



The Durham Miner

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The Durham Miner is the magazine of the Durham Miners' Association, PO Box 6, Red Hill, Durham, DH6 4BB
General Secretary D. Hopper, President: D Guy

Crisis Deepens

Dear Member,

Since we last wrote to you in November the economic crisis has deepened and further resources have been taken from taxpayers to save the Nation's banks. Nationalising the banks was always a socialist policy but now Bush and Brown see it as the only way to save Capitalism from collapse. How ironic is that?

We are now told that a crisis caused by excessive borrowing can be solved by further borrowing. It is difficult to see the logic of this argument when it is obvious that the collapse of the financial system was a direct result of the policies initiated by Thatcher and Reagan and embraced and strengthened by New Labour. It is therefore self evident that only a radical change can solve the underlying causes of the crisis. The

government could start with a windfall tax on the obscene profits of the energy companies and then immediately embark on a massive programme of public spending on infrastructure and home building, thereby creating tens of thousands of real jobs. They could reverse the disastrous closure of the coal mines and develop clean coal technology which would release the enormous wealth left below Britain's land.

New Labour should end the senseless waste of billions of pounds on the Iraq and Afghanistan war and the ridiculous retention of Trident — no matter what financial problems the country faces there is always, it seems, money for war. It is time our government apologised for this



Dave Hopper

terrible waste of life and resources.

If New Labour does not make a radical change then we can be sure that hundreds of thousands of us will pay the price of the crisis through lost jobs, lost homes and lost pensions while the bankers and speculators, who through greed and fraud created the mess, will be rewarded by having the government-held bank shares returned to them.

Whatever the problems we will do our utmost to defend our members by campaigning against attacks on their benefits and continue our work to ensure that they are compensated for the damage their health has suffered as a result of working in coal mines.

I thank all members for remaining true to the working class spirit of collectivism and wish you all a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Dave Hopper

General Secretary



Sacriston lodge banner at this year's Big Meeting

Weekend Compensation School

An important Durham Miners and Mechanics compensation school was held on the weekend of November 22 in Newcastle in collaboration with Thompsons Solicitors. The school which was attended by branch officials throughout the mining communities discussed a wide range of subjects which included Thompsons' Legal Services, miners knee litigation, criminal law, asbestos litigation, local authority care funding and the new changes to welfare benefits.

Report by Dave Guy, President



Dave Guy

PARLIAMENTARY REPORT



Dave Anderson MP

A parliamentary report was given by Dave Anderson MP for Blaydon and former Durham Mechanic.

Anderson began by thanking the Durham Miners and Mechanics for the help they had given in the recent Glenrothes by-election. Those members who had travelled to Scotland had made a significant contribution to the successful outcome and their efforts had been much appreciated. He gave a comprehensive report of his activities campaigning for the development of clean-coal technology which is now attracting a surge of support as energy costs rise. He said, 'even John Redwood the arch right-wing Tory admitted in one meeting that the Tories had made a big mistake when they closed down the mining industry.'

On a hopeful note Anderson welcomed the appointment of Ed Miliband the new Secretary of State and his private parliamentary secretary ex-miner Dave Hamilton. He was hopeful that they

would be sympathetic to the cause of injured miners.

BEWARE OF DOOR-STEPPERS

Solicitor Mike Laffey of Thompsons warned the school of the new tactics employed by insurance companies. In a bid to limit the damages paid to victims of road traffic accidents they were door stepping claimants with offers of quick one-off payments of derisory amounts. He emphasised that members need not pay for legal services through insurance policies as these solicitors were often compromised by their association with the insurance company who were contesting the claim. Laffey emphasised that Thompsons covers all our members and always fights for the highest possible settlement.



Mike Laffey

Photo: Keith Potts

INSURANCE COMPANIES DISGRACE

Thompsons' solicitor Ian McFall reported on the disgraceful way in which insurance companies were attempting to avoid liability for workers who had been exposed to

asbestos and had developed mesothelioma and other lung related conditions. Their latest ploy is to try to get the date of liability to coincide with the date on which the victim is diagnosed with the disease which can be decades after the exposure to asbestos. This would mean that if the company which caused the exposure no longer existed then there would be no case to pursue. This would change the existing legislation which requires the insurance company at the time of exposure to pay damages even if the firm that caused the exposure no longer exists.

The High Court have just ruled against changing this requirement but as McFall told the school, 'we are not celebrating yet as the insurance companies have been granted leave to appeal to the House of Lords.'

A STEP FORWARD FOR KNEE LITIGATION

Anthony Patterson of Thompsons reporting on the recent developments in the knee litigation explained that a small but important piece of evidence had come to light which suggests that the NCB knew that there was a higher than average incidence of osteoarthritis of the knee amongst face workers and development men as early as 1954. If it can be proved that there were effective steps that could have been taken to alleviate this problem then our chances of winning the case would be greatly enhanced.

The Durham Miners, The Durham Mechanics and the other funding bodies have committed considerable resources to this case and Patterson emphasised that there were still many



Anthony Patterson Photo: Keith Potts

problems that had to be resolved.

CHARGING PROCEDURES FOR CARE HOMES

Considering the average age of our members this was a new but apt subject for a weekend school.

John Grey of Thompsons solicitors told the school that the rules governing the availability, quality and funding of care homes is complex and varies between local authorities and most people are expected to pay out of their income or their capital for whatever care is provided. However, those whose primary reason for being in a care home is their medical condition will be exempt from any charge. This is known as NHS Continuing Health care.

When assessing how much has to be paid by the individual the local authority take into consideration both income and capital. Capital includes both cash savings and property. Anyone who has capital between £13,500 and £22,250 must pay a contribution on a sliding scale which is dependent on the precise amount of savings they possess. If capital exceeds the upper limit of £22,250 then the full cost of care has to be paid until the savings falls below that limit.

If a partner is living in a jointly owned house then the house cannot be taken into consideration when calculating a persons contribution. If, however, the person in care survives their partner and inherits the house the house is then taken into consideration. If a close relative over the age of 60 is in residence in the house then the capital value of the house is again excluded. Also children under the age of 16 and

relatives who are incapacitated also attract the same protection.

Savings held in joint accounts are subject to a complex formulae which disadvantages both partners to the extent that it is better to separate such funds into different accounts whenever possible.

These are only a few of the many pitfalls associated with care home provision and any member who thinks he will be effected by these issues should contact our offices at Red Hill immediately.

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

The President gave the school a comprehensive report on the changes contained in the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) which came into force on October 27, 2008. ESA now replaces Incapacity Benefit and Income Support.

To claim this support a person with health problems which effect their ability to work are subject to a series of tests. While these tests are similar in some respects to the old tests the ability of a claimant to achieve the 15 points to qualify for a payment is considerably harder.

During the qualifying procedure, which takes 13 weeks, the emphasis is placed on what work the claimants are capable of doing after which they are placed in one of two groups — those capable of some work and those not capable. In the first of these groups the claimants must participate in organised activity designed to help them find a job. This is compulsory and failure to cooperate will result in financial sanctions. Claimants who fall into the second category, which is known as the Support Group will receive a slightly higher benefit and will not take part in return-to-work activities unless they volunteer to do so.

Anyone who is already in receipt of Incapacity Benefit or income support will remain on this benefit at least until 2010 and will not be subject to the new WCA test.

If an applicant fails at any stage to achieve the 15 points to qualify for a payment, or if they disagree with the category in which they have been placed they are entitled to appeal.

DMA members who are about to apply for ESA must contact the Area Offices to make sure they are properly advised and adequately represented.

Mesothelioma – Lump Sum Payments

Following many years of campaigning by Trade Unions, their solicitors and Welfare Rights organisations, the Labour Government has introduced a new compensation scheme for people who suffer from diffuse Mesothelioma.

The scheme was introduced on October 1, 2008 via the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008. This scheme will enable lump sum payments to be made to people who suffer from diffuse Mesothelioma, where they were exposed to Asbestos in the UK and do not currently qualify for help from the Government.

Therefore, those previously not eligible for compensation under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers Compensation) Act 1979 or Social Security Industrial Injuries Scheme may now qualify, as the new scheme is designed to compensate those who have contracted this dreadful condition without being exposed to Asbestos at work. Consequently we envisage claims from the following groups:

Those who come into contact with Asbestos from a relative – for example by washing their clothes.

Those who were exposed to Asbestos in the environment – for example they lived near a factory using Asbestos.

Those who have been exposed to Asbestos whilst self-employed.

Those who are unable to specify where their exposure has occurred, but did occur in the UK.

The rate of payment depends on the age of the person with the diagnosis. If the date of diagnosis is not known, it will be based on the age of the sufferer at the date of claim, with the lowest rate payable at £8,197 and the highest at £52,772. Separate rates apply for dependants where the sufferer has died.

The DMA is currently advising on two cases that may qualify for benefit under the new regulations. We urge members who believe they or members of the family need further information or representation to contact us as soon as possible.

Herrington Mining Exhibition

An Experience Not to be Missed

If you can't remember what a tin bath looks like or you have never seen a set of 'gallowa's limbers' then you must go to see the Herrington Mining Exhibition at the YMCA Herrington Burn — but be prepared to spend some time because there is plenty to see.

Bob Melvin secretary of the Herrington Miners Banner Partnership recalled how the exhibition started nine years ago after they commissioned a banner to replace the New Herrington colliery banner.

'A few old photographs were donated by members of the village and we put them on display in the church hall. As more were donated we got a grant from the City of Sunderland's Strategic Initiative Budget (SIB) to buy display boards. As the word spread in the village all kinds of artefacts and memorabilia were added

to the collection. People were bringing us miners lamps and all manner of equipment that had been lying around their houses for decades.'

'When the space in the church was wanted for other things we approached the YMCA and they gave us a massive floor space to display all we had collected.'

In the early days Bob and former pit electrician Brian Middlemiss carried the display board around the local primary schools giving talks to children about pit-work and pit-life. Now the children come to the exhibition on organised trips.

Bob said, 'When the children come here some of them don't even know what a piece of coal is but when it is time to go they don't want to leave they are so interested in the exhibition.'



Below: Mock-up of a coal face at Herrington Mining Exhibition





Left to right: Bob Melvin, Brian Middlemiss of the Herrington Miners Banner partnership and local historian Bill Lees

Photograph below: Miners' tin bath

Bob started work at Herrington colliery, always known as 'The New Pit', in 1959. In the uncertain days of the 1960s when many pits in Durham closed he was tempted along with many other miners to go south. In 1966 Bob moved to Staffordshire where he worked at Littleton colliery. In 1975 he applied for a transfer back to Herrington where he worked until it closed in December 1985 — one of the first to close after the miners strike.

This was a massive blow to the community as Bob explained,

'When the colliery closed we lost everything within a mile and a half of the village. We lost the colliery the coke works, Philadelphia workshops,

the central stores, the foundry and the garage — everything, and to date nothing has come back.'

'For us this exhibition is important because it carries the tradition of mining on. What we are most proud of is that we have now got a group of about 20 young lads in their 20s interested in our history and they want to carry the banner in at the Big Meeting. That's what its all about passing it down to the next generation.'

Each year the Herrington Miners Banner Partnership organise a Memorial service which this year was held on September 20 and 14 banners were paraded to an open-air service held on the site of the pit



which has now been converted into a memorial garden for all those who lost their lives at the colliery.

The exhibition which covers an area of 2,000 square feet is open to the public from 4pm to 7pm on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of every week.

Banners at Herrington Memorial Service Photo: Keith Potts



Bowburn Banner Group



Photo: Durham Photographic Society

Heritage Open Day – Saturday 13th September 2008

Bowburn Banner Group was formed in 2004 and its first achievement was to find and return to the community the 1959 and the 1920 Bowburn miners' banners. Having secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) both these banners were repaired and conserved and are on display at the Bowburn Community Centre. An impressive new banner was then produced for the centenary of the 1906 sinking of Bowburn colliery.

Such was the enthusiasm of the young people for this project that the group decided to commission a children's banner which is kept at Bowburn Junior School.

On Saturday September 13 this year the Group organised a heritage open day entitled *Celebrating Miners Lodge Banners*.

The Exhibition displayed a total of 44 banners, dating back to the 1920s. The more modern banners were loaned by community banner groups but some of the oldest (and most fragile) banners were from the Durham Miners' Association collection. Others can be seen in their own locations but rarely travel and are never paraded outside due to their fragile condition.

Murton Heritage Society

An Impressive Display of Banners and Photographs



An impressive display of 40 banners and over 2,000 photographs was organised by The Murton Heritage Society on the weekend of September 8 and 9. The venue was the Glebe Centre, formerly the Miners' Welfare Hall, which was refurbished in 2002.

The Murton Heritage Society was started six years ago and has amassed one of the largest collections of local photographs in County Durham — over 5,000 to date.

Their newly opened web site is well worth a visit at

www.murtonheritagesociety.co.uk

Preserving Our Mining Heritage

Researching Memories Past at NEEMARC

by
Dave Hartis

Dave Hartis, Education and Research Co-ordinator,
North East England Mining Archive and Research
Centre (NEEMARC)



Officials and committee of DMA celebrating their jubilee anniversary 1919

It was with good reason that a 17th century song writer described the north east as 'England's Peru.' Peruvian wealth can be attributed to precious metals hidden under the terrain, but we northeasters dug for something even more valued, coal.

The precious black rocks provided civilization with a cheap source of fuel. Regionally coal mining did so much more; it provided the northeast with an identity, a feeling of belonging and importance, as well as a deep and binding sense of community spirit that still exists today, fifteen years after the final

cage returned to the surface at Wearmouth Colliery (the last of Durham's collieries to close). This brought to an end four centuries of coal mining in the region.

The industrial and social impacts made by coal mining have helped to shape and mould industrial development in the region. They have found their way into almost every aspect of the cultural development of the region, from its dialect to its landscape.

With this in mind the North East England Mining Archive and Research Centre (NEEMARC) was

born. The centre holds over one hundred years of records from three key regional organizations: National Union of Mineworkers, Durham Miners Association, North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, and National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, Durham Area (formerly Durham Deputies' Mutual Aid Association).

The centre, based at The Murray Library in the University of Sunderland, represents a key source for coal mining, family history, regional history, working conditions in mines, accident reports, disaster information, welfare activities and other key areas of interest in social, economic and industrial history. Minutes, correspondence, financial records, photographs, publications, lodge records, all demonstrate the scope of union activity in the region. The Institute's minutes, correspondence and records of experiments demonstrate the range of its world wide membership.

To find out more you can use the on-line catalogue with its search facilities. Users will have access to the original records at NEEMARC.

The centre is open to anyone with an interest in any aspect of coal mining and its history. Further details can be viewed on-line at the NEEMARC website, www.neemarc.com.



Officials of the Durham District Miners' Welfare Committee 1930

Government Skims 3 Billion off Miners' Pensions

NUM Campaign To Get Cash Back

The National Union of Mineworkers is to mount a campaign to have the £3 billion returned to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme (MPS) which has been siphoned off by the Government under an unequal agreement brokered in 1994 when the coal mining industry was being closed. In exchange for a government promise to underwrite the MPS to maintain miners' pensions at the rate of inflation the Government claimed half the surplus in the MPS every year. However, it soon became apparent

that due to the robust nature of the finances of the MPS and the low rate of inflation there was little chance of the scheme getting into difficulties. As a result the price the beneficiaries of the MPS are paying in reduced pensions is hugely disproportionate to any benefit they might receive in the future as a result of the Government guarantee.

While in opposition the New Labour encouraged the NUM to believe that they would rectify this matter. Once in power, however, they have

consistently refused to end what many regard as the blatant theft of miners' pensions. Dave Guy, NUM North East President said, 'at a time when the government are giving tens of billions of pounds to rich bankers it is a disgrace that they refuse to give our members, whose average pension is little over £30 per week, what is rightfully theirs. If the Government gave this £3 billion back it would put some spending power back into our pensioner's pockets which would help to stimulate the economy.'

Margaret Thatcher Dies on Stage

Play 'Maggies End' goes to London

On the 25th anniversary of the 1984/85 strike the NUM North East is to join with the RMT, UNITE, and the GMB in sponsoring a play which begins with the 'death' of Margaret Thatcher. This dark comedy written by internationally acclaimed playwrights Ed Waugh and Trevor Wood was inspired by press reports that the New Labour government was making plans to give Margaret Thatcher a state funeral.

Trevor Wood explained, 'There's little doubt that most Labour supporters would see a state funeral for Margaret Thatcher as the ultimate betrayal by their party and that to acknowledge her in this way would re-open many of the sores of the 1980s.'

'We wanted to explore what the possible repercussions of this could be, particularly in the North

of England, where many communities were decimated during the Thatcher years.

'In the play, a former militant campaigner's sense of outrage over the betrayal brings him into conflict with his only daughter, who has risen through the ranks to become a senior minister in the New Labour government, and threatens to destroy his family.'

'Maggie's End is really about the legacy of Thatcherism and examines how far the New Labour government has travelled from its traditional roots.'

Maggies End was first performed at the Gala Theatre in October 2007 and was a sell-out. It is now being taken to London, to the Shaw Theatre in Euston Road for two weeks from April 6 to 18.

Tickets cost £11 to £15 and are on sale now. Contact the box office on 0871 594 3123.



Durham Miners' Gala 2008
Photo: Keith Potts