



The Durham Miner



NO 17 DEC 2016

The Durham Miner is the newsletter of the Durham Miners' Association, Secretary, Alan Cummings, The Miners' Hall, Flass Street, Red Hill, Durham, DH1 4BE. Tel: 0191 3843515

www.durhamminers.org

Dave Hopper Will Be Universally Missed

By DMA Secretary, Alan Cummings

The sudden and untimely death of Dave Hopper, our General Secretary for 31 years, was a huge and tragic shock.

His contribution to the welfare and wellbeing of the Durham miners was enormous and he will be universally missed. The 800 mourners at his funeral are manifest testimony to how he was respected and revered throughout Durham and the wider trade union and labour movement.

Whatever the difficulties may be I can assure you that we will continue his work defending our members.

This year's Big Meeting attracted the biggest crowds for over 50 years. After years of indifference and opposition from the leadership of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn has restored the Gala to its rightful place at the centre of the Labour calendar.

The massive crowd that rallied round the platform to hear Jeremy demonstrated that no matter how much he is vilified by the Tory media his popularity continues to grow particularly among young people who reject self-serving, careerist politicians.

We were delighted that, despite all the efforts of disloyal Labour MPs, to bully him into resigning, despite all the manoeuvres to disenfranchise over 100,000 new party members,

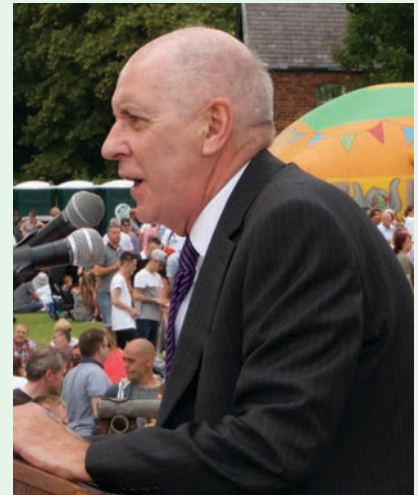
Jeremy increased his mandate to lead the Labour Party. Now the Labour Party must unite and fight our real enemy: the Tories.

After the close vote to leave the European Union, we are entering uncharted waters. We feared that whatever the outcome of the referendum it would be the poorest in society that would suffer. Unfortunately, early indications are proving this correct. The rapid fall in the price of the pound sterling is already having an adverse effect on our standard of living.

After decades of little or no wage increases, inflation now threatens to plunge millions of families, already living on the edge, into the depths of poverty. The loss of in-work benefits planned by the Tories will lengthen the queues at the food banks.

The shock result of the US Presidential elections has dropped further uncertainty into the world situation. Bizarrely, a man who fought a campaign based on racial hatred, simplistic answers to complex problems and straightforward lies won an election when he received 2.3 million fewer votes than his opponent and polled less than a quarter of the eligible electorate. It is a very worrying development.

When we were denied the right to progress our case to recover



Alan Cummings

damages for our members suffering from osteoarthritis of the knee we incurred costs in excess of £3M. This has forced us to make some economies, one of which is, the decision not to provide our members with a diary this year. This decision was taken reluctantly, but we are sure that you all will understand that the most important objective for the DMA is to continue to give the best service to our members who are facing ever-increasing attacks on their benefits.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families all the best for the New Year and to assure you that the Durham Miners Association will always be here for you.

Below: Jeremy Corbyn addressing this year's Big Meeting



Paraplegic Former Miners Harassed By Maximus



Above: Secretary Alan Cummings and Chairman Joe Whitworth discussing a tribunal case in the Compensation Office at Red Hill

Any hopes that the new health Assessment provider, Maximus, would improve the assessment process and make it more humane have been well and truly dashed. Maximus has inherited the exact same processes and descriptors as its predecessor ATOS.

They too use unqualified and underqualified assessors and have managed to introduce an even higher degree of inconsistency, while ensuring higher remuneration for themselves, into the process. We have members who under ATOS were deemed unfit for work, yet, when reassessed by Maximus have received no points at all.

Even more disgraceful has been the treatment of two of our members who are paraplegic due to a serious mine accident. They have been pursued and made to go through the process of reassessment despite it being blindingly obvious that they can not and never will be capable of working.

Ken Loach, who made the film *I Daniel Blake*, which highlights the plight of those trapped in the assessment process, has concluded that this kind harassment can only be described as 'deliberate cruelty' – he is not wrong.

To increase the degree of mental torture the government has systematically introduced procedures designed to slow up the whole process, increasing the waiting list for tribunals.

The introduction of Mandatory Reassessment means that if a claimant refuses to accept the findings of the assessors the case is referred back to the same decision makers who made the original assessment – delaying the date of a tribunal.

This procedure gives the assessors the opportunity to ring and interrogate our members without a representative being present to give advice. Pressure is then put on our members to give up their appeal.

We strongly advise our members not to be intimidated and to contact the Area Office immediately if they are being approached by Maximus so that we can monitor the situation and give advice.

A further problem is that we are denied access to the decision makers and have to deal with what amount to call centre operators, which hampers our ability to sort out simple problems quickly.

However, the most serious effect on our members is that, while waiting for a tribunal, they are denied their rightful benefit.

Those in difficult situations are then encouraged to apply for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) that puts them into a Catch-22 situation. To claim JSA, a claimant must agree to 'actively seek work', which contradicts their claim to be unfit to work.

We advise our members, if at all

possible, not to apply for JSA as it may create problems at a later stage. Although, there is never a cast-iron guarantee of success we are winning well over 60% of the cases we take to tribunal after which all benefit lost is refunded.

Unfortunately, we have not yet reached rock bottom with this discredited process. We now hear that there are plans afoot to hold tribunals by video link and reduce the panel of 'judges' on the tribunal so that, in future, appellants could face a single 'judge' sitting alone and determining the future of our members without the checks and balances afforded by a panel of judges from diverse backgrounds.

Just as worrying are the rumours that the number of assessment centres are to be reduced meaning that the sick and disabled will be forced to make longer journeys, adding to an already stressful experience.

Dupuytren's Contracture

It is now nearly three years since the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) made a recommendation, based to a large extent on evidence collected by the DMA, that Dupuytren's Contracture (DC) should be registered as an industrial disease, allowing sufferers to claim industrial injuries benefit.

It now requires an Act of Parliament to put this recommendation into practice – a measure that this Tory government has stubbornly refused to take.

DC, which can be caused by the excessive use of vibratory tools and is

Below: Example of the effect of Dupuytren's Contracture



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.

Hitherto, recommendations of the IIAC have always been accepted by successive governments, but we strongly suspect that the government's failure to act on this recommendation is motivated purely by a desire to save money.

We are concerned that many elderly and frail miners, who have suffered this condition for decades, will die cheated of the benefit they so rightly deserve.

The DMA calls upon all Labour MPs to press the government to act without further delay to see that justice is done.

Pneumoconiosis

We have become increasingly concerned that doctors are misdiagnosing cases of pneumoconiosis in former miners.

Before the advent of British Coal, the NCB regularly took X-rays of miners' chests that were studied by teams of doctors who were skilled at spotting the telltale signs.

After the privatisation of the mines this practice ceased and as a result the disease was not detected in the lungs of many miners. We are now experiencing an increase in the number of miners whose illness was only discovered as a result of post-mortem examinations.

We believe that there are two related reasons that former miners' conditions are going undiagnosed. Firstly, spotting the signs of pneumoconiosis from X-rays is particularly difficult as the heart obscures a large area of the lung.

And a second reason is that, because of the destruction of the coal industry, doctors have not had enough practice and training in the detection of this disease from the evidence afforded by X-rays.

We believe that every miner who has problems with his chest should be given a CT or MRI scan which gives

a much clearer indication of the damage caused by coal dust.

We are now participating in a working party including our solicitors, the NUM and MPs which is raising this question and demanding that former miners with chest problems are automatically sent for a CT or MRI scan regardless of cost.

The best £20 I ever spent

'The best £20 I ever spent', is how one of our members described the 'Beneficial Membership Fee' on being told that our solicitors, Thompsons, had won him a £50,000 settlement for the injuries he had sustained after an accident.

Our member took advantage of the 'free initial legal advice' that is an important feature of DMA Beneficial Membership.

When Thompsons considered that he had a good case, they fought a successful legal battle resulting in an excellent settlement.

The moral of this story is – keep up your membership because you never know when you may need it.

Orgreave – A Denial Of Justice



The decision of Amber Rudd not to hold an enquiry into the criminal actions of the South Yorkshire Police and other police forces present at the Orgreave Coke Works on June 18 1984 is an appalling act of injustice.

She glibly asserts. 'ultimately there were no deaths or wrongful convictions.'

Miners were lured to Orgreave that day and subjected to a continuous series of brutal attacks employing thousands of police, supported by mounted cavalry and vicious dogs, badly injuring over 50 men. The fact that no one was killed was purely a matter of chance.

However, the fact that no one was wrongfully convicted was not a matter of chance, but, due to the robust and dedicated work of the lawyers engaged to defend the 95 miners who were charged with riot, a crime carrying a life sentence.

These lawyers proved that police evidence was fabricated and the written statements of the arresting officers were dictated by senior officers. When these statements were exposed as false, the trial collapsed, but, predictably, no officers were disciplined let alone charged with criminal offences.

However, culpability goes far beyond the police forces involved that day. It is impossible to believe that the premeditated assault on miners at Orgreave could have been organised without the

active participation of Thatcher's government. A thorough enquiry would expose the myth that the police are non-political and independent of government.

That is why a public enquiry into Orgreave is being resisted by the present Tory government and the British establishment in general.

We should never forget that Orgreave was but an extreme example of the police violence that had become commonplace in the coalfields and mining villages of Britain in 1984/85 and we will continue to campaign until we get justice.



Dave Hopper 1943 – 2016

Dave Hopper was born on April 8 1943, the first son of Timothy and Barbara, in a small colliery house directly opposite the gates of Wearmouth Colliery, Sunderland, where his father worked.

His primary education was basic and, at a time when fewer than ten percent of Sunderland's children were awarded a place at a grammar school, Dave spent a year in the local secondary modern before passing the entrance exam for Villiers Street Secondary Technical School. He was an able pupil, a keen footballer and was already honing that legendary acerbic wit that delighted his classmates and annoyed the teaching staff in equal measure.

Sunderland's many shipyards and engineering factories were enjoying a post-war boom and there were ample jobs for Dave to choose from. However, he decided, at the age of 15, to follow his father down the pit

As a teenager he enthusiastically embraced the age of rock n' roll – Edwardian "drapes", beetle crushers and all. One night, on the dance floor of the Seaburn Hall, he met Brenda Lough, fell in love and after a short courtship they married on December 1 1962 – he was 19, Brenda, 18.

First Job At The Pit

At the pit, Dave's first job was stone picking on the surface screens amid the din and dust, a job he detested. When 16 and allowed down the pit, he first worked at the shaft bottom loading tubs into the cage. From there, he progressed in-by and finally, at the age of 19 and fully face-trained, he began hand-filling on a three-foot-high coalface – the most physically demanding job at the pit. In Durham, the men picked the face teams and the whole team shared piece-rate earnings equally. Comradeship and co-operation were essential and Dave forged bonds that lasted his lifetime.

Gary, his first child, was born in March 1963 and eighteen months later Brenda gave birth to their second child, Deborah, in September

1964 and their third child, Beverley in March 1964.

With a growing family to feed, Dave moved on to drilling in the development drifts and later operating a Dosco road-header in the new 15 70 horizon that was heading for the high coal reserves under the North Sea.

1972 Strike

In 1967, the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement replaced piecework and halved Dave's take home pay. By the time Jason, the fourth child, was born in April 1970, large-scale dissatisfaction was spreading throughout the British coalfields. Miners who had been so compliant since Vesting Day 1947 were at breaking point and, in January 1972, they struck for seven weeks for higher pay and won substantial increases.

Dave now began to take a keen interest in the union, encouraged by his father, Timothy, who was a union safety inspector and a member of the lodge committee. He read avidly about the history of the labour and socialist movement and became convinced that capitalism was the enemy of working people the world over, never wavering from this view.

His growing militancy brought him into conflict with the moderate area leaders and after the Incentive Scheme was introduced, by stealth, after twice being rejected by national ballot, Dave and a group of young miners decided to form a discussion forum, they called the Durham Left, dedicated to creating a more combative area leadership.

By 1981, they had succeeded in changing the rules governing the election of the union's Area Executive Committee making it more democratic, enabling Dave to be elected in 1982. Most importantly, in 1983, the Durham Left was instrumental in getting the first rank-and-file miner elected to the National Executive Committee, giving the left a vital majority of one. This was to prove decisive in the coming



Dave addressing the Big Meeting 1990

struggles. In that year, the influence of the left was further strengthened when Dave was elected secretary of Wearmouth's 3,000 strong lodge.

In 1984, the Wearmouth Lodge was amongst the first to strike against pit closures. Throughout the strike, Dave remained dedicated to achieving a successful conclusion while Brenda worked tirelessly raising money and feeding miners and their families.

Elected General Secretary

When the strike ended, Dave was elected General Secretary of the NUM (Durham Area) and with Dave Guy, the newly-elected President, formed a strong area leadership in the most difficult of circumstances. They opposed all the subsequent pit closures, the new draconian discipline procedures and the

Dave at Area Offices shortly after being elected in 1985





Denins Skinner Dave and Brenda on balcony of County Hotel, 1986

attempts to lengthen shift times underground. Above all, they stood by all those miners who had been sacked during the strike, getting many reinstated and supporting the others financially.

When the last pit in Durham closed in 1993, all appeared lost. The union's resources had been consumed in the strike, there were no miners to pay subscriptions and it would have been easy to have walked away. However, that was not how the two area leaders saw it.

The building assets of the Durham Area were put up as collateral and the union fought a court battle for

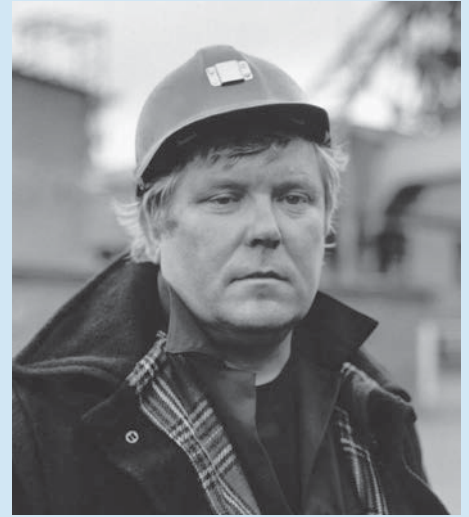
compensation for members suffering from the industrial disease Vibration White Finger. When they won, £1.7 billion in compensation was paid to miners throughout the coalfields of Britain. A similar success with bronchitis and emphysema was to follow.

In 1997, disaster struck Dave's family when Brenda, after a four-year battle with cancer, died on November 23 at the age of 53. The family was heartbroken and Dave struggled to face life without his wife to whom he had been devoted for 31 years.

Dave was passionately against the British intervention in Afghanistan and, when Tony Blair took the country to war in Iraq, he was incensed and left the Labour Party in which he had been an active member and office holder for over 30 years. He was totally opposed to the policies of New Labour and saw its refusal to reverse Thatcher's anti-union legislation as a betrayal of the very people the party was formed to protect.

He referred often in his Gala messages to the disgrace that, after 13 years of Labour Government, the gulf between rich and poor had actually widened.

Under Dave's leadership, Durham miners played an important role in providing aid for Cuba, donating money to buy ambulances for



Dave on pit visit to Murton Colliery 1990

its health service and computer equipment for schools. It was during a visit to Cuba that Dave met and fell in love with Maria Sanchez Zarzabal whom he married in the Cuban Embassy in 2005 and became a stepfather to her two children, Samuel and Esther. This gave Dave a new lease of life that they enjoyed for 11 happy years together.

Dave was a passionate internationalist who hated racial discrimination of all kinds. He supported all working people fighting oppression and was widely admired for his straight talking. Above all, he believed that the capitalist system, based on the exploitation of working people for the enrichment of the few, is not and can never be the highest level of civilisation that humankind can achieve.

Whatever the difficulties and problems, he was adamant that we have to strive to replace it with a socialist system under which, the weak are protected and everyone can enjoy the full fruits of their labour.

The Durham Miners' Gala, which under his leadership has grown and developed into Europe's largest celebration of community and trade union values, is his legacy and he leaves it to us all to cherish and guard with all the passion he demonstrated throughout his life.

Dave leaves behind his beloved wife Maria, four children and two stepchildren, eleven grand children and six great-grand children.



Above: Dave with Maria to his left on the balcony of the County Hotel on Gala Day 2015

Below: Dave's last speech in public at this year's Gala





Hundreds Gather to Say Farewell To Davey

Over 800 friends and relatives gathered at Red Hill on Friday 29 July to honour the memory of DMA General Secretary, Dave Hopper.

In a moving humanist ceremony conducted by former General Secretary of UNISON, Rodney Bickerstaff, Dave's life was celebrated with tributes from Wearmouth Lodge Secretary, Alan Mardghum, Geoff Shears, the former Chief Executive of Thompsons Solicitors, Alan Cummings, the Chairman of DMA, and the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

All spoke fondly of Dave's proud record of struggle for the principles of socialism and trade union solidarity and above all his hatred of racism and discrimination.

Alan Mardghum who, as a young man, was encouraged by Dave to take an active part in the union, brought laughter to the ceremony when he reflected on the lighter side of Dave's life at the pit. Alan recalled that when he finished his face training he asked the undermanager if he could work with Dave and Eddie Cable, the notoriously awkward Union Pit Inspector. The undermanager replied: 'If you can find out where those two work, you can have my job'.

Geoff Shears emphasised the courageous decision to put all the union's assets at risk in order to pursue the common law cases for compensation for men suffering from the industrial disease, vibration white figure.

The successful outcome of the case benefited miners throughout the country and the money members donated back transformed the finances of the union and secured the Gala. 'Government figures confirm,' Geoff said, 'that Durham miners had

the highest success rate and gained the highest level of compensation of any in the country.'

When Rodney Bickerstaffe, introduced Jeremy Corbyn as the 'undisputed leader of the Labour Party', a huge and prolonged burst of applause resounded throughout the chamber and the overflow marquee and crowds standing outside.

Jeremy Corbyn recalled that Dave Hopper had given him great support and valuable advice over the years. Dave's greatest strength was that



Jeremy Corbyn, (left) and Geoff Shears

when he was under pressure he didn't retreat but faced his adversary with courage. Dave was an internationalist who opposed all who tried to divide us and understood the need for the international solidarity and cooperation of the working class.

He laid particular emphasis on how Dave was instrumental in the preservation of the Gala that had grown in size year on year and now reached out far beyond Durham into



Left to right: Jeemy Corbyn, Alan Cummings, Rodney Bickerstaffe and Alan Mardghum

all the communities in the country. 'The greatest tribute we can make to Dave's memory and heritage will be to make next year's Gala the biggest ever', he said to applause.

The last word was from Alan Cummings who recalled how he had worked with Dave for over 40 years and had, with others, formed the Durham Left to fight for a more democratic union – a fight they won. He said that the culmination of Dave's work was the last Gala, the largest for decades, 'an international socialist platform fighting for justice, trade union rights and socialism'. He said that Dave had spoken all over the world and always 'straight forward passionate and knowledgeable'.

He drew laughter when he alluded to Dave's laid back attitude to organisation, repeating Dave's often heard statement in the run up to many Galas: 'I don't know what the panic's all about – the Gala runs on wheels'.

He ended with these heartfelt words, 'Dave, your shift is over. Hope he gives you a good "cavil"'. The ceremony was concluded when all stood to sing *The Red Flag*



North East socialist folk singer, Bethany Elen (centre) leads the singing of The Red Flag

Davey's Last Gala 9th July 2016





133rd Durham Miners' Gala July 8 2017

*Let's make it a Gala to remember in honour of the
memory of Dave Hopper*



Durham Miners' Beneficial Membership

Beneficial 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:

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.

Durham Miners' Association

Tel: 0191 384 3515

Email: admin@durhamminers.co.uk
www.durhamminers.org