders such as Bob Crow and Len McCluskey, Frances made an unequivocal statement of the TUC's attitude to striking.

'I want to say to our teachers, to our council workers, to our rail workers, our civil servants, our fire-fighters and our factory workers: whenever unions want it, whenever workers





Francis O'Grady

vote for it, the TUC will back you up on strike action including coordinated action.'

She continued: '...there are those that want to challenge the fundamental right of working people to have a political voice.'

'David Cameron and his cabinet of multi-millionaires are worried that working people have been getting above their station and that our members don't have the right to a political opinion. He seems to believe that politics is just for posh people and – never mind breaking the link – he wants to break our spirit. But when it comes to funding political parties it's time to set the record straight. Union money is the cleanest cash in politics today [Applause]. Our members vote for it, our unions declare it and what's more, unlike those parasites in the city of London, our members earn it.'

'Before the Conservative Party starts getting on its high horse about union funding I think it's time that they came clean about their own finances. Who bankrolls the Tories? It's hedge funds, it's bankers and it's big business. Unions use political funds to campaign for a minimum wage, jobs for young people and decent pensions. They use theirs to attack workers' rights, to protect their bonuses and to get us to bail them out of the financial mess they caused.'

'We campaign to protect the poor. They campaign to protect the rich.'

On representation in Parliament, Frances said that although there were many good hardworking MPs and councillors 'democracy would be a whole lot stronger if those benches in Westminster were filled with more bus drivers, cleaners, engineers, nurses, teachers and car workers'.

Frances finished with a plea for unity: 'Let's stand up for what we believe in. Let's fight back against this wage-cutting, pension-slashing, privatising, incompetent shower of a government.'

'Those words on the banners mean a lot. They say loyalty, they say equality, they say unity and they say solidarity. If we stick together and if

we fight them not fight amongst ourselves... lets stay together, campaign together and together we will win.

Len McCluskey

Len McCluskey paid tribute to Dave Guy who, he said, epitomised 'the courage and bravery of our movement.' He recalled the origins of the Gala, when in 1871 Durham miners first marched into the city demanding their rights. They marched, 'as proud pitmen and women who had nothing but hope on their side for a better future' '... your forefathers were men and women of greatness'

He continued, explaining how the mining communities of Durham long before the Welfare State was

envisaged, under the guidance of the union, created community welfare looking after the sick, the old and infirm.

In a wide-ranging attack on the coalition government, he condemned the terrible effect of their policies on the million unemployed youth who were asked to work for nothing or lose their benefits. Families were losing their homes because they had a spare bedroom.

'But', he said 'if you're a City banker, a hedge-fund manager, a billionaire – well things aren't so bad. This government cuts their taxes and gives them millions and all the better if, like most of them, they don't pay their taxes.'

In a carefully worded and firm statement, Len turned to the question uppermost in the minds of the audience and the representatives of the press

'Sisters and brothers, let me touch on the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party. You may have noticed that there has been a very public dispute carried out across the media. But let me read you this quote: 'The trade unions founded the Labour Party. Our party is stronger, because of the three million nurses, engineers and shop workers and all of the trade union levy payers who are part of our movement.'

'Who said that? Well, it was Ed Miliband speaking here, at this very spot, last year and Ed was right: we're not a lobbyist group, we are founder members of and integral part of our party.'

Below: Len McCluskey addressing the Big Meeting





'But this is an important point for me to make, perhaps this is what the journalists have come for, I want to make it clear, the Labour Party must understand that it has no god-given right to exist. It can only exist if it remains the voice of ordinary people and organised labour.'

Len paid tribute to many 'fantastic MPs, good comrades, people who are here today on the platform, who battle and do a fantastic job in difficult circumstances'

'...However, they agree that the Parliamentary Labour Party today does not look like, think like, the broader party or the working class communities it seeks to represent. That's a serious problem. From general election to general election this [the Labour Party] is increasing the preserve of an out-of-touch elite, Oxford educated, special advisers. People who glide from university to think-tank to green benches without ever sniffing the air of the real world. I generalise, of course, because there are good people who travel that route but the balance is way out of kilter – that's what Unite was fighting for (I'm pleased I can use the F word here), in Falkirk and in other constituencies – giving the working class a say in our democracy and I make no apology for that to anybody.'

Len continued calling for a public enquiry to 'air the truth' about what happened in Falkirk. He warned those both inside and outside the Labour Party who believed in 'smear campaigns' that he would not back off.

'I come from the docklands of

Liverpool. We're made of sterner stuff and if they believe we are going to bow our knee to paddle back on our principles they've got a long, long wait.'

He insisted that he was not opposed to a changed relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union movement.

“**Will the next Labour Government reverse the present coalition's disastrous policies? Will it be different and not just from Cameron and his crew but from the Blair-Brown years as well?**”

'I'm ready for reform, I'm ready and I'll tell you for why. Because the status quo is no longer an option. It hasn't delivered for those of us represented here today. The block vote has not got us socialism, it didn't stop us having a 'New Labour' government, which pampered the rich and waged illegal wars whilst it supported the most restrictive trade union laws in western Europe. That's why I'm ready for reform.'

'...So let me say this about the new proposals. If we are to go out and convince thousands of working class men and women that they want to sign up to Associate Labour Party Membership, those workers will not be interested in the rule book, or even our history, they will want to know: will Labour make a difference? Will the next Labour Government reverse the present coalition's disastrous policies? Will it be different and not just from Cameron and his crew but from the Blair-Brown years as well?'

'...I say this to Ed: The people here today are the people you should seek to represent and the future is in your hands. My challenge to you is for you to make Labour the party we all want, the party of equality, justice, fairness and, yes, the party of socialism.'

'Then nothing can stop us because it will mean that the values that we all share here today, the values of the Durham coalfield, are back where they belong at the heart of our movement and our party.'

'Keep the belief comrades!

Len resumed his seat to cheers and applause.

In calling for a vote of thanks, Alan Cummings, Chairman of the Durham Miners' Association, condemned the vicious attacks that were being perpetrated on the sick and the disabled in society. 'No one', he said, 'is safe from this government.'

'While we continue to reinforce our socialist principles, Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, has publically stated that if elected Labour will not change any of the Tories' welfare policies. What a disgrace that is. The Labour Party once stood for the most vulnerable in society. That's what Ed should be doing. Looking after our people, not the rich but the people that vote for the Labour Party.'



Alan Cummings

He said how proud he was to represent the members of the Durham Miners' Association, which would continue to fight for the interests of their members – the best people in the world.

He ended by thanking the speakers, the volunteer stewards, George Robson, the Gala organiser, and all those who had made the day such a resounding success.

The 129th Durham Miners' Gala

Picture Gallery









