



The Durham Miner

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

Now Official: Capitalism Is In Crisis

By Dave Hopper



Dave Hopper, General Secretary Durham Miners' Association

Capitalism is in crisis. Only a few years ago anyone uttering this simple phrase would have been condemned as a member of the loony left but now we hear it every day. Just about every economist from far left to extreme right agrees capitalism is in a deep and dangerous crisis.

Capitalism is an economic system where the few who own 90 per cent of the wealth exploit the many who produce the wealth. It is therefore self evident that if capitalism is in crisis then it is the system and the ruling class who run the system who are to blame and not the working class.

Billions upon billions have been lost as a result of a feeding frenzy of greedy bankers and speculators yet no one responsible for this catastrophe has ever been charged with a crime let alone punished.

But those not responsible, the ordinary taxpaying worker, the unemployed and the disabled are being made to suffer. It was our money which bailed out the banks and it is the taxpayers who will lose their jobs, their pension and their quality of life.

The major banks have in fact been nationalised with our money but nationalisation sounds too much like socialism for politicians to use the word. And while the Government hold controlling shares in these banks, they have left the day-to-day control to the architects of the crisis and allow them to continue to enrich themselves.

What are ordinary members of the public supposed to think when the money for vital services such as health and education is being cut while we are treated to an extravaganza of expenditure on

the Olympic Games and the Royal Jubilee? While the unelected British newspaper barons pillory those dependent on rapidly diminishing benefit payments, they fully support this criminal waste of money – just as they supported the disastrous and ruinous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which have led to the deaths of hundreds of British soldiers and hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

Capitalism has in the past solved its problems through world wars but we can't allow it to do so on this occasion because the consequences would be too terrible to contemplate.

We can, if we have the courage, make a radical change. At no other period in history have the British people been so aware of the inequalities and basic unfairness of capitalism. Inequalities and unfairness which are daily being made more extreme by the action of this deadly coalition.

Every day we learn more of the corrupt relations between politicians, the press and the police. And, now, just when we thought that the reputation of bankers could not sink any lower we hear of more instances of lying, fraud and mis-selling.

If the word capitalism is now freely used to describe this failed system is it not time that the alternative, socialism, became common parlance amongst the leaders of the Labour and Trade Union Movement?

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Have You Had Your Benefit Stopped?

We have recently been successful in winning claims for the reinstatement of Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA) for some of our members who have had their REA stopped by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

In cases where the DWP have stopped or reduced this benefit they have justified their action by saying that the claimant in his present employment has proved that he can earn more money than he would have earned in his previous employment with British Coal (formerly the NCB).

In calculating the level of earnings which a former miner would have been earning as a British Coal employee, the DWP in the North East has been using a computer model which has proved to be flawed.

Dave Hopper General Secretary of the DMA said,

‘As a result of this flawed formula

the level of earnings which they have predicted is well below the average earnings of miners employed in the few British coal mines which remain. As a result many former miners in the North East who have been in receipt of REA have suffered. As far as I am aware, in all other coalfields the calculation which determines the notional level of earnings for a former miner claiming REA is based on the present wages earned in UK Coal mines so it looks as if the former North East miners have been discriminated against and treated as second class citizens.

‘I will be contacting the DWP to ask that all cases where claimants have had this benefit either stopped or reduced be re-examined and fully reimbursed.

If you were a victim of this discriminatory system and are a Beneficial Member of the DMA please contact Head Office with details of your claim.’



Knee News

You will recall that with the financial backing of a number of organisations, including the Durham Miners' Association, court action was taken against the former British Coal Corporation on behalf of ex-miners suffering from chronic degenerative knee conditions.

In the Summer of 2010 eight test cases were heard in the High Court at Leeds, including three from Durham. His Honour Judge Grenfell ruled that all of the claims had been brought too late and refused to allow the claims to proceed. He also refused to allow us to appeal his ruling.

On the advice of our legal team we applied to the Court of Appeal for permission to appeal and this was granted in January 2011.

The Appeal was finally heard in London between April 30 and May 2 2012. We are currently waiting for the Courts judgment and will advise members when we hear whether we will be allowed to continue with the claims. The DMA remain hopeful we will be successful.



Dave Guy

We are sorry to report that at the time of going to press Dave Guy who has led the Compensation Department for 26 years is seriously ill. His courageous four-and-a-half year battle against illness has been an inspiration to us all and our thoughts at this difficult time are with Dave and his family.

Dave Hopper

New Banners For This Year's Gala

Heworth



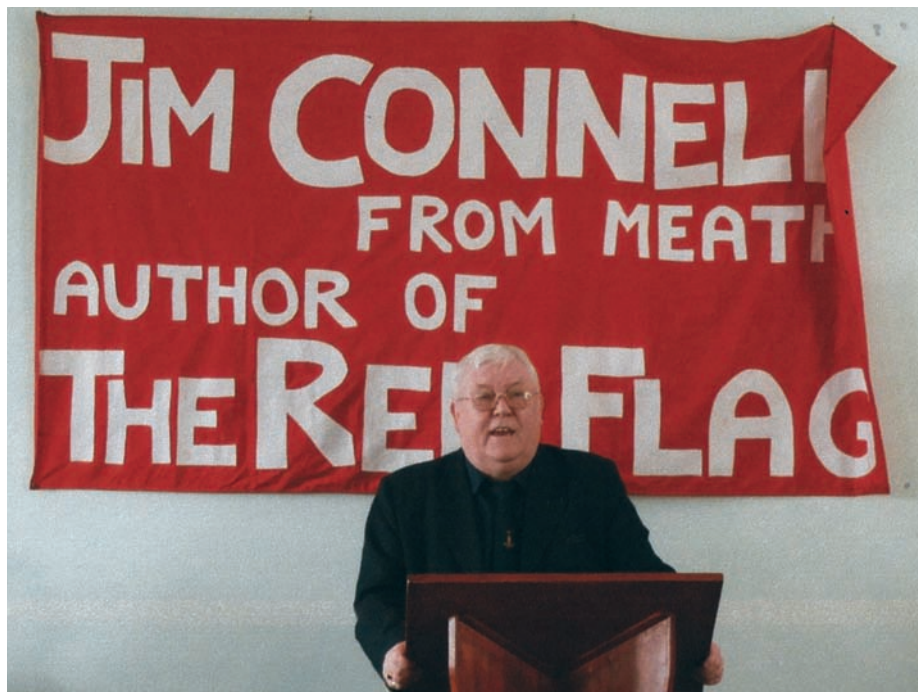
Felling



Brandon



Jim Connell Memorial



Dave Hopper speaking at the Jim Connell memorial

A delegation from the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) were in Crossakiel, Kells in the Irish Republic over the May Day weekend to pay tribute to Jim Connell the author of the socialist anthem 'The Red Flag'. They were in attendance at the invitation of the Jim Connell Society.

As part of the celebration David Hopper the General Secretary of the DMA unveiled a plaque at the Jim Connell memorial paying tribute to Connell who was born in Crossakiel.

Dave Hopper said that this plaque was a fitting tribute to Connell from the Durham Coalfield to which many Irish families had emigrated. Those miners of Irish descent had played an important role in the struggles of the miners' union. He explained that in the nineteenth century the Durham miners' lodges frequently invited Irish nationalist leaders to address the Durham Miners' Gala.

The school held at the Peoples Resource Centre in Kells on the Saturday was a very successful event

and there were representatives from the GMB, RMT and British Trades' Councils in attendance.

Next years event will coincide with the centenary of the 1913 Dublin lock-out and it was hoped that the Durham Miners could attend and take the Chopwell and Follonsby lodge banners because of their Irish connections. The Chopwell banner was unfurled by the Irish trade unionist James Larkin who spoke at several Durham Galas and the Follonsby Lodge banner bears the portrait of the Irish socialist James Connolly who played a major role in the lock-out and was executed by the British after the Easter Rising in 1916.

The Easington Colliery band now sponsored by the RMT played at the march on the Sunday and speeches were made by Colm Keaveney, the Irish Labour Party Chairperson, Bob Crow, RMT General Secretary and Phol McFadden of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions. A special guest over the weekend was the Irish Ambassador for Cuba Mrs Terrisita Trujillo.

Felling Pit Disaster Remembered 200 Years On

On May 25 this year residents of Gateshead and the surrounding area, Local Government leaders, members of the Durham Miners Association and school children gathered at Heworth Church to commemorate the lives of 91 men and boys some as young as eight years, who perished in a methane explosion at Felling Colliery on the same day 200 years earlier.

A local historian MA Richardson published the following account of the tragedy.



A contemporary artist's impression of the Felling explosion

About half-past eleven o'clock on the morning, one of the most tremendous explosions on record in the history of the collieries, took place at Felling, near Gateshead, in the mine belonging to Mr. Brandling, which was always considered one of the most safe in the district.

Nearly the whole of the workmen were below, the second set having gone down before the first had come up, when a double blast of hydrogen gas took place. A slight trembling, as from an earthquake, was felt for about half a mile around the workings; and the noise of the explosion, though dull, was heard to three or four miles distance, and much resembled an unsteady fire of infantry. Immense quantities of dust and small coal accompanied these blasts, and rose high into the air, in the form of an inverted cone. The heaviest part of the ejected matter, such as corves, pieces of wood and small coal, fell near the pits; but the dust borne away by a strong west wind, fell in a continued shower from the pit to the distance of a mile and a half. In the village of Heworth, it caused a darkness like that of early twilight, and covered the roads so thickly, that the footsteps of passengers were strongly imprinted in it.

The heads of both the shaft frames were blown off, their sides set on fire, and their pullies shattered to pieces; but the pullies of the John Pit gin, being on a crane not within the influence of the blast, were fortunately preserved. The coal dust ejected from the William Pit into the drift or horizontal parts of the tube was about three inches thick, and soon burnt to a light cinder. Pieces of burning coal driven off the solid stratum of the mine were also blown up this shaft.

As soon as the explosion was heard, the wives and children of the workmen ran to the working pit; wildness and terror were pictured in every countenance. The crowds from all sides soon collected to the number of several hundreds; some crying out for a husband, others for a parent or son, and all deeply affected with an admixture of horror, anxiety, and grief. In this calamity ninety-one men and boys perished.

The few men who were saved, happened to be working in a different part of the mine, to which the fury of the explosion did not reach. After the mine had been made air tight for about six weeks, to extinguish the fire, it was again opened, and on the 8th of July the workings were entered, and the first dead body found. From various obstructions, the last of the bodies (some of whom were under six or seven feet of stone) was not found until the 19th of September.

All these persons (except four, who were buried in single graves) were interred in Heworth chapel-yard, in a trench, side by side, two coffins deep, with a partition of brick and lime between every four coffins. In commemoration of this catastrophe, a neat plain obelisk is erected, nine feet high, fixed in a solid stone base. It has four brass plates let into the stone on the four sides, on which are inscribed the name and age of each of the ninety-one sufferers alphabetically arranged.

This terrible loss of life had such an impact on the Reverend John Hodgson, vicar of Saint Mary's Church Heworth that he led a campaign for better safety in mines. Largely as a result of his persistence the Sunderland Society was formed. This Society brought together a number of engineers, scientists, doctors and colliery viewers of which George Stephenson, Dr. WR Clanny and Sir Humphrey Davy all produced an early form of safety lamp. Although this was regarded as a step forward, it in fact led to an increase in the number of deaths due to explosions. The lamps were not infallible, and their existence encouraged mine managers to send men to work in seams which, before the introduction of the safety lamp, were regarded as far too dangerous.



Above: Blue plaque unveiled at St Mary's Church Heworth May 25 2012.

In Memoriam Felling pit disaster 1812

Allen, Andrew, 11	Gordon, Joseph, 10	Pearson, John, 64
Allen, Jacob, 14	Gordon, Robert, 40	Pearson, Robert, 10
Allen, Phillip, 17	Gordon, Thomas, 8	Pringle, Joseph, 16
Anderson, Joseph, 23	Greener, Isaac, 24	Pringle, Matthew, 18
Bainbridge, George, 10	Greener, Isaac, 65	Reay, George, 9
Bainbridge, Matthew, 19	Greener, John, 21	Richardson, Edward, 39
Bainbridge, Thomas, 17	Hall, Ralph, 18	Richardson, Thomas, 17
Bainbridge, Thomas, 53	Hall, Robert, 13	Richardson, William, 19
Bears, Thomas, 48	Harrison, John, 12	Ridley, George, 11
Bell, Edward, 12	Harrison, Ralph, 39	Ridley, Thomas, 13
Bell, George, 14	Harrison, Robert, 14	Robson, George, 15
Boutland, John, 46	Haswell, Edward, 20	Robson, Thomas, 18
Boutland, William, 19	Haswell, Henry, 18	Sanderson, Matthew, 33
Brown, Matthew, 28	Haswell, John, 22	Sanderson, William, 43
Burnitt, John, 21	Haswell, Robert, 42	Surtees, John, 12
Comby, James, 28	Hunter, John, 21	Thompson, Benjamin, 17
Craggs, Thomas, 36	Hunter, Michael, 8	Thompson, John, 36
Craggs, Thomas, 9	Hunter, William, 35	Turnbull, Jeremiah, 43
Craigs, James, 13	Hutchinson, Robert, 11	Turnbull, John, 27
Cully, Christopher, 20	Jacques, John, 14	Urwin, Nicholas, 58
Cully, George, 14	Jacques, William, 23	Wilkinson, John, 35
Dixon, William, 35	Kay, George, 16	Wilson, Charles, 20
Dixon, William, 10	Kay, James, 18	Wilson, John, 30
Dobson, John Archibald, 15	Knox, John, 11	Wilson, John, 32
Dobson, Robert, 13	Lawton, George, 14	Wilson, Joseph, 25
Dobson, Robert, boy	Leck, Robert Gray, 16	Wood, John, 27
Fletcher, Paul, 22,	Mason, Christopher, 34	Wood, Joseph, 39
Galley, Gregory, 10	Mitcheson, George, 18	Young, Joseph, 30
Galley, William, 22	Pearson, Edward, 14	Young, Thomas, 30
Gardiner, Michael, 45	Pearson, George, 26	and one unnamed.
Gardiner, William, 10	Pearson, John, 58	



Right: Felling brass band leads the march from St Mary's to Felling Metro Station close to the site of the Felling Pit where another plaque was unveiled.

Spanish Miners Strike For Jobs, Pits and Communities

Spanish coal miners in the northern regions of Asturias, Aragon and León are on indefinite strike against the austerity measures of Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy at the end of May.

Fuelled by massive property speculation – a bubble which has now well and truly burst – the dictates of the IMF and the deteriorating capitalist crisis, the Spanish economy nosedived into recession in the second half of 2008, and since then millions of jobs have been lost.

With £25 billion of cuts, as well as huge tax increases, Spain also now has one of the highest unemployment rates in the EU. 24.4 per cent – 4.71M – of adults and over 50 per cent of 15-25-year-olds are jobless.

The miners responded angrily to the news that government subsidies to the coal industry are to be slashed from this year's £240M to £89M next year. These cuts will almost certainly car-crash the industry and leave communities dependent on coal utterly destitute.

About 8,000 jobs are now at stake with unions estimating that another 30,000 workers will be affected indirectly. Miners from the two major trade union federations, the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the Union Generale de Trabajadores (UGT) are united in their opposition to the government's measures and the strike, which was at first envisaged as a series of protest stoppages,

has drawn 100% support with many other unions across the country pledging support.

As soon as the strike started, young miners blocked 16 major road arteries linking northern cities, and ten miners began sit-ins after their shifts ended at the Candín mine in Oviedo.

Already transport workers and teachers have taken sympathy action alongside the miners and a regional one-day general strike was planned for 18 June. A number of miners continue to stage 'stay-down' strikes and, on 31 May, miners demonstrated in the centre of Madrid where they were violently attacked by heavily-armed riot police using tear gas. Meanwhile, in clashes in pit villages, military police have used rubber bullets indiscriminately.

Some of the reports filtering through what has been a Spanish and international media blackout suggest that in some areas of Asturias there is almost a state of civil war.

Clearly, this is a dispute that may well last for a long time. Miners are intent on stopping a repeat of the pit closures that have seen 40,000 jobs disappear in the past twenty years.



Striking Spanish miners stop motorway in Asturias

Asturias, still Spain's main mining region has an especially long and heroic history of industrial militancy, collective action and socialist politics. 'Red Asturias' was the scene of a mass armed uprising, in defence of their wages and conditions in 1934 in which miners' militias fought for two weeks against the Spanish Army and Spanish Navy, led by later fascist dictator General Franco.

It was Franco who controlled the movement of the troops, aircraft, warships and armoured trains used in crushing the miners' uprising in which more than 2,000 miners were killed, many of them executed.

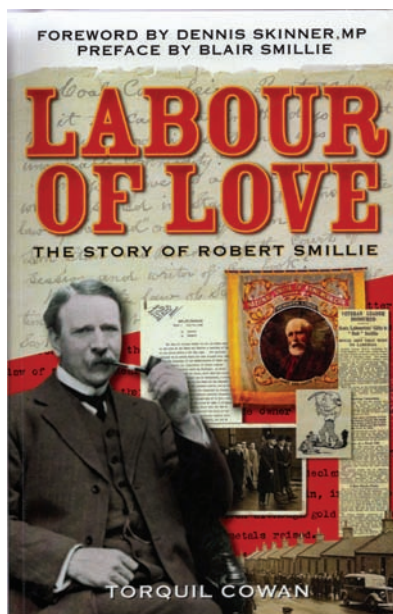
Miners remained one of the main oppositional forces during Franco's fascist dictatorship and, during the British miners' strike of 1984-5, Spanish miners were generous in their support.

In the same way that British miners were once considered the vanguard of the labour movement, the Spanish miners are seen by many to be giving a lead to the rest of the Spanish trade union movement. This strike could provide the spark to ignite the whole Iberian Peninsula against capitalism's determination to make workers pay for its crisis.

John Cunningham, former miner at Dinnington Colliery, Yorkshire and Graeme Atkinson



Left: Spanish Civil Guard firing rubber bullets at miners



Labour of Love tells the fascinating story of the life of Robert Smillie.

How he escaped from the grinding poverty of his childhood in Belfast to work in the Lanarkshire Coalfield where he became a pioneer of the early socialist movement and a local miners' leader.

Although never actively seeking high office he eventually became Member of Parliament for Morpeth and President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

Price: £14.99

To obtain a copy ring: Blair Smillie:
07779113510
or email: smillieblair@yahoo.co.uk

For further information on the Spanish Miners' Strike contact:

Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee

smisc@talktalk.net

Visit blog at:

<http://smiscuk.blogspot.co.uk>

For donations contact:

John Cunningham (SMSC secretary/treasurer) on (0114) 231-1240 or email:

j.cunningham6@virginmedia.com

The Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee is sponsored by the Durham Miners Association

The Big Meeting A History of The Durham Miners' Gala by David Temple

'This beautifully produced and illustrated book shows the importance of the miners to Britain in the last 140 years, their triumphs and disasters and the reasons why they march with pride each year with their bands and banners to celebrate the Durham Miners' Gala.'

Tony Benn

'This wonderful book is a considerable achievement. Rich in words and photographs, it traces the history of the Durham Miners' Gala, illuminating both local and national struggles and the central role that coal miners and their families have played in British politics and society.'

Professor Huw Beynon, Cardiff University

'No book could ever capture the spirit of Durham Miners' Gala.... or could it? David Temple comes as close as it is possible to get with his comprehensive new book.... He rekindles memories of Galas we attended and tells the story of Galas long ago, setting them in the political context of their time and the battles fought by the union...'

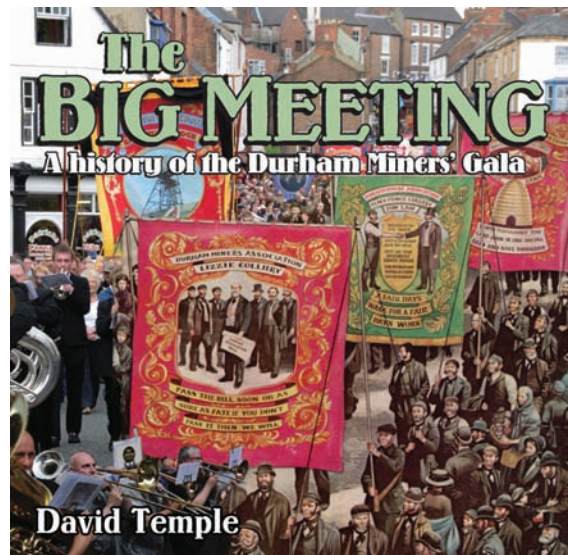
Sunderland Echo

'The title doesn't do this book justice because, as well as being a history of the Durham Miners' Gala, it is a history of coal-mining in the county and a social history of our towns and villages.'

Northern Echo

'Packed with detail, this book is a terrific, fast-moving account that charts not only the history of the Gala since its inception in 1871 but also chronicles the political and industrial struggles of the Durham miners for 140 years.'

Workers.org



I would like to buy the following copy/copies of *The Big Meeting – A History of the Durham Miners' Gala* by David Temple

☐ Hardback copy/copies
£19.50 + £3.50 pp (£23)

☐ Softback copy/copies
£14.50 + £2.50 pp (£17)

I enclose a cheque for £..... made payable to:

Durham Miners' Gala Book Project

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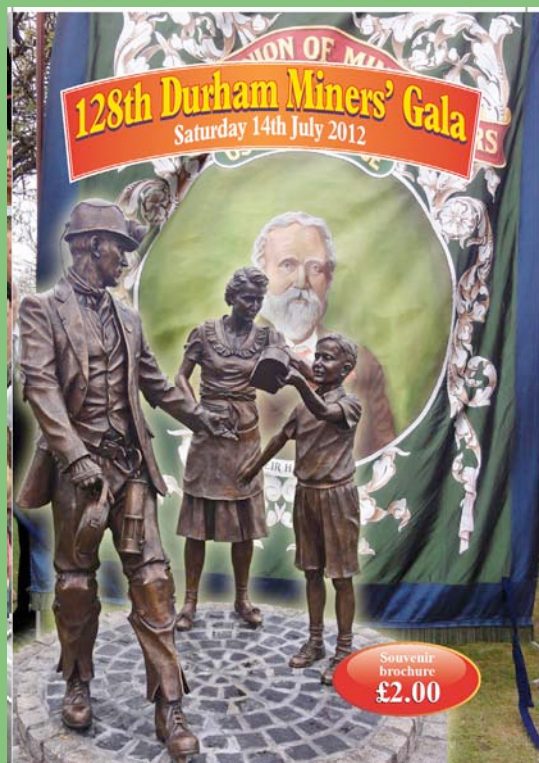
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Please return with remittance to:

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This year's Gala Souvenir Brochure features on the front cover the miners' memorial, created by Staffordshire sculptor Carl Payne and recently erected near the Bus Station at Concord, Washington. The 96 page full colour brochure is now on sale and is available at the DMA offices at Red Hill.



Ashes and Diamonds

Exhibition of the work of leading London artist Darren Coffield of work inspired by the Great Miners' Strike 1984/85
At The Miners Hall, Redhill, Durham DH1 4BB
July 5 – July 24
Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm Saturdays 9.30 am – 1.30 pm

