Jeremy Corbyn’s landslide election to the leadership of the Labour Party has shaken the political establishment of this country to its core. A hundred years on from the death of Keir Hardie, the Labour Party at last has another leader who believes in socialism.

His election was the more remarkable because he won despite the storm of disapproval from a right-wing media that was aided and abetted by a cabal of discredited former Labour ministers and prime ministers.

But, the more they condemned his anti-austerity policies, declared him unelectable and mocked his dress sense, the more tens of thousands, young and old, flocked to his rallies and joined the Labour Party, doubling its membership. Many more, who had quit the Party in despair at its right-wing leadership, rejoined in the belief that a party led by Corbyn could be trusted.

Above all, he stood up for the no-nos, no-buts belief that there is an alternative to the Tories’ austerity programme that punishes the poor for an economic crisis caused by the rich.

It was, however, not just his policies that attracted this tsunami of support, it was more than that. In a party dominated by professional, career-driven, politicians, tainted by the expenses scandal and the politicians-for-hire industry, Corbyn stood out as an honest man who could be trusted.

Now the Tories, big business and their media friends are out to get him, to demoralise him and rubbish all he stands for. They fear he has struck a chord with the almost 15 million voters so disillusioned in the political class they refuse to vote for any party.

So, would it be too cynical to suggest that more was going on? Was there a conscious effort to isolate the leader? The barnstorming, over-the-top, oratory of the Shadow Foreign Secretary was undoubtedly a call to arms but was it also the opening salvo in a bid to be leader?

Labour’s massive win in the Oldham by-election suggests the anti-Corbyn camp has miscalculated. Corbyn, it appears, is not only electable but can increase Labour’s share of the vote.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year,

Dave Hopper
The Durham Miners’ Association is calling on Members of Parliament, particularly those representing former mining constituencies, to put pressure on the Tory government to act on the ruling of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) and allow all those suffering from Dupuytrens Contracture (DC) to receive industrial injuries benefit.

This ruling was, to a large extent, based on evidence acquired by the DMA from its members, which proved that DC was far more prevalent amongst miners than in the general population.

DC, which can be caused by the excessive use of vibratory tools and is sometimes known as ‘miner’s claw’, causes the fingers of the hand, most commonly the little finger and the ring finger, to bend progressively towards the palm, causing the sufferer to be unable to straighten the distorted fingers.

We suspect that the Tories, in their desire to slash £12 billion from the benefits budget, will drag their feet and deny our members the right to compensation for this painful and highly debilitating condition.

It is now over 18 months since the IIAC made its ruling and still no secondary legislation has been passed to enable payment. We had to wait 18 months after the IIAC ruling on osteoarthritis of the knee before it was passed into law and it looks like we are going to wait much longer before sufferers of DC will get justice. How many of our older members will die before the government acts?

**Work Capability Assessment**

The Chaos Continues

In the last issue of the Durham Miner, we reported that Mandatory Reconsideration had resulted in the reduction of 70,000 tribunals nationally. This new process means that if a person has had their disability benefit stopped after being wrongly assessed as ‘fit for work’, they can’t proceed to an appeals tribunal until the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) reconsiders their original assessment.

There is no set time limit for this process and it can take months, during which the appellant is denied his benefit. We have always considered this new requirement a deliberate stalling tactic designed to avoid paying benefits to sick and disabled people.

We are now even more concerned as the DWP is now telephoning those who have asked for reconsiderations in an attempt to encourage them not to proceed to an appeal tribunal.

We urge all our members who receive these telephone calls not to be discouraged and to inform the DMA Area Office immediately. When we take cases to tribunals we are experiencing a high level of success.

MAXIMUS, the American company which took over the contract originally held by ATOS in March 2015, was tasked with completing a million assessments by the end of the year despite there being an estimated backlog of between 500,000 and 600,000 to start with.

No official statistics are available but it doesn’t take a mathematician to deduce that a state of chaos created by the DWP and ATOS still prevails under MAXIMUS.

**Unfair Dismissal**

One of our members recently got in touch to use our free initial advice service because he had been sent a text message from his employer sacking him and wanted to go to an industrial tribunal.

Due to the changes made by the last government this required him to pay an initial fee of £250 and, if the case was allowed to go to court, a further fee of £950.

He was advised by Thompsons, the DMA solicitors, that he had a good case and elected to pay the fee only to have his request turned down on the grounds that there was a technical problem with the application form.

Undeterred, he appealed to the tribunal in Newcastle but was again refused his day in court. However, when he took the case further to the upper tribunal in London, the judge upheld his appeal and told the opposing side that, in his opinion, the matter should be sorted out promptly. Consequently, a settlement was agreed to the satisfaction of our member.

There is, however, an important lesson in this case – anyone who is in employment and a beneficial member of the DMA must join the union organised in their place of work.

The DMA provides a service related to benefit and health problems related to the mining industry and has not the capacity to deal with the problems, which occur in the workplace. If there is a union covering your job – you should be a member of it.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year.

Alan Cummings
The First World War was entering its second year of carnage when Anthony Greathead was born. He was in his last year at the junior school during the 1926 lockout and, in 1929, at the age of 14 he started work as a trapper boy, opening and closing the ventilation doors, at Deaf Hill Colliery. ‘In those days,’ he said, ‘we only had oil lamps and sometimes when a miner’s lamp ran out of oil they took my lamp and left me in the dark.’ But that did not worry him, he recalled. In time, Anthony progressed in-bye as a putter, moving the coal tubs to and from the coalface, finally becoming a drawer, pulling out the face supports to allow the roof to collapse as the face advanced.

Looking back to his childhood, he remembered the 1926 lockout when he was 11 years old. He spent most of the strike on the pit heap scavenging for bits of coal, which he sold around the doors for a penny a bucket. Despite the hardships of the seven-month ordeal, when asked if he had enough to eat, he answered emphatically: ‘Yes, we never starved – our parents saw to that – we never went hungry.’

Anthony took a keen interest in the union from an early age and, when he left Deaf Hill and moved to Trimdon Grange Colliery, he was elected Delegate and Financial Secretary. One of his proudest moments was on the eve of the 1963 Gala when newly elected leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson, unfurled a new Trimdon Grange Lodge banner. Later he joined the NCB No 4 Area Salvage Team as a chock drawer. This team moved from colliery to colliery throughout the No 4 Area removing the hydraulic supports and machinery from coalfaces that had finished production.

He ended his working life at Vane Tempest Colliery and had, by that time, served as a lodge official for 34 years. At the age of 100, Anthony complains of being hard of hearing but still takes a keen interest in current affairs keeping scrapbooks of events and writing perceptive comments on the political events of the day, in his immaculate handwriting.

Looking back, he said: ‘It was the comradeship that made the job so enjoyable, everybody helped each other.’

Anthony will celebrated his birthday on Wednesday December 16 quietly at home with his neighbours.
The Miners’ Hall at Red Hill
100 years Of History

On October 23 and 24, the Miners’ Hall at Red Hill was opened to all our friends and supporters to visit. Hundreds attended the event and a Souvenir pamphlet was produced celebrating 100 years since the opening of the hall and surveying the history of the Durham Miners’ Association in photographs and text. Reproduced here is an extract written by DMA Secretary, Dave Hopper.

On Saturday 20 November 1869 a small group of delegates from several mines met in the Market Hotel, Durham City and established The Durham Miners’ Mutual Association. This was not the first miners’ union to be established on the coalfield but the first that would endure. A further meeting was held in the same venue on December 18 that year when 19 delegates met representing 1,964 miners.

On August 12 1871 the first Gala was held in Wharton Park, Durham attracting 5,000 miners and their families.

The following year it was estimated that between 50,000 and 70,000 marched through Durham and on to the racecourse at Old Elvet, much to the discomfort of the genteel residents of Durham City.

By 1876, the new union was well established boasting a membership of 50,000 and having amassed sufficient funds to expend £6,000 on a new purpose-built hall and offices in North Road, Durham, opened by Miners’ Agent John Forman on June 3 1876. This fine gothic building with its hall capable of holding 300 was a firm statement that the union had arrived.

By the time the present Miners’ Hall was opened by newly elected General Secretary, Tomas H Cann on October 23 1915 the membership had swollen to 120,000 miners organised in 200 lodges. If the North Road Hall was a statement that the union had arrived this new hall, set in its own grounds resembling a coal owners country estate, was an expression of permanence, power and prosperity. However, the miners’ agents were unaware that the Durham Coalfield was already in decline having reached its peak of production some three years earlier in 1912.

The first time I visited the Miners’ Hall at Red Hill, as a young coal miner, the splendour of the architecture, the records, the memorabilia and the history fascinated me – I am still fascinated today.

In those days it was unusual for a miner, who wasn’t a lodge official, to be given permission to visit. For most miners Redhills, as it was always known, was a foreign place and the agents who represented them were distant and aloof.

A Durham miners’ life revolved around his local lodge, his welfare hall and his union committee. When local disputes arose, many lodges would complain that their Durham agents were too conciliatory, too eager to see the managements side and were always opposed to any kind of militant action.

General Secretary, Peter Lee, who did much good work as chairman of the County Council bringing basic sanitation and fresh water into the villages of Durham, was in total conflict with his members during the great strike of 1926. But despite his opposition Durham miners fought on against the savage wage reduction and the lengthening of their hours of labour and defied Lee by remaining on strike a month after all other areas had returned to work. Even then they never voted to return to work but failed to achieve a two thirds majority require by the Miners’ Federation Board to continue the strike.

However, the most controversial leader was Sam Watson. Watson rose to prominence on the coalfield as the Secretary of the militant Boldon Miners’ Lodge. He was particularly active in the unemployed movement and the fight against the hated Means Test. In the late 1930s he supported the campaign for unity between the Communist and Labour party in the fight against Fascism. Elected as an agent in 1936, he rose through the ranks to become General Secretary in 1945.

Once in control Watson became the most influential right wing, anti-communist trade union leader in the Labour Movement. He conspired with Hugh Gaitskell to have fellow miner Nye Bevan expelled from the Labour Party and became the unofficial ambassador for the newly formed state of Israel.

On the Durham coalfield he collaborated with the National Coal Board in closing pits, opposed all local strikes and instructed local officials to support management in sacking men for absenteeism. As a result, it was not long before Durham miners were the lowest paid in the country. Only the strikes of 1972 and 74 restored wage parity throughout the coalfields and restored some dignity and credibility to our lodges.

I was elected General Secretary in 1985 in the aftermath of the year-long strike alongside the late Dave Guy who became President.

We were determined that Redhills would no longer be a forbidden place for Durham miners. Rank and file members were encouraged to
drop in and have a look around and be inspired by the history of the building their forbears financed. We organised brass band concerts and exhibitions in the council chamber and encouraged other unions to use the building as a meeting venue.

Redhills finest hour was in 1990 when it was our turn to host the National Union of Miners’ Annual Conference and rather than pay for a seaside venue we brought the conference to Redhills. It was an acclaimed success and made me proud to be a Durham miner.

Whatever the future holds in these uncertain times we are determined that this magnificent building will remain a facility for the use of the Labour movement and the people of Durham.

It is our Heritage and we must cherish it.

Esh Winning Honours its Mining Heritage With Memorial Statue

A magnificent black granite statue of a miner’s family was unveiled on Saturday October 18 by DMA Secretary, Dave Hopper and six-year-old Jake Heslop, who was dressed as a pit lad.

Jake’s grandfather Bob Heslop, one of the leaders of the Esh Winning Miners’ Memorial Group, sadly died in 2013 before he could see the project completed. The ceremony was witnessed by large crowd of Esh residents and representatives of miners’ banner groups from across the County.

The unveiling marked the end of a six-year campaign by the Memorial Group to raise £65,000. Group treasurer Richard Thompson Minnis said: ‘We were very pleased at how the day went. A lot of hard work has gone into making it become a reality.’

The monument was designed by local resident, Norman Emery, the author of several books on the history of Durham miners and their banners.
Sunshine and Socialism

We are in serious danger of running out of superlatives to describe the Durham Miners’ Gala after, once again, tens of thousands flocked onto the streets of Durham in bright sunlight on 11 July.

Older veterans say the Racecourse had never been so full since the 1950s and the police estimated that over 150,000 were in attendance.

As part of the throng of bands and banners that marched onto the field for over five hours were three magnificent new banners from Sacriston, Usworth and Tanfield Lea.

Dave Hopper, Secretary of the Durham Miners’ Association (DMA) opened proceedings by calling on the Fishburn Colliery RMT band to play the miners’ hymn Gresford in memory of all those who had perished in mines throughout the world. He said that although he could not mention all who had sadly passed away since the previous Gala he would like to make reference to three:

Mike Elliot, the actor and comedian, who ‘had given great service to the union and would be sadly missed.’

And, finally, Robin Todd, the Durham County Councillor from South Hetton and former colliery mechanic, who ‘gave 51 years of service to local government and played an important role in keeping alive the heritage of mining in his community.’

The platform then stood to the haunting strains of Gresford.

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Jeremy Corbyn, the left wing contender for the leadership of the Labour Party, who had just arrived from a huge rally in Edinburgh, was introduced by Dave Hopper as ‘the only man who is going to change the direction of the Labour Party towards socialism and a better society’.

Jeremy opened by saying that he considered speaking at the Gala one of the greatest honours of his life. He said that on his way from Edinburgh his train had been delayed, but he was fortunate that he was accompanied by a delegation from the train drivers’ union ASLEF who kept him informed of the difficulties preventing his progress south.

‘They had analysed the problem and concluded it should all be sorted out by bringing the railway service back into private ownership,’ Jeremy said to enthusiastic applause.

Referring to the miners’ history, he spoke of the ‘bitterness’ of the 1926 lockout and its aftermath when mining communities ‘stood together and, in standing together, helped to develop the strength of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the whole socialist ideal through the years of the 1930s.

‘So, when we celebrate our National Health Service, when we celebrate the principle of a welfare state, it’s on their shoulders that this service was built and it’s on their shoulders that
the great advance was made after the Second World War...

‘The work of trade unions over the years not only achieved the National Health Service and Welfare State, it also achieved the Equality Act, the Human Rights Act and a society where we oppose discrimination and the scapegoating of anybody at any time.

‘There is no way forward in blaming migrants or minorities for the problems of our society. The only way forward is unity in struggle to achieve better conditions for all.’ (Applause)

He paid tribute to the Durham miners’ and the British trades unions’ proud history of international solidarity and warned that international trade agreements were leading to an international race to the bottom in workers’ wages.

‘We all want to live in a society where everybody counts and where we all care for each other. It is wrong, it is immoral, it is unnecessary that anyone should be sleeping on the streets of Britain, that any child should be homeless, that anyone should be hungry. We are a rich enough country to conquer those inequalities and those miseries. (Applause)

‘We need an alternative. We need to say “No” to austerity that has brought about such grotesque levels of inequality. We need trade union rights that mean something so our funds are not put under threat and we can take strike action through our union structures. We need collective bargaining.

‘We need an alternative policy and what is fascinating about this debate in the Labour Party is that people are attending events because they know where we came from and they want to know we are going to a society of full employment, of decency and human rights: A society that condemns and eliminates poverty both here and elsewhere. It can be done.

‘Thank you for inviting me today.’ (Cheers and applause)

Tosh continued, explaining that when he started work in 1979, in a freight yard in Doncaster, the main activity of the yard was to shift coal from nationalised coal mines onto a nationalised rail network and take it to nationalised power stations where power was generated and distributed by a nationalised company.

‘We owned the power and we distributed it to where it was needed not where the most profit was. It went to homes, to factories, to hospitals and schools – not for profit.’

He went on, explaining how different things were now after denationalisation: ‘When John Major privatised rail he said he was going to introduce competition, which would
drive down costs and fares. More than 20 years later, we have the dearest fares in Europe.’

He said that privatisation had created a series of local monopolies and that the irony was that the state-owned companies of Germany, France and Holland all ran sections of the British rail industry and, consequently, they all benefited from British taxpayers’ subsidies, creating the ridiculous situation where high fares in Britain were helping to keep fares low in Germany, Holland and France.

Turning to the Labour Party leadership elections, Tosh explained that, when ASLEF met at national level to discuss which candidate they would nominate for the leadership of the Labour Party, they had no hesitation in selecting Tom Watson, ‘who stood up to Murdoch’, for deputy leader. However, when it came to the leader, Jeremy Corbyn had not yet been nominated. ‘What we saw was more of the same. We couldn’t choose the tallest of the seven dwarfs.’

He said that the policies put forward by the candidates were basically a continuation of the policies that had lost Labour 5 million votes between 1997 and 2010.

‘So we didn’t nominate, we couldn’t nominate a leader. Then we had an inspiration, a Messiah came with the initials “JC” and we reconvened and immediately and unanimously voted to support Jeremy Corbyn for leader.

‘We want socialism, not austerity, and we want to fight for our class the same way they [the Tories] fight for their class.’

Tosh sat down to applause and cheers.

Matt Wrack, General Secretary FBU

Matt opened his speech by saying that he was honoured to speak at the Gala and he paid tribute to the rich history of the National Union of Mineworkers from which many important lessons could be learned.

He drew the crowd’s attention to the FBU fire engine parked on the edge of the racecourse and the slogan painted on the side: ‘We Rescue People Not Banks’.

‘It was’, he said, ‘not our slogan but one we borrowed from Spain’, explaining that the people of Spain were suffering great hardship because of the harsh regime of austerity dictated by the Spanish government.

An example he gave was the plight of an 89-year-old pensioner who could not manage to pay the rent after her pension had been reduced. The landlord decided to throw her out of the flat she had lived in since 1979. But, when the bailiffs found the flat securely shut, they called on the fire brigade to come with their cutting equipment to break into the flat.

Said Matt: ‘When a fireman, was instructed to do this, he said: “I joined this job to save lives. I joined this job as a humanitarian service and I’m not going to do it” and he refused. Overnight, all across Spain, banners went up declaring: “We Rescue People Not Banks”.

‘And that’s where our slogan comes from and that’s why we’ve adopted it – because it blames those who should be blamed – not migrant workers, not the low paid, not those on benefits – but the banks and capitalism that caused this crisis. They should be made to pay, not our people.’ (Cheers and applause).

Matt then turned to the ‘horrific attacks’ which the government was making on people in general and how they were, ‘as they always do’, trying to ‘divide and rule’ by blaming public sector workers, benefit claimants, migrants or whatever.

‘We have,’ he said, ‘to build on the traditions of our movement, the traditions of unity and solidarity – that’s how we will resist them.’

He described how his union was particularly under attack as an essential service. The Tories were, he said, going to make it almost impossible to take industrial action. He reminded everyone that this week was the anniversary of the horrific 7/7 terrorist attacks when so many people were killed and injured.

He continued: ‘Who went to help them? – those much maligned public sector workers, tube workers and my own members. When people were rightly running to get out of those tube stations fire-fighters went down into those tunnels to save lives and to protect the injured.’

‘On the 7 July we commemorated that and, on the 8 July, George Osborne condemned us to four more years of pay restraint.

‘I come to Durham every year because it gives me a boost to be with our people and to look at and reflect on the traditions of our movement; to see the magnificent banners march past and reflect on the people who built this movement. It was built on traditions of struggle and solidarity, and it was built by people who wanted to improve pay and safety and conditions in mines and other workplaces. It was built by people who had a wider vision.

‘People didn’t just say we want better pay and conditions, they also said we want decent education, we want decent health services and we have the ability to run things differently. This world doesn’t have to be run on
the basis of the needs of a tiny, tiny, tiny minority who run everything for their profit.

‘We should take things over and run them in the interests of the majority of the world. A society built on human solidarity, that’s socialism and that’s what we should be fighting for.’ (Cheers and applause)

Chris Keates, General Secretary NASUWT – The Teachers Union

Chris opened by saying that the Gala was just the event she needed to lift her spirits after the disappointment of the General Election and drew applause when she said: ‘But we do have a cause for celebration. Why don’t we celebrate the Liberal Democrats being consigned to the dustbin of history?'

She condemned the ‘shameful legacy’ of the Coalition Government and the narrative it constructed which, she said: ‘blames the poor for their poverty; a narrative designed to distract from the reality of the low pay of hard working families, masking the fact that most of those receiving benefits and tax credits for their children are actually in work.

‘I am proud that my members have been – and continue to be – prepared to stand up for standards in our schools in the face of relentless assault by governments. My members have taken over 300 days of strike action in schools across the country to fight for conditions of service to enable them to do their best for children and young people they teach.’

She spoke of what motivated teachers to resist the Tory government’s attacks, explaining that teachers and support staff see, first hand, the rise in child poverty and its consequences for the 3.7 million children in this country suffering the effects – ‘they see children coming to school too hungry to concentrate’.

‘They see children without the footwear and clothes for the weather conditions; they see young people who have had their life chances compromised...They see young people now choosing subjects in school not on the basis of their aspirations, their skills and their abilities but on whether their parents can afford the books, the equipment and the field trips that go with the courses.’ (Applause)

She concluded: ‘Trade unions have a proud history of empowering working people and their families. Trade unions will continue the fight for equality, fairness, social justice and democracy and trade unions will still be here when this Tory government is consigned to the dustbin of history. (Cheers and applause).

Owen Jones, journalist and author

Owen Jones said that speaking at the Gala for the second time was the greatest honour of his life. He had sought great inspiration from the miners’ battle for their communities in the Great Strike 30 years ago and, particularly, he found inspiration in the struggle of the women: ‘the true Iron Ladies’. He saw great hope in the support many miners had shown for LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] rights and how the role of lesbians and gays in supporting the miners had now been immortalised in film.

‘All too often’, he said, ‘the trade union link with the Labour Party is treated as a matter of shame, including sometimes by some of its own leaders, but Labour should be proud to be bankrolled by supermarket shelf stackers, cleaners, lollypop ladies and engineers – the
He said that the Tories were preparing to batter the trade union movement again despite the fact that Britain already had the most oppressive anti-trades union laws in Europe.

Referring to their plans to impose a threshold on the number of votes cast in a trade union ballot he said: ‘If they applied the same principles on ballots to the MPs in Parliament, as they wished to impose on trades unions, it would mean most MPs being turfed out on the basis that their election was illegitimate.’

But, he explained, that injustice was not just a fact of life to be accepted. ‘Injustice is created, it’s contrived, it’s manufactured and if human beings can create injustice then human beings can eradicate injustice as well.’

In his opinion the Labour Party lost the election because they had not put up ‘an inspiring alternative’ in Scotland or in any other part of Britain.

They had failed to challenge the myth that the economic crisis was caused by Labour borrowing. The Tories’ so-called recovery was, he said, ‘the weakest since the 19th century’ and people had suffered, ‘the longest fall in workers’ pay packets since Queen Victoria sat on the throne’.

He said that not only had the Tories failed to reduce the deficit by half, they had created more debt than any previous Labour Government. Despite this, the Labour Party had failed to provide an opposition.

‘The official opposition has gone AWOL’, he said, adding: ‘Friends, it is our responsibility, every single person here, to fill that vacuum. We are the official opposition today. And it’s time we stopped letting them get away with it.’ (Applause)

He painted a chilling picture of the threat that lay ahead: ‘All those people who keep the country ticking over are going to have their pockets emptied. Their homes will be colder; their children will be having fewer hot meals. There will be more sleepless nights as bills loom ever more ominously. Life will become harder, harsher and more difficult.

‘We have a responsibility to make sure that does not happen. We must all speak out, we must tell the truth about what’s happening to this country.’

Owen continued, saying that five million people were on the waiting list for social housing and were driven into the hands of private landlords who charged unaffordable rent with no security of tenure.

‘Hundreds of thousands are driven to food banks,’ he pointed out, ‘in the sixth biggest economy in the world. Disabled people are having their desperately needed support taken away.’

In addition, young people on zero hours contracts were getting text messages at six in the morning, telling them whether they had work for that day.

When people get angry at these conditions, Owen described how the Tories tried to divert their anger to other sections of society: ‘They say to low paid workers whose wages have been slashed by their bosses, whose in-work benefits have been cut by this government: “don’t be angry with the government, don’t be angry with your bosses. Envy the unemployed scrounger living in so-called luxury down the road.”

‘They say to private sector workers whose pensions are being decimated – one of the great scandals of our time: “don’t be angry with your boss, envy the nurse, the teacher, down the road who still has a pension. Why should they [have a pension] when you don’t?” And they say to people who can’t get a home they can afford to live in because they government won’t build housing, or they can’t get secure well paid jobs ... “don’t get angry at the rich and powerful, envy instead the immigrant getting a home or a job that should be yours instead.”’

Owen said that in situations like this we have to create hope and that hope comes from: ‘your mothers, your fathers, your grandmothers, your grandparents and your ancestors before them. We stand on the shoulders of giants and we must show the same determination and conviction and hope that they showed because...if we show that hope and conviction and foresight that these people showed, against far more insurmountable odds than ourselves, then we will build a new society.’

‘Not a society run as a racket for those at the top but a society run in the interests of the real wealth creators – working people. Let’s stand together, let’s fight together and, friends, let’s win these battles together.’ (Cheers and applause)

Len McCluskey, General Secretary UNITE

Len opened his speech by saying what a privilege it was to speak again at ‘this magnificent meeting’ which, he said, ‘represents the finest traditions of our movement’.

‘Its popularity in modern times,’ he emphasised, ‘is a testament to the spirit of the Durham coalfield.’

Len said he thought that Thatcher, who did so much to destroy mining communities, would be spinning in her grave if she could experience the spirit of this Gala Day which was all about ‘sunshine and socialism’.

‘Our movement’, he said, ‘has always been forward looking.’

‘The generations of miners who have gathered on these fields on Gala Day since 1871 – and who laid the foundations of our movement – did so because they believed in a better and brighter future. They believed that their children and their children’s future, could be more prosperous and fair.’

He explained that the return of a Tory government, backed by the lies of the media and the cash of hedge funds, has put those dreams for us
in danger but said we should take heart because ‘our movement is still standing, our values are still shared by millions. In every city, every town, every village and every street there are people, not just suffering from the Tory attacks but people wanting to resist and wanting to voice their hopes for a fairer and more equal society.’

The evidence for this spirit of resistance, he stressed, was in the quarter of a million people who recently marched through the streets of London and those that attend the Peoples Assemblies.

He paid tribute to the Greek people and their refusal to accept ‘the bankers’ agenda’ and called for a message of solidarity to go out from the Gala to the Greek people. (Applause)

He dubbed George Osborne’s budget, ‘a budget of the rich for the rich – a budget of a government trying to throw one last party for its friends in the boardrooms while its neoliberal order crumbles around it.’

He said that they thought that inheritance was a preserve of the rich, ‘handing down wealth and mansions’ but asked: ‘what about our inheritance, our hospitals, our council houses and our welfare state? Everything our parents and grandparents built with their hands and paid for with their taxes? (Applause)

‘And also, yes comrades, paid for with their lives – Chancellor, that’s our inheritance, so I say, get your grubby hands off it you thieving Tory bastards!’ (Cheers and Applause)

Len McCluskey

He ridiculed the Tories ‘ridiculous claim to be the friend of working people’ while they attacked the very organisations which fight for the interests of working people – the trade unions. He gave this warning: ‘We don’t need and we never have relied on their permission to do our job properly.’

He explained that his members in many different industries, ‘from car factories to housing associations, building sites and bus depots’, had voted for strike action and won demands hundreds of times in the past year. They voted for strikes in the confidence that UNITE would not let them starve as the union had a strike fund of £35M – the largest strike fund in Europe.

‘No matter how many borders we have to cross or miles we have to fly, we are forcing global institutions to be accountable for their abuses against working people.’

Speaking of the Leadership campaign, he explained that he was dismayed by the lack of a credible opposition from the front bench of the Labour Party, drawing cheers and applause, when he said: ‘For God’s sake in the name of the millions suffering the Tory cuts and the millions of low paid nurses, dinner ladies and teaching assistants, get off your backside, stop being scared of your own shadow, and start opposing!’

He said this lack of opposition was the principal reason for UNITE’s decision to back Jeremy Corbyn for leader. He became more convinced, that they had taken the right decision when the Daily Mail and other Tory papers had attacked them as the ‘extreme left’.

He then posed the following questions: ‘Is it extreme to oppose austerity wrecking the lives of millions? Is it extreme to stand for higher taxes on the wealthy to help tackle inequality, extreme to support our NHS, extreme to oppose criminal wars and is it extreme to support proper rights and freedoms for trade unionism?’

And, on the latter issue Len had an announcement to make: at its Brighton conference UNITE delegates had made an important change in their union’s constitution by voting to delete the words ‘so far as they are lawful’ before the list of his union’s objectives.

He explained why: ‘Not because we are anarchists, not because we want to rob a bank, but because we have to ask ourselves the question – can we any longer make that commitment to stick, under any and all circumstances, within the law as it stands and as the Tories are preparing to change it?

‘The history of the world, the history of our movement, tells us we have a duty to not only oppose but to break bad laws.’ (Cheers and applause)

He emphasised: ‘I’ve made it clear before and I do so again here today: UNITE is not going to see itself rendered toothless by passively submitting to unjust laws. If the Tories wish to put trade unionism beyond the law, then they must live with the consequences of their own actions. (Applause)

‘We are ready to fight and we will, I believe, find allies throughout society amongst everyone who cares for freedom and democracy. Sisters and brothers, this year is the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta – the first real challenge to an over mighty Crown. In that spirit, let me urge everyone fighting austerity, everyone fighting injustice at work, to stand up to the tyrannical barons of the establishment.

‘To say to them loud and clear, “our rights come before your unjust laws, we will never bend a knee and our spirit will never be broken.”’

‘Keep fighting comrades!’

Above: Alan Cummings, chairman of the DMA, thanked the speakers and all who had contributed to organising the Gala. He said that the Gala should never die and it wouldn’t with the support of all the organisations present. He urged everyone to donate to the Friends of The Durham Miners’ Gala ‘because they were the ones who paid for the band allowances’.
International Guests

Raymundo Fernandez Navarre, International Officer of the CGT (Cuban TUC), Alexis Asher Abreu, of the Cuban Mining and Energy Union and Marcus Garcia, Labour attaché to Venezuelan Embassy in London, were among the guest speakers at the 131st Durham Miners’ Gala.

Raymundo Fernandez Navarre
After thanking the DMA for inviting him to speak, Raymundo said that he had, for the first time, been down a coal mine [at Beamish Museum] and now could appreciate ‘how hard the conditions were for coal miners and their families for so many years’.

‘The hard work of the miners can be seen in this incredible gathering. We see your unity and we appreciate the unity you have given us,’ he said.

He explained that the National Union of Mineworkers was one of the only two British unions to establish a connection with the Cuban unions: ‘We thank you, and are very grateful for this solidarity, for the support you have given to the Cuban people during the struggle.

‘There are battles that have been won. One of them is that we now have the Miami Five back with us after 15 years. This is due to the solidarity you gave us.’

He said that even if Cuba and America restore normal relations, Cuba will always be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist but, he cautioned: ‘The embargo has not gone so we urge you to keep your solidarity and your support until the embargo goes away – until Guantanamo goes away.

‘We are sure we can win this battle with your support. Thank you very much’. (Cheers and applause)

Garcia, Labour attaché to the Venezuelan Embassy in London, opened his address, before continuing to pay tribute to ‘all the wonderful leaders and activists that are present’.

He reported that Venezuela had been fighting capitalism for a long time and had proved that it was possible to put people before profit. Since 1998, it had built a national health service and provided free education for everyone at all levels of society as well as creating a ‘wonderful labour law’ and building fully equipped houses for the poor.

As a result, he said, ‘workers now have a pride they never had before and now Venezuela has gone from the most unequal country in South America to the least unequal’.

Marcus explained that these programmes were not without opposition, mainly from the business sector and the USA. ‘Workers throughout the continent,’ he declared, ‘are struggling for the right to make their own decisions in their own interests and not in the interests of the USA. For this your solidarity is vital and has been vital. So I thank you again for this kind invitation – forward to a world of dignity and socialism where people are put before profit!’ (Cheers and applause)
Beneficial Membership of the DMA will entitle you to the following benefits of membership:

**Legal Support**
Through the Association’s solicitors, Thomsons, 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:

- Social Security entitlements including representation before Social Security and Medical Appeal Tribunals.
- Advice and representation on any issues relating to concessionary fuel and cash in lieu.
- Mineworkers Pension Scheme entitlements.

**Become a Marra at:**
www.friendsofdurhamminersgala.org

**Follow the Marras on**
Facebook Durham Miners Gala

**New Club To Raise Cash For Gala**

At a time when Workingmens’ Clubs are struggling it’s refreshing to hear of a new club being formed. When the old Legion Club on Claude Terrace Murton was put up for sale it was bought by former Murton Mechanic Alan Carver. Rather than see the club developed into flats Alan was keen to see the building returned to its former use for the community and offered to rent it to the committees of the former Legion Club and the Victoria Club.

Steve Musgrove, Executive Committee member of the DMA said, ‘The Victoria Club committee were delighted to take up the offer and the Colliery Club was formed in February 2014 and we had over 1,000 applications for membership.’

Alan has recently refurbished the upstairs concert hall and it is now available for parties, weddings and functions. Two functions have been arranged to raise funds for the Friends of Durham Miners’ Gala. The first is:

**Monday December 28 2015**
7pm ’til late
The Ultimate Comedy Hypnotist Show
Starring Adam Night

Tickets £2.00 All proceeds to the Friends Of The Durham Miners’ Gala.