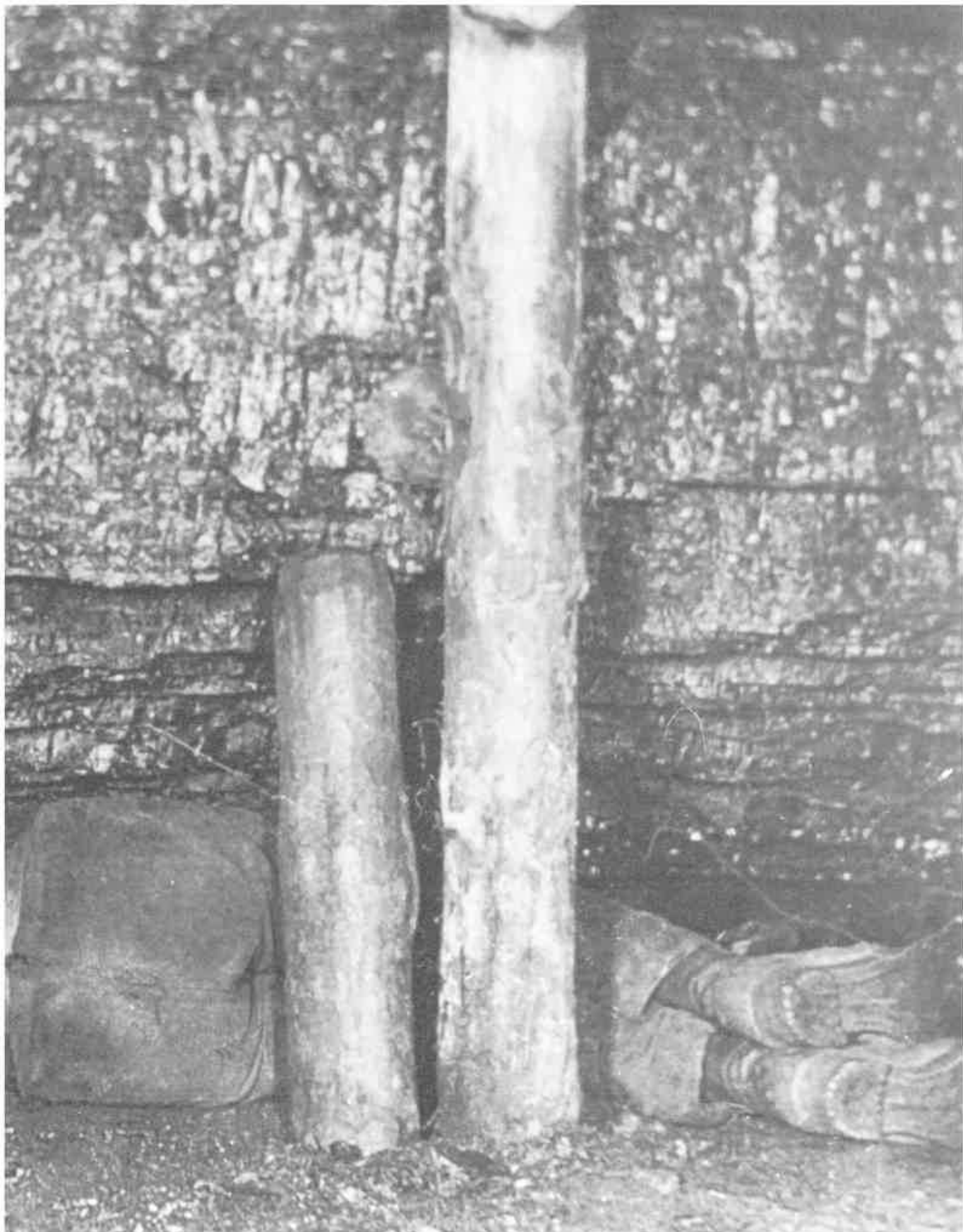

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1 Labouring in the bowels of the earth. This picture sums up the working conditions for generations of miners – cramped, dirty, dangerous



2 A miner using the most primitive form of hand-drilling at Douglas Bank Colliery, Wigan. The drill was simply a steel rod with a sharpened end. After every three inches or so, the scraper, next to the pick, was inserted to pull out the dust

Towards a national union

The first trade unions in the British coal mining industry were established in the eighteenth century although records indicate the existence of 'combinations' as early as the seventeenth century. One can find references to the rules of a Coal Miners' Society in West Yorkshire during the late 1700s, and it is clear that similar organisations existed elsewhere.

Trade unions were born in the mining industry out of the worst possible exploitation of human beings. From childhood, through adolescence and adulthood, miners (female as well as male) gave their very lives to profit-hungry mine owners. Fully-fledged slavery in the pits was not abolished until 1799 – and the miners of Tyneside were forced to submit each year to being 'bonded' to their employer for nearly a century after that.

Under conditions where children as young as four had to face a seventeen-hour day and a six-day week working underground, the District Unions (forerunners of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the National Union of Mineworkers) were established to protect the interests and the lives of miners.

In the pits of Sheffield there was concerted action in 1792 when colliers employed by the Duke of Norfolk refused to work until their wages were raised. There are many examples of miners' secret organisations taking industrial action.

The first attempt at national organisation, called the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, took place in 1842. The same year, mineworkers and their sup-

porters achieved a key piece of legislation, the Coal Mines Act, which made it illegal for mine owners to employ below ground women or boys under the age of ten.

In 1844 the Association led a heroic five-month strike for better wages; however, pressure from coal owners and the Government crushed it out of existence by 1848.

It was succeeded in 1863 by the Miners' National Union, an organisation which concentrated its ef-

forts on representing mineworkers in the courts and in Parliament rather than involving itself in industrial action, and confronting owners over pay and conditions.

Throughout the nineteenth century, conditions remained absolutely appalling, with major mining disasters claiming thousands of lives. Safety precautions were still non-existent: it took the death of 204 mineworkers at Durham's Hartley Colliery in 1862 to force



3 Snap time underground in 1893. It was common for miners to have only ten minutes in a whole day to grab some food. Young lads often lost their first meal underground to the rats and mice, or even the pit ponies

the government and owners into introducing 'up cast' shafts for ventilation. It was only following other major disasters that any sort of proper legislation began to appear.

Meanwhile, the economics of capitalism (slump-and-boom) meant that mining communities were at the mercy of 'the market'; lifted for brief periods from literal starvation to simple hardship, only to be dropped back into starvation whenever 'the market' collapsed into slump.

Whilst the District Unions did everything in their power, it was clear by the end of the 1880s that only a national union could effectively challenge the co-ordinated policies of Government and owners.

Thus, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was born in November 1889. It would prove to be the first national trade union to survive the ferocious attacks of those who opposed organised labour in the coal industry.





5

4 Miners undercutting, with the gaffer's man literally breathing down their necks. The man at the back seems to be setting a prop. The date on the photograph is 1893, but the location unknown

5 Showing off the simple underground equipment used in mining at the turn of the century

6 Faceworkers at the 'Clog and Legging' level, Pontypool, about 1910, so-called because the wet conditions required waterproof leg and footwear. The picture is one of a series taken by William E. Jones whose father, Jabez Jones used them to recruit miners into the Union



6

3



TO MINERS AND THE HUMANE PUBLIC.

[illegible]

1,500 PERSONS ARE THROWN UNWILLINGLY INTO IDLENESS,

How valuable and important this record is, is seen in the following letter submitted from the "Trade Bureau" of Commerce, Aug. 1904:

The above-mentioned findings in the present study point to the importance of the role of the family in the development of the child. The family is the first and most important environment for the child, and it is the family that provides the child with the first experiences of life. The family is the first and most important environment for the child, and it is the family that provides the child with the first experiences of life.

[illegible]

1. The first step is to identify the variables involved in the problem. In this case, the variables are the number of hours worked (H) and the number of units produced (Q).

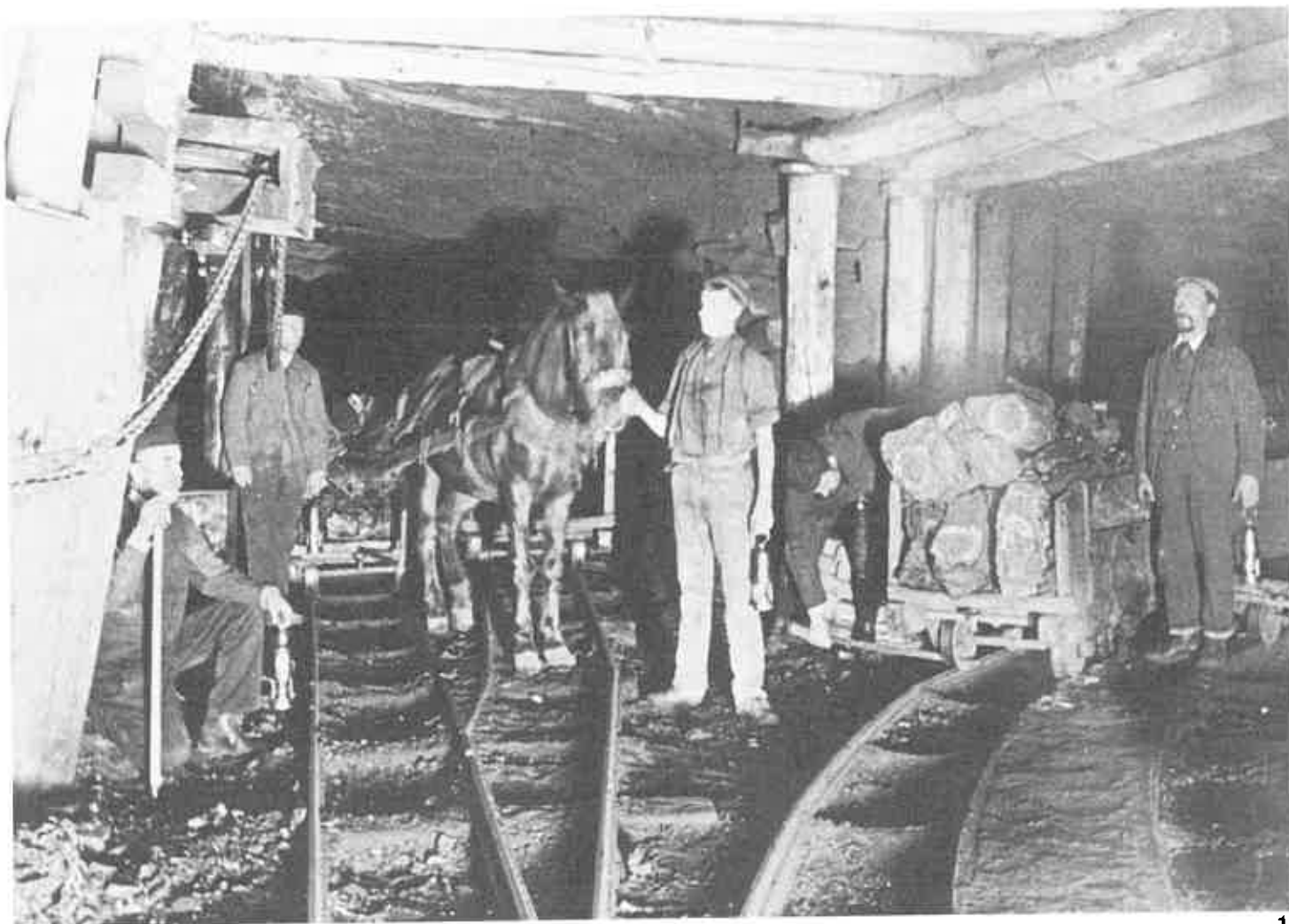
[illegible]

Dictation is their Rule, and Starvation
their Means of Effect

[illegible]

From: J. B. Spink, Jr., 622 E. 3rd St., Waco, Tex.





10

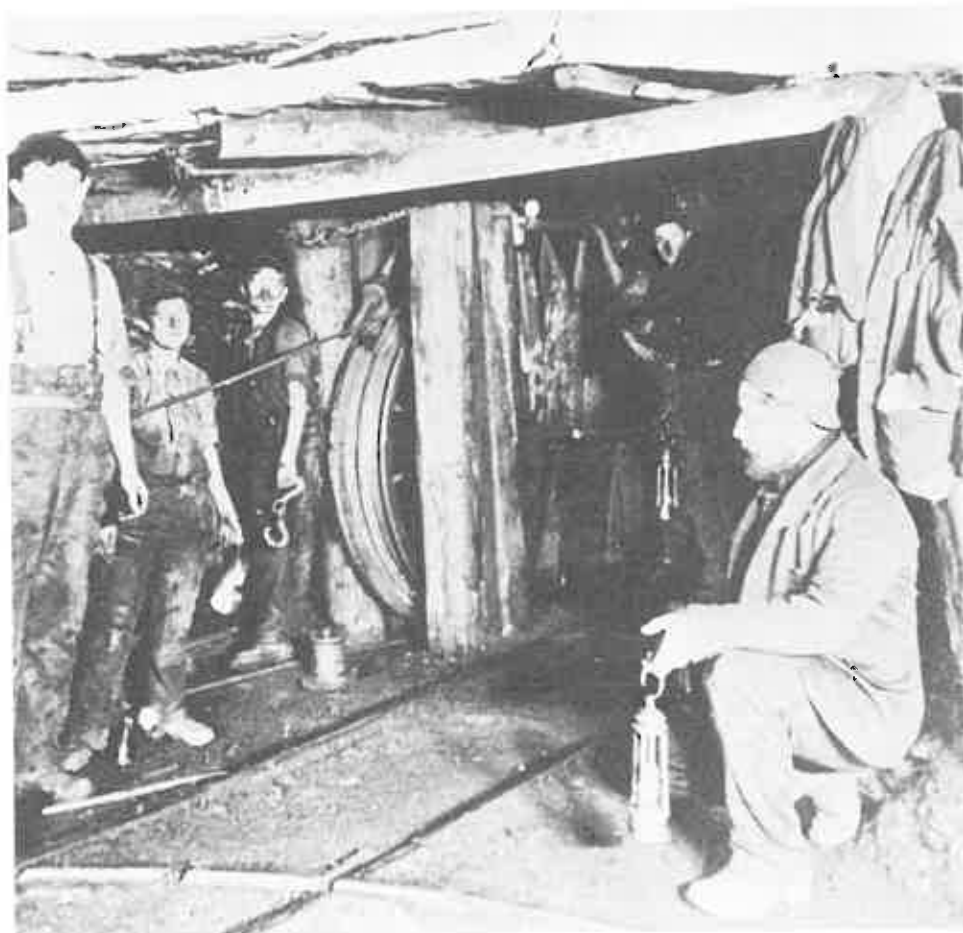
7 The danger of roof falls was present not only at the coal face but also in areas like this 'main roadway', photographed in 1893. The man appears to be testing for gas

8 An early appeal for solidarity from locked-out colliers in 1863 at Methley District, Yorkshire

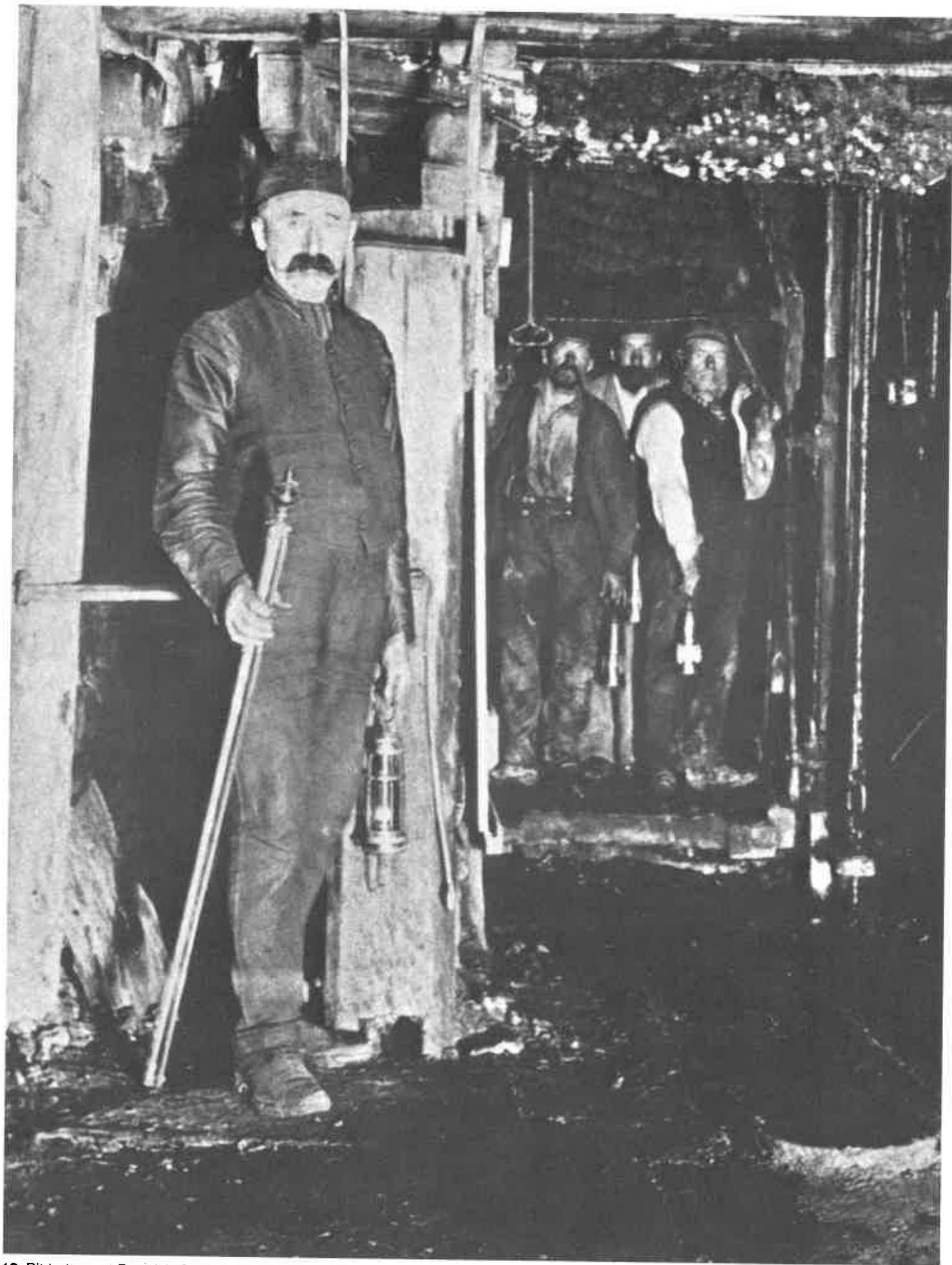
9 A heading in 1899. A new road being driven into a solid wall of rock

10 Junction at Pentrich Colliery, Derbyshire, 1896

11 An underground haulage roadway in 1893. Main road powered haulage systems reduced the need for hand-putting and ponies but were the cause of many trapped limbs and lost fingers



11



12 Pit bottom at Pentrich Colliery, Derbyshire, 1896

Baptism by fire

There is nothing more painful than the birth of a 'new idea'; the creation of the MFGB in 1889 was no exception to this rule.

The miners had by now witnessed the election of the first ever working-man town councillor: John Normansell, General Secretary of the Yorkshire Miners. In 1874, they had finally secured representation in Parliament, with the electoral victories of the Liberal Alexander McDonald, President of the Miners' National Union, and Thomas Burt representing 'radical labour' from the North East.

Yet, despite these advances, there was a reluctance on the part of the District Unions to come together in a formalised way.

Six national conferences were held during 1889 until finally, in the Temperance Hall, Newport, South Wales, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was born. It is worthy of note that among the delegates from Scotland at the inaugural conference was one James Keir Hardie.

Within a year, this new national, federated organisation had won a 30 per cent increase for its members, and established itself also as a major force in the labour movement. Recruits began to flock in, and by 1890, when the MFGB joined the Trades Union Congress, its membership numbered over 250,000.

This new Federation brought together a splendid array of talent which included Ben Pickard of the Yorkshire Miners' Association who became the MFGB's first President and Thomas Ashton of the Lanca-

shire Miners' Federation who became the MFGB's first National Secretary.

The MFGB did not, however, cover all the coalfields. South Wales, Durham and Northumberland – where district associations were still bound by the deadly 'sliding scale' agreements which linked wages to coal prices – remained outside the new organisation. Indeed, the MFGB's founders felt that until those agreements were aban-

doned, no amalgamation could take place.

In 1893, the young Federation found itself involved in what became the most widespread struggle between workers and employers that Britain had yet seen. The mine owners' demand of a 25 per cent cut in miners' pay escalated into a massive lock-out subsequently involving 300,000 workers.

The lock-out was in progress for six weeks, when there was an event



13 Miners and pithead girls, Blantyre Ferme Colliery, Lanarkshire, 1898. A successful strike that year forced the coal owners to award an increase of 3d a day, half the claim submitted by the Scottish Miners' Federation

at Featherstone in the West Riding of Yorkshire which has left an indelible mark on history.

The forces of authority deliberately turned out soldiers from the local barracks and marched them to Featherstone Colliery; there, following the reading of the Riot Act, the soldiers opened fire on the crowd.

Two men were killed and sixteen wounded in what became known as the 'Featherstone Riot'. The action of the soldiers, calculated and deliberate, showed the naked face of the capitalist State.

During the course of the 1893 conflict, women's committees were formed around the country to support mining communities, and in London, Beatrice Webb, the famous labour campaigner and historian, chaired a national meeting aimed at raising funds for the families of the striking miners.

After fifteen weeks' united action, the miners forced the owners to restore the wage cuts they had tried to introduce.

This was indeed a 'baptism by fire', with the MFGB tried and tested in industrial action, many of its members badly injured, and a number killed.

The national Union, however, had now established itself on a firm footing, and its position inside and outside the coal industry had been strengthened. It had proved that united action could defeat the employers.



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14 A typical Welsh miner's family from Cwmtwrch in the Swansea Valley in about 1889. It is likely that all the teenage boys were already working underground

15 Evictions in Quarry Street, Silksworth, February 19, 1891. A row of police can be seen halfway up the street, and in front of them, colliery officials and bailiffs. The aristocratic owners of the Sunderland Colliery, the Londonderrys, were violently opposed to trade unions. During earlier evictions in 1844, Lord Londonderry said he wanted to teach a lesson to the 'deluded and obstinate victims of designing men and crafty attorneys', and to defeat the 'insane union'. The family was to retain its hatred of unions. In 1925, Lord Londonderry said he hoped 'the trade unions will be smashed from top to bottom'

16 Street scene on High Rows, South Moors, a pit village in County Durham

17 An evicted family in Quarry Street, Silksworth, surrounded by their neighbours and belongings

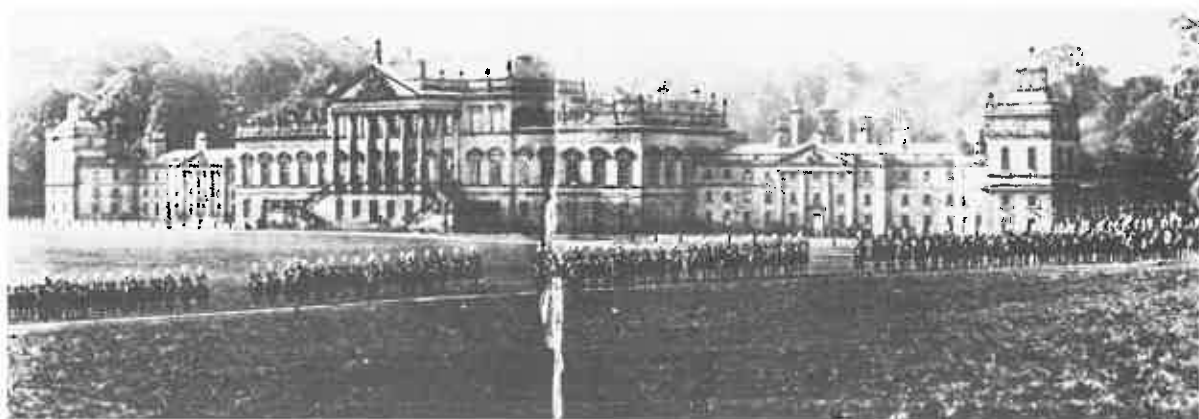


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The 1893 lock-out:

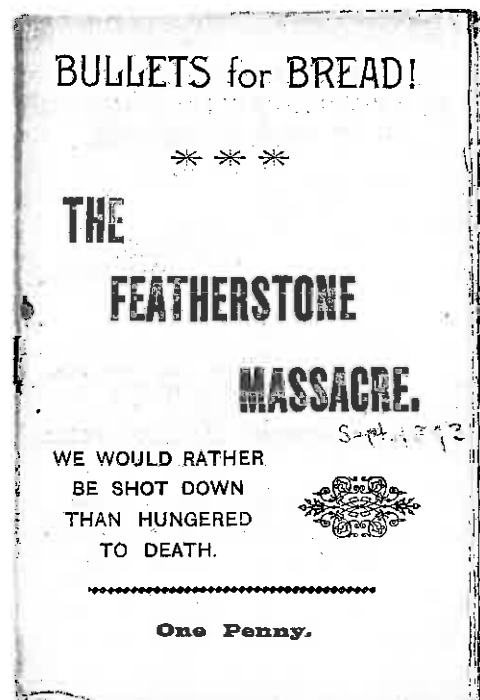
18 A Staffordshire soup kitchen, believed to be at St Andrew's Church, Porthill

19 Children of striking miners in South Derbyshire eagerly awaiting food in Swadlincote Town Hall. Bread, cheese and meat was provided by an anonymous benefactor from Liverpool, known only as 'The Stranger', who had visited the area and witnessed the hunger of mining families

20 Wentworth Woodhouse, the home of Earl Fitzwilliam, owner of many collieries in Yorkshire, under military protection. The family was ruthlessly anti-union, evicting and sacking members of the Yorkshire Miners' Association in the period before federation

21 West Riding Police on duty at Houghton Main Colliery, Yorkshire. The photograph of the sword-bearing constabulary and colliery manager and engineer was taken ten weeks into the strike against pay cuts, and one month after the 'Featherstone Riot'

22 The 'Featherstone Riot', in which two men were killed and 16 wounded by troops, was the first time bullets had been used against workers for fifty years. This pamphlet was circulated shortly after the incident on September 7. A week after the killings, the MFGB called on the Government to remove all police and troops from the coalfields, and sent a message of sympathy to the relatives of those shot. The jury at the inquest refused to record a verdict of justifiable homicide against one of the victims, James Gibbs, and added a rider expressing 'deep regret that such extreme measures were adopted by the authorities'



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24 Local dignitaries and shareholders turn out to witness the turning of the first sod at Grimethorpe Colliery, Yorkshire on October 8, 1894. The spade is on show at Cusworth Hall Museum, Doncaster. The event was toasted in expensive wines. But for most present, it was the nearest they ever came to the coalface

26 Sinkers at South Moor Colliery, County Durham, in 1890. Shafts were usually no more than 18 feet in diameter, compared to modern shafts twice the diameter



25

23 Two wagons have run away after a rope broke on the Blackfell incline, at Birtley Colliery, County Durham, in 1898. This year was the first in which the families of those who might have been killed or injured in such an accident could have expected any compensation. Amounts were small but even so the employers attempted to persuade miners to sign forms exempting them from the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897

25 Appalling injuries suffered by miners in South Wales were treated at 'The Rest' in Porthcawl



26



27 Up into daylight and fresh air. End of a shift at Chanters No 1 Pit, Atherton, Lancashire in 1905. Owners saw to it that winding men up and down the shaft took as little time as possible, so that coal tubs could replace the human cargo. In many cases they actually rode – illegally – coal and men together

Fighting for principles

At its founding conference, the MFGB had decided that it must work to bring an end to the iniquitous 'sliding scale' agreements; this goal would not be achieved until 1902.

The fight to eliminate the 'sliding scale' was therefore long and bitter, marked by the struggle of mining communities against outright starvation. During these years, miners vowed that never again would they be party to such a divisive agreement.

While it set about winning a number of vital demands in the early years of the twentieth century, the MFGB at the same time extended its influence and membership.

In 1900, the minimum age of entry into the coal industry was raised to thirteen years. In 1906, the Union participated for the first time in a Royal Commission: on safety in the mines. It was incessant campaigning alongside industrial action that brought about in 1908 the Eight Hours Act for mine-workers underground.

By example and leadership, the MFGB was winning into membership all the remaining District Unions; between 1900 and 1909, membership rose from 363,000 to over 600,000.

It was Bob Smillie, President of the Lanarkshire miners, who represented the Federation on the Royal Commission on Safety which in 1911 produced the Mines Regulation Act – still a cornerstone of protective legislation for underground workers.

In spite of the increasing health

and safety legislation, however, the death toll in the industry remained dreadful. Disasters like that at the Oaks Colliery in Barnsley, Yorkshire, in December 1866, which claimed 361 lives were being surpassed.

The worst ever explosion in British mining history occurred on October 14, 1913, when 439 miners were killed at Senghenydd in South Wales. It was a grim reminder to the MFGB that alongside higher wages, shorter hours and the issue of nationalisation, the industry must be made safe as a matter of urgency.

In 1909 the Union, becoming ever more involved in the wider labour and trade union movement, affiliated to the Labour Party and within a year was sponsoring eighteen members of Parliament.

Then, economic crisis hit Britain. The coal owners were swift to

take steps which produced another momentous clash between mine-workers and the State – one of the sharpest conflicts since Featherstone in 1893.

In September 1910, South Wales miners employed by Cambrian Collieries Limited were locked out following the owners' decision to cut wages. Subsequently, 12,000 men voted to take strike action.

State alarm at the miners' resolve led Home Secretary Winston Churchill to order troops into the Rhondda Valley where, in the community of Tonypandy on November 21, they charged striking miners with fixed bayonets.

The brutality and violence of troops and police ensured that, like Featherstone, Tonypandy's name would become synonymous with working class struggle against a State prepared to use any means to suppress workers' rights.



28 Paying out shortly after the first coal was cut at Brodsworth Colliery in 1908. The pit became famous for supplying coal to Buckingham Palace

anger and revulsion at such trickery. Another ballot saw mineworkers voting by nearly 54 per cent to continue the strike – but on the basis that there was not a two-thirds majority in favour of that, an MFGB conference agreed to a resumption of work.

Commenting on the strike's importance, no less an observer than Lenin pointed out:

'The Government pretended to be neutral ... pretended to yield to the workers, secured the recognition in Parliament of the principle of the minimum wage, but, as a matter of fact, took the side of capital and did not do anything to secure this minimum wage.'

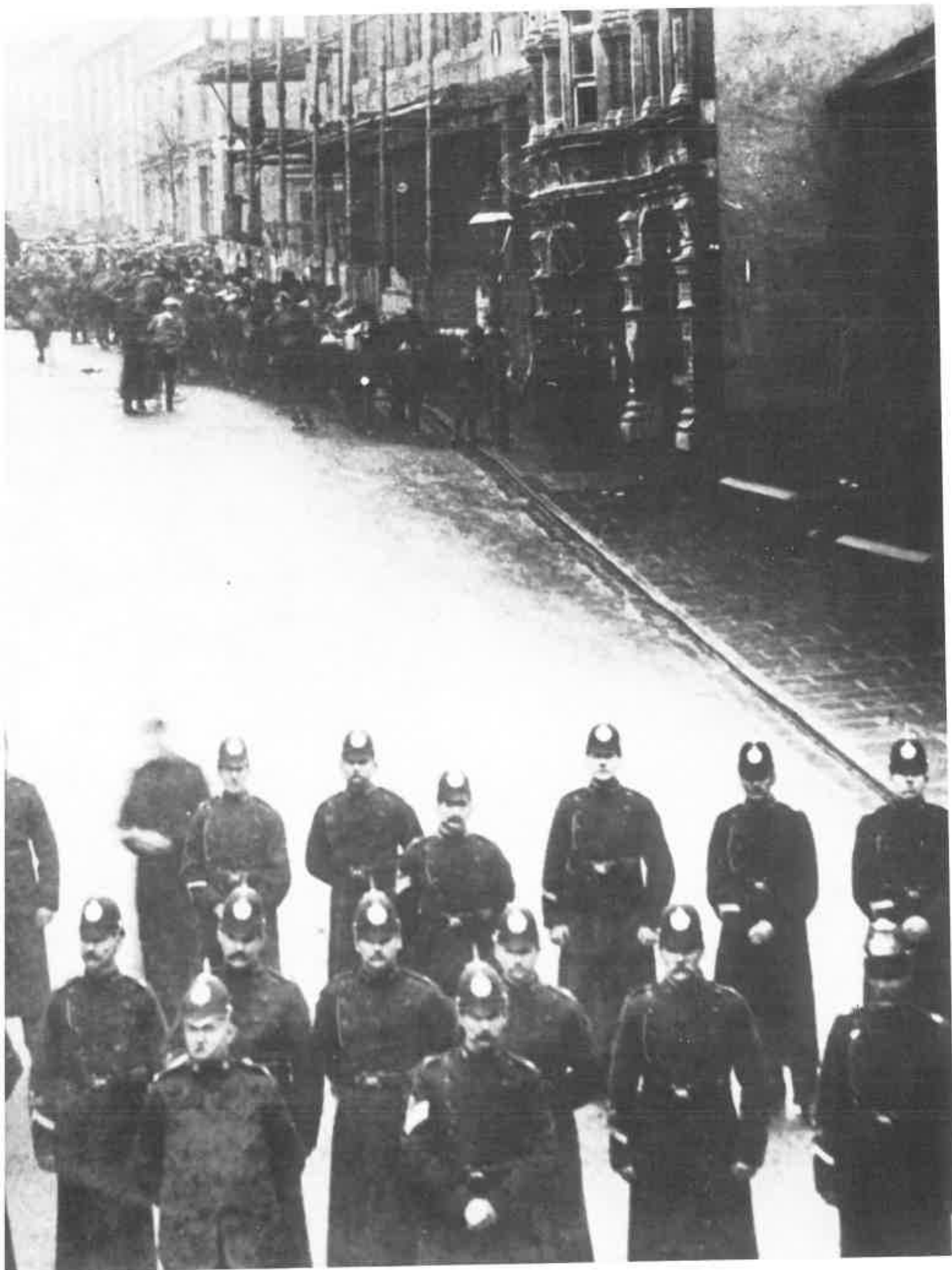
The 1912 strike had been fought on a basic issue of trade union principle, and whilst there was much dissatisfaction among the miners who felt that the Government had cheated them of an assured victory the struggle had welded the Federation together. It had not been in vain.

Despite shortcomings, the Minimum Wage Act of 1912 was to remain on the statute books until 1947 when the mines were finally nationalised.

The MFGB was now campaigning not only for higher wages, but for a five-day week, a further reduction in working hours and, significantly, nationalisation of the coal industry.

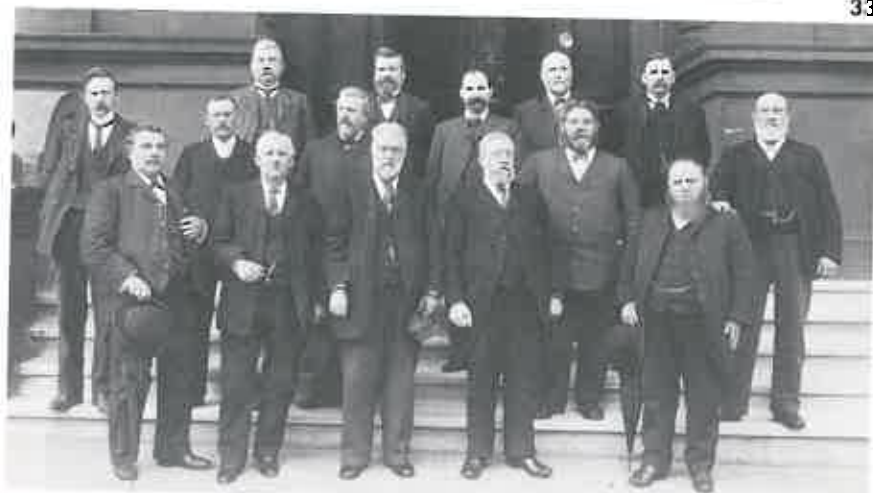


32 Hundreds of police and troops put South Wales mining communities under siege during the Cambrian Combine dispute





33



34

33 Some of the 54 Labour and Lib-Lab candidates elected to Parliament in January 1906. That year, no less than 16 miners' representatives gained seats. Keir Hardie, a former leader of the Lanarkshire miners, is third from right in the front row

34 MFGB Executive Committee members in 1903. Ben Pickard is in the centre at the front, and Bob Smillie on the far left

35 The Alma and Tizwell lodge, County Durham, pictured at Grange Villa in the summer following the March 1912 Minimum Wage Strike. The lodge banner is draped in black to signify the death at work of a lodge member during the preceding year

36 Derbyshire miners' demonstration in Chesterfield market place, about 1900



35





37

The 1912 strike:

37 Outcropping at Warren Quarry Lane, Barnsley. The six-week strike began on March 1 to demand a national minimum wage. It was the first miners' strike to involve every miner in the country. Over one million miners joined the action

38 Digging for coal on Workington Shore, Cumberland

39 Coal-picking at Tredegar, South Wales



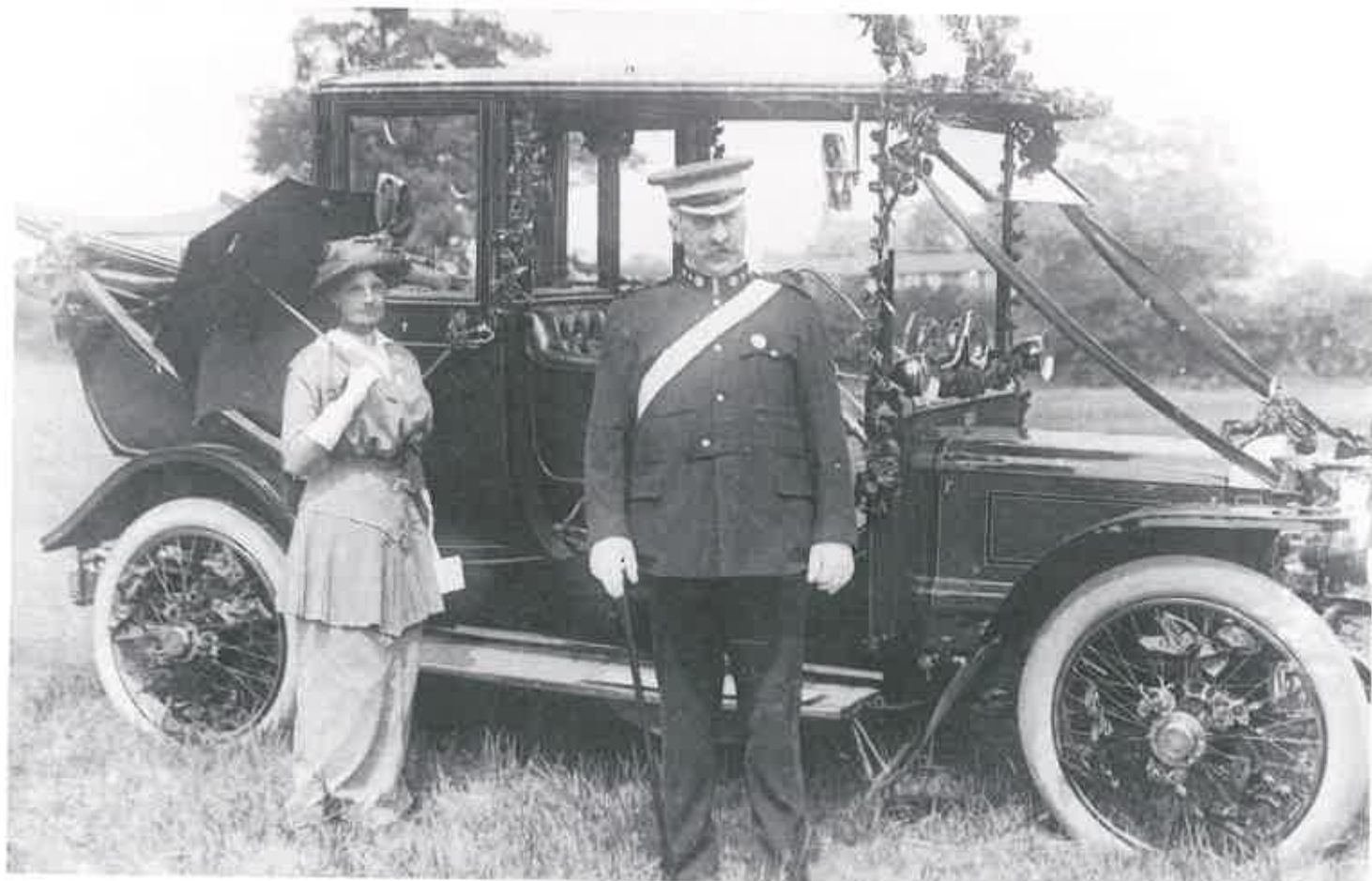
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40 This Whitehaven soup kitchen carried an appeal for miners' children



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42



41, 42, 43 The hierarchy of exploitation – owners, management, butties and men. The owners are from Moira Colliery, South Derbyshire, pictured in 1914, and the officials photographed during the sinking of Barnborough colliery in Yorkshire in 1913. The managers hired butties, who themselves hired colliers and paid them out at the end of the day, as in this scene from Digby, Nottinghamshire

43



44 Waiting to go down the mine at Chatterley Whitfield Colliery, Staffordshire, before the First World War. Often these men got only three days work a week

Miners and the War

The declaration of world war in August 1914 saw chaos and catastrophe on all fronts. In Britain's coal industry, it saw mine owners levelling their own offensive against their employees.

The owners demanded repeal of the eight hours legislation, curtailment of holidays, and called for higher productivity. This offensive resulted in worsened conditions, and eventually provoked industrial action.

In South Wales, 200,000 miners went on strike in 1915, an action followed by widespread demands for higher wages in 1916. This response to the owners' attack obviously threatened the war effort for which coal was desperately needed, and the coalition government of Lloyd George placed the entire coalfield under state control.

Miners' determination to seek justice, however, forced the Government to yield at least partially to two pay demands in 1917 and 1918.

It was during this period of turmoil that a Triple Alliance of coal, transport and rail unions was formed to give solidarity and mutual support to the workers in these three key industries as they struggled for decent pay, conditions and job security against the alliance of owners, employers and Government.

After the Armistice of 1918, coal remained under Government control. Politicians and mine owners alike had become fearful of the miners' ability to mount a thorough challenge after centuries of brutal exploitation. The flow of coal

supplies was vital socially and economically, and the Government wanted to be able to step in and take charge when conflicts between owners and miners threatened that flow.

In 1919, the MFGB called for a six-hour day, a 30 per cent wage increase in the mines, and trade union rates of pay for the demobilised soldiers returning to the 'land fit for heroes'.

A breakdown in negotiations led to a ballot vote massively in favour of strike action.

Faced with the miners' resistance, Parliament swiftly set up the famous Sankey Commission, a tripartite body representing the

Government, MFGB and the mine owners. The Government indicated that it would be bound by – and quickly implement – the Commission's findings.

Those findings, when delivered, favoured payment of a wage increase, a staged reduction in hours down to six per shift (from as many as ten and a half!), and the nationalisation of the coal industry on a permanent basis.

Since the Government had signalled its intention of abiding by the Commission's conclusions, the MFGB called off its planned strike action. However, in August 1919 Lloyd George announced that the conclusions would not be honoured.



45 Life on Lovesall Street, Denaby Main Colliery village, Mexborough, Yorkshire, at the turn of the century



The miners took this betrayal to the TUC's annual conference, seeking support for a call for general strike action aimed at forcing the Government to honour its pledge. But the call for active solidarity was rejected at Congress.

While fighting for economic and social justice at home, the MFGB was deeply committed to an international perspective, having played the leading role in setting up the Miners' International Federation before the turn of the century. In 1919 it called for the withdrawal of British troops engaged in the fourteen-nation assault against the people of the Soviet Republic, and played a key role in the campaign against the presence of British troops in Ireland in 1920.

That was the year in which MFGB membership reached its peak, totalling nearly 950,000. Its willingness to protect and defend its members' interests had prevented real wages from falling too drastically since the 1914 period, despite a general decline in living standards and value of pay.

Now, however, with the need for coal less acute than it had been over the past five or six years, the Government announced it was ready to return control of the pits to the owners in early 1921.

46, 47 Mining ran in families out of harsh necessity – the lack of alternative employment obliged son to follow father underground. On the left, James Neilly and son William outside their home at Jellyhill, Scotland, 1915. Above right, three generations of the Gray family, all from Shieldhill, who worked at Gardrum pit, Scotland

48 The lamproom attendant at Gibfield Colliery, Atherton, Lancashire, 1905. He is filling a lamp with oil tapped from the drum in the corner. Lamps were exchanged for tags taken home by miners after every shift. Tags can be seen hanging on some of the hooks to the left. Miners were charged both for the hire of the lamps and the use of oil



47



48



49 Four young miners from Dawdon Colliery, County Durham, 1919

50 A trapper boy opening the door for a train of several tubs. The tubs are full and on their way to the pithead. The trap doors ensured the correct ventilation of the coalface. The boy has his water bottle hanging on the wall. Ashington Colliery, Northumberland, 1911

51 Descending the shaft for these young Derbyshire boys at Denby pit was a dangerous business. They were barely tall enough to reach the 'safety bar', and risked being thrown out of the cage. The photograph dates back to the turn of the century

Boys in the mines

Children as young as three and four years were found working underground by the inspectors who drafted the 1842 Coal Mines Act. When the MFGB was formed, boys from mining communities were still condemned to a gruelling existence underground from the age of twelve years. Their first job was usually as a trapper, opening and closing ventilation doors to permit the passage of tubs. Soon after, they would work as pony drivers, taking home a pittance from the owners, supplemented by a few tips from the colliers if they were good at speeding coal to the surface. It is a cruel irony that an industry which in the past was unscrupulous in tapping child labour should in recent years have abandoned the younger generation in the coalfields to the dole queue.



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52 Young lads were sometimes started on the screens. Those pictured are sorting dirt from coal at a colliery near Bargoed, South Wales, in 1910



53 These boys are working on the screens, probably at Bentley Colliery, Yorkshire in the 1920s



54 Putters from No 4 pit, Brayton, Cumberland, photographed for a company publicity postcard. Ponies continued to be used underground until 1972, though not for main road haulage in later years. Miners who remember working with ponies often recall that the two most important elements in their early working life were membership of the Union and the friendship of their pony. Some also recall nailing home-made runners under their clogs to enable them to slide along the track while leaning against the first tub in a train to brake it down a steep incline

55 A pony prepared for descent at Auchenreoch Colliery, Scotland



Pit brow lassies

The employment of women and children under ten years old was outlawed in 1842. However, women were employed on the surface until the 1960s in some areas, principally Lancashire and Scotland. Dragging tubs, working the tippler and picking coal on the screens was back-breaking work. There was a premium price paid for large coal, and each day entailed lifting very heavy weights. Women would then have to wash and cook at home. Though never more than a few thousand strong, the 'pit-brow lassies' are symbolic of the importance of women to the miners' Union. Throughout the history of the MFGB and NUM, every struggle has witnessed the crucial support of miners' wives.



56 The screens at Chanters Pit, Atherton, Lancashire, 1905. The mesh screens separated small from large coal. The woman on the left is using a pick to break off dirt





57 Two women operating a 'kick-up' tub tippler at Douglas Bank Colliery, Wigan, in 1891. **58** Women screen workers in the canteen at William Pit, Whitehaven, about 1910. **59** 'Pit head lassies', about 1920, Scotland. **60** 'Pit brow lassies', in 1952, Cleworth Hall, Tyldesley, Lancashire



58



59



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61 Group of miners from Mosley Common Colliery in Lancashire outcropping during the 1921 lock-out. The Union branch was noted for its militant resistance to attacks on pay and conditions

The lock-out of 1921

The Government's haste in passing control of the industry back to the owners was spurred by a rapid fall in coal prices and the onset of 'slump' economic conditions in 1921.

It was in March of that year that – unexpectedly and without real explanation – the President of the MFGB, Bob Smillie, resigned his position, and virtually disappeared from the national trade union scene, returning to the miner's cottage at Larkhall in Scotland where he had begun his career.

During the spring, the owners used the fall in coal prices (taking place on a cut-throat market) to announce cuts of up to 50 per cent in miners' pay.

When the MFGB refused to agree to this, owners locked mineworkers out of the pits on April 1 and, immediately on the heels of this provocation, the Government put into force its Emergency Powers Act, drafting soldiers (again) into the coalfield. So significant did the Government regard the 1921 dispute that it brought troops back from Ireland where war was being waged.

The struggle which followed was a severe test of the solidarity pledges made among the Triple Alliance unions. When the Government and mine owners stepped up the conflict by seeking an end to MFGB national agreements and a further cut in pay, the Union, sadly, found itself without the supportive action it desperately needed from its allies.

On what became known as 'Black Friday', April 15, 1921, the miners found themselves effectively be-

trayed by the leaders of the Transport Workers' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen, and it was clear that they would be on their own in a contest of endurance with the State.

The MFGB, now led by a blunt Yorkshireman, Herbert Smith, was determined to carry on the struggle even though the Federation's allies were unwilling to take strike action alongside it.

However, the Government steadily exerted more and more pressure, under which the MFGB Executive Committee eventually changed its position. On June 28, it recommended acceptance of a deal which involved scrapping national

agreements. The deal also included a wage reduction that left miners at least 20 per cent worse off in real terms than in 1914, some seven years earlier.

After three months the lock-out was ended; the miners had been betrayed, but they would live to fight another day.

In the two-year period through to March 1923, membership of the Federation dropped by over 200,000. But from this time – spring of 1923 – a groundswell of energy and purpose began building again in the coalfields, a groundswell which within another two years would lead to a conflict to dwarf the great lock-out of 1921.



62 Officials at Dean and Chapter Colliery, Ferryhill, County Durham, distributing small coal rations to those locked out in the dispute. The reason for the policeman is unclear. However, there was some tension in the area about outcropping, with staunch Union members denouncing those outcropping for sale

In December 1923, the miners voted to fight again – to get rid of the terrible agreement which had been forced on them in 1921. Following the report of a Committee of Inquiry set up by the then Labour Government in the spring of 1924, proposals which at least ameliorated the worst effects of the imposed 1921 settlement were agreed by the owners, recommended by the MFGB Executive and accepted by the membership.

It was in June 1924 that the miners elected their legendary leader A. J. Cook as the Federation's General Secretary. He was a charismatic figure who inspired his members and drew larger audiences to his meetings than any other political figure of the day. The campaign of agitation which he conducted in the British coalfields was electrifying.



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The 1921 lock-out:

63 A miners' soup kitchen, East Fife. The sign reads: 'Dinner Served Daily at 1 o'clock'

64 The 'Chums Coal Co.', Gresley Common, South Derbyshire, June 29

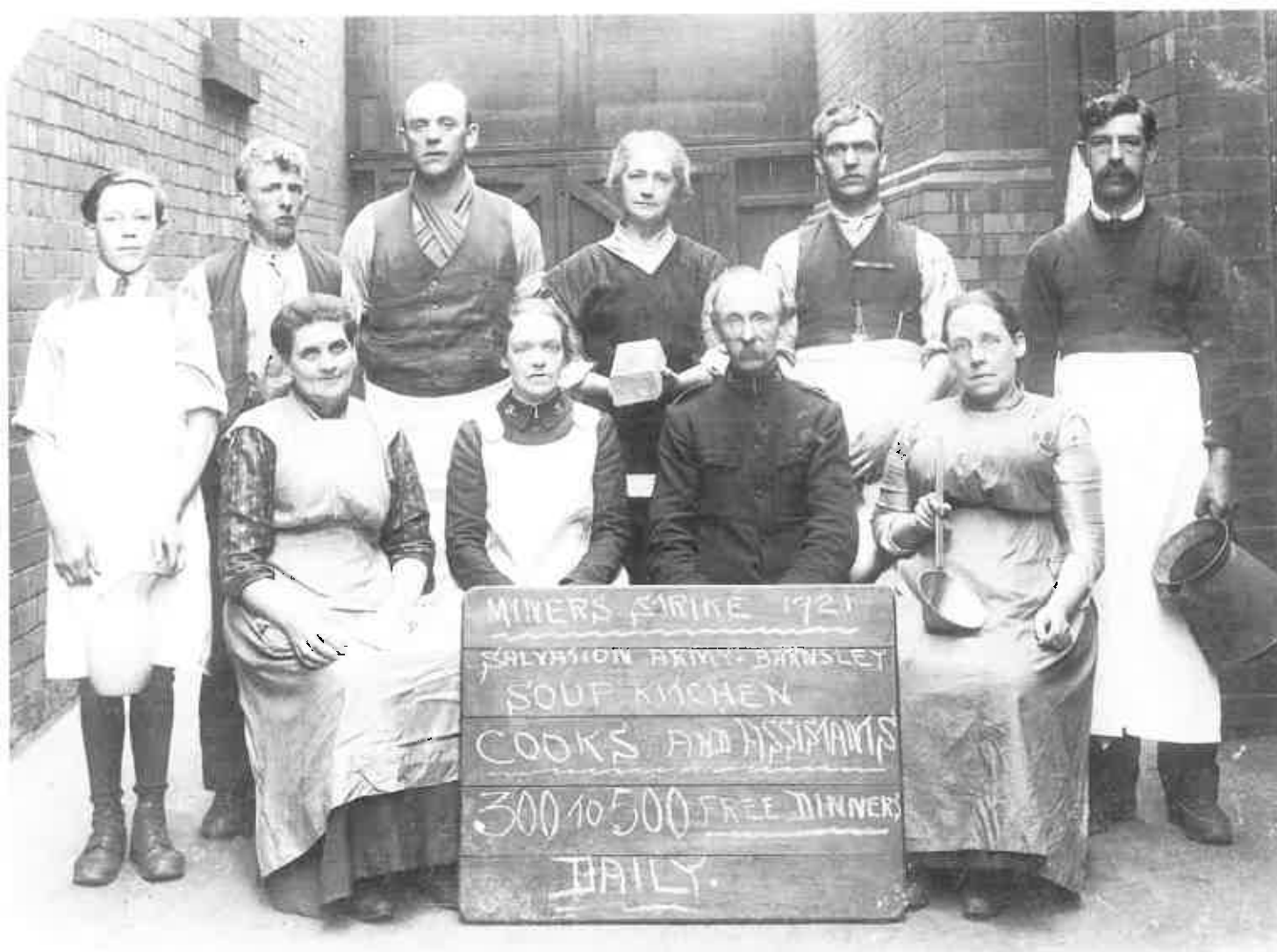
65 Co-operative boot repairs at West Moor and Forest Hall, County Durham. The miner in the front row is holding a pair of babies' shoes

66 The local community rallied round the miners. This Barnsley soup kitchen boasted up to 500 free dinners a day during the lock-out

67 Cardenden strike committee returning from Cupar after the trial of local miners for riot. There were several major clashes between miners and police and soldiers in Scotland during April as owners attempted to use scab labour to keep the pits maintained



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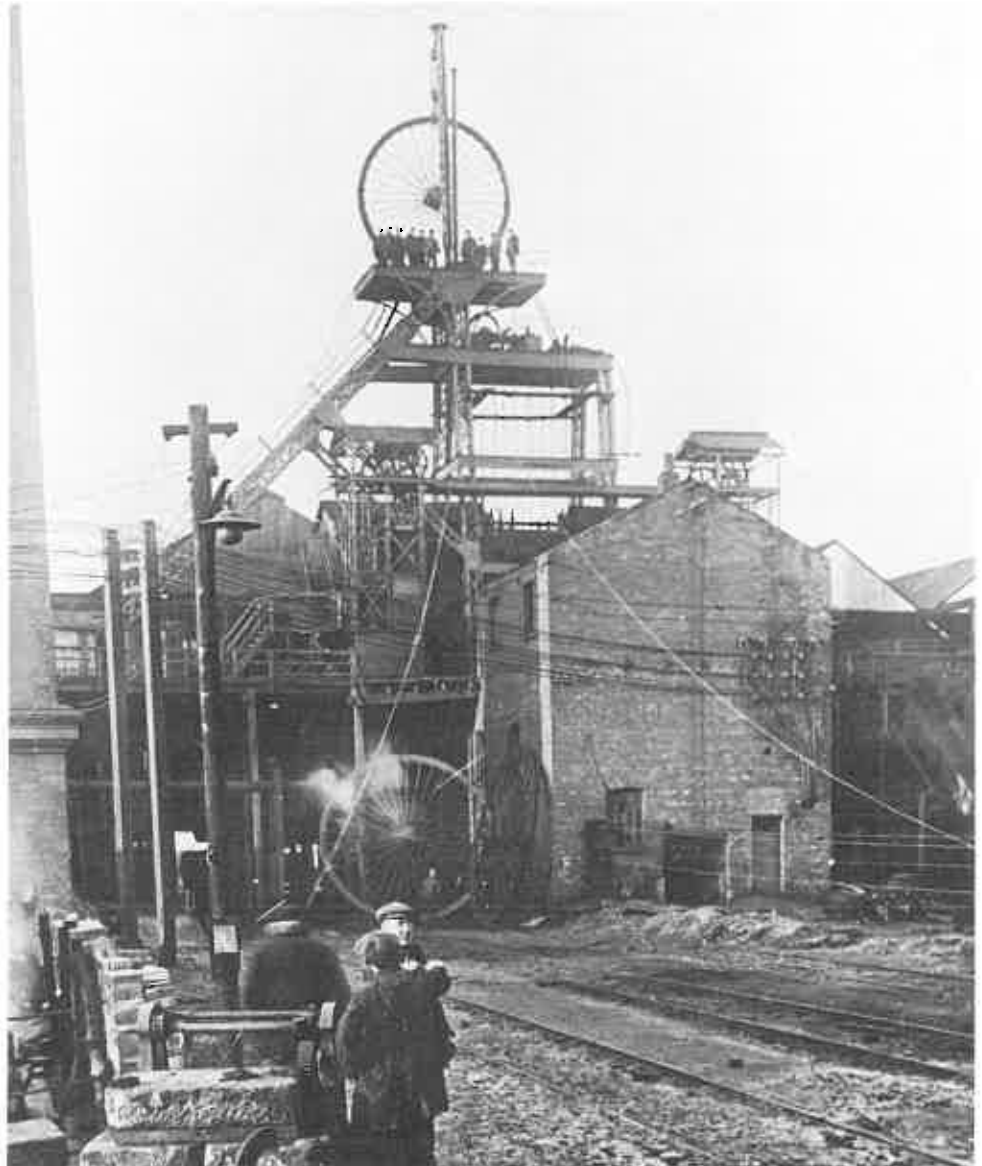


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68 Miner's children Rose and Emma Short standing on the coal allowance at Millmoor Terrace, Low Valley, Darfield, Yorkshire, in 1924

69 Typical Scottish miners' housing in the 1920s. This is Smeaton, near Dalkeith in 1925. The privies are on the left. The horse and cart was the means for delivering household provisions

70 Erecting new headgear at a Yorkshire pit, Christmas Eve, 1922



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71 Workers throughout the country enthusiastically took strike action in support of the miners. This demonstration in Crewe took place a week into the General Strike

The General Strike

The Labour Government that had been elected in 1924 lasted only nine months – after which the coal owners lost no time in pressing ahead with a demand for pay cuts, longer hours and an end to the guaranteed minimum wage.

When the owners announced in June 1925 that current wage contracts would end in one month's time, they plunged the industry and the MFGB into a new crisis.

The Federation rejected the owners' ultimatum, and immediately sought pledges of assistance from the wider labour and trade union movement should the miners be forced to take industrial action. The TUC offered its support, placing itself 'without qualification and unreservedly at the disposal of the Miners' Federation'. It proceeded to issue instructions for an embargo on all movement of coal.

By the end of July, it was clear that while on the one hand the Government stood with the coal owners, the MFGB had the backing of the TUC.

Faced with circumstances in which not only the miners but the Trades Union Congress was apparently prepared to take industrial action, Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made an 'offer'. He said that the Government would set up an inquiry into the entire situation, and while that inquiry was sitting it would provide a subsidy to maintain miners' wages at their current level.

The day on which Baldwin made his proposal, July 31, 1925, became known as 'Red Friday'; many people



72 The platform at a mass meeting of Scottish miners during the 1926 dispute

indeed believed it heralded a significant climb-down by the Government. However, ominous signs soon indicated that, far from compromising, the Tories were preparing the ground to take on the miners in a final show-down.

The Commission of Inquiry, set up under Sir Herbert Samuel, included no miners' representatives, nor indeed any from organised labour. During the months of its deliberations, the State proceeded to prepare for impending warfare. Government, coal owners and a body which became known as the OMS (Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies) used the media to build up an anti-trade union atmosphere, preparing the ground for a pro-Government/coal owners climate when conflict broke.

During this preparatory period, striking anthracite miners in Ammanford, Wales, were imprisoned, and leading Communist Party members were jailed for sedition.

The Samuel Commission's report was completed and published in early March, 1926. It found in favour of the coal owners. From there, events moved swiftly: by the end of April, the owners had again issued an ultimatum on reducing wages, ending the guaranteed wage agreement, and increasing hours of work.

The MFGB Executive Committee rejected these demands, while General Secretary A. J. Cook now coined the famous battle phrase which would soon echo throughout Britain: 'Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day!'

The owners posted notices imposing a lock-out against more than





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73 Miners on Claypath Lane, South Shields, during the 1926 lock-out. St Hilda's pit is behind the wall. The town was described as 'solid' at the start of the General Strike, and local support for the miners remained strong even when the General Strike had been called off

74 Miners camping out at Tayport in 1926. The aim was to reduce some of the costs of living especially for those single miners evicted from their homes

75 Swimming during the 1926 lock-out at Low Valley, Darfield, Yorkshire. The skinny boy on the far bank gives an indication of the level of hardship

76 Miners from West Stanley, County Durham, living under canvas during the hot summer of the lock-out



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one million miners by midnight of April 30. On that day, the King signed a proclamation declaring Britain to be in a 'state of emergency'.

The Government could now be seen to have taken full advantage of the long breathing space provided by the Samuel Commission. Troops were ready for deployment, and the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was prepared for action.

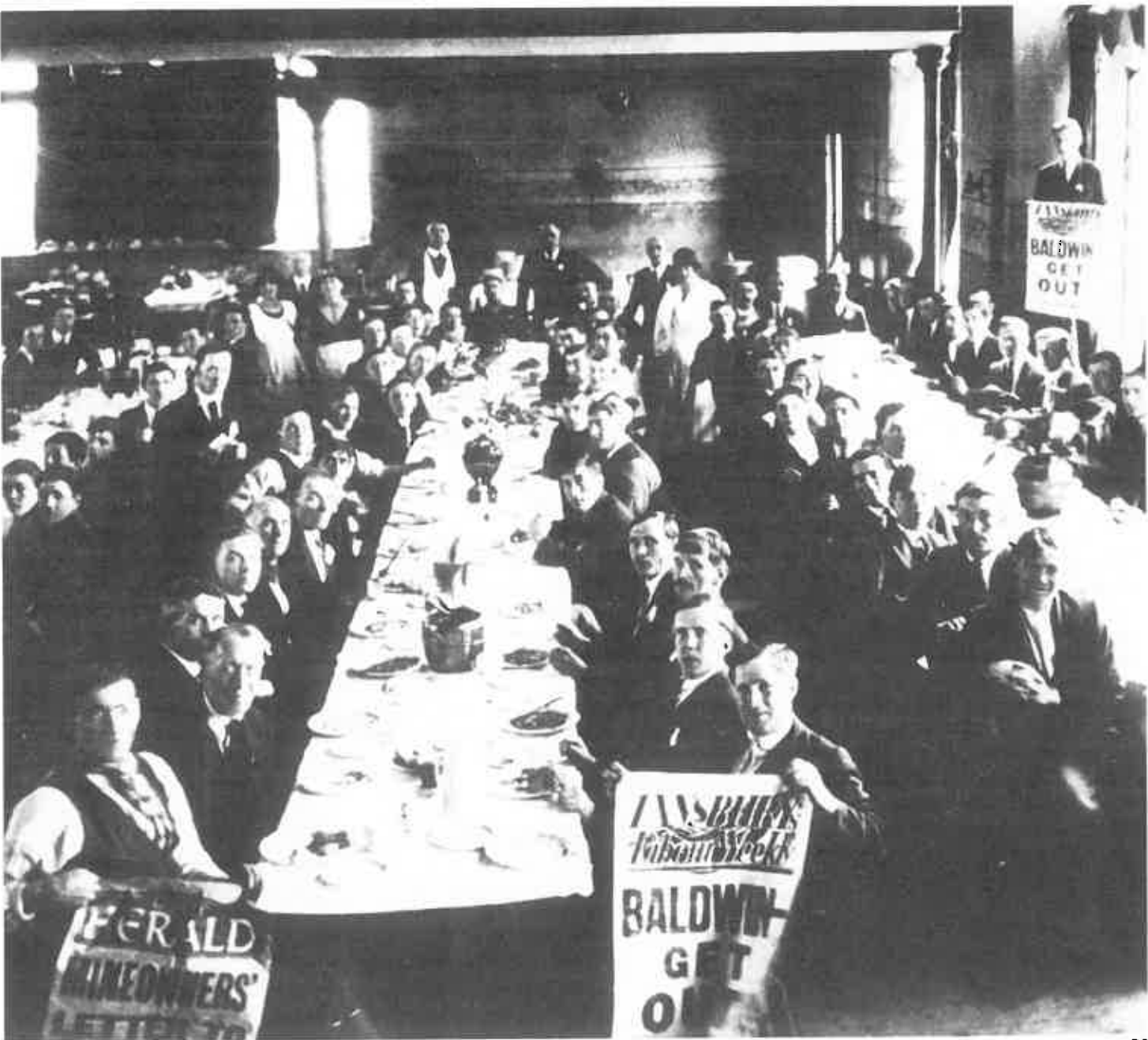
On May 1, a crowded meeting of the TUC's affiliated trade union executive committees voted overwhelmingly (by 3.5 million votes to less than 50,000) in favour of a general strike. It began at midnight, May 3.

All production, all communications ground to a halt. The industrial solidarity shown by other workers towards the miners was beyond anyone's expectations; *for nine days, British workers organised the distribution of food and*

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77 Sharing out the bread supply from the Providence Street club, Darfield, Yorkshire during the lock-out



78 Miners' children receiving food parcels and clothing from Workers' International Relief at Lochore, Fife

79 Five thousand Scottish miners and their supporters joined this march in June 1926 from Methil to Thornton poorhouse and back, a distance of 20 miles

80 A message to the Tory Government from Neath soup kitchen

81 Swadlincote butcher Spittle offers cheap meat to striking South Derbyshire miners during the lock-out

81

emergency supplies around the nation.

Steadily, their control of the situation grew. The General Strike was not only solid, it was gaining more and more support. Then, suddenly, on May 12, it was called off.

The TUC General Council had sold out this unprecedented struggle for decent pay and conditions. Following a 'promise' from Sir Herbert Samuel that, provided the General Strike was called off, negotiations on miners' pay and conditions could resume on a status quo basis, the General Council agreed to a return to work despite fierce opposition from the MFGB.

This was a bitter betrayal. The MFGB was left to fight alone, its nearly one million members and their families bearing the full brunt of the Tory Government's attack. Although the TUC had abandoned them, however, mining communities were supported with food and donations from rank-and-file trade unionists in Britain and around the world.

Indeed, two-thirds of all financial contributions came from workers in the Soviet Union, who helped sustain the miners throughout the summer of 1926.

At home, women's committees and organisations played a leading role in organising practical and moral support for the striking miners. The labour movement and its organisations, including the Labour Party, gave vital assistance.

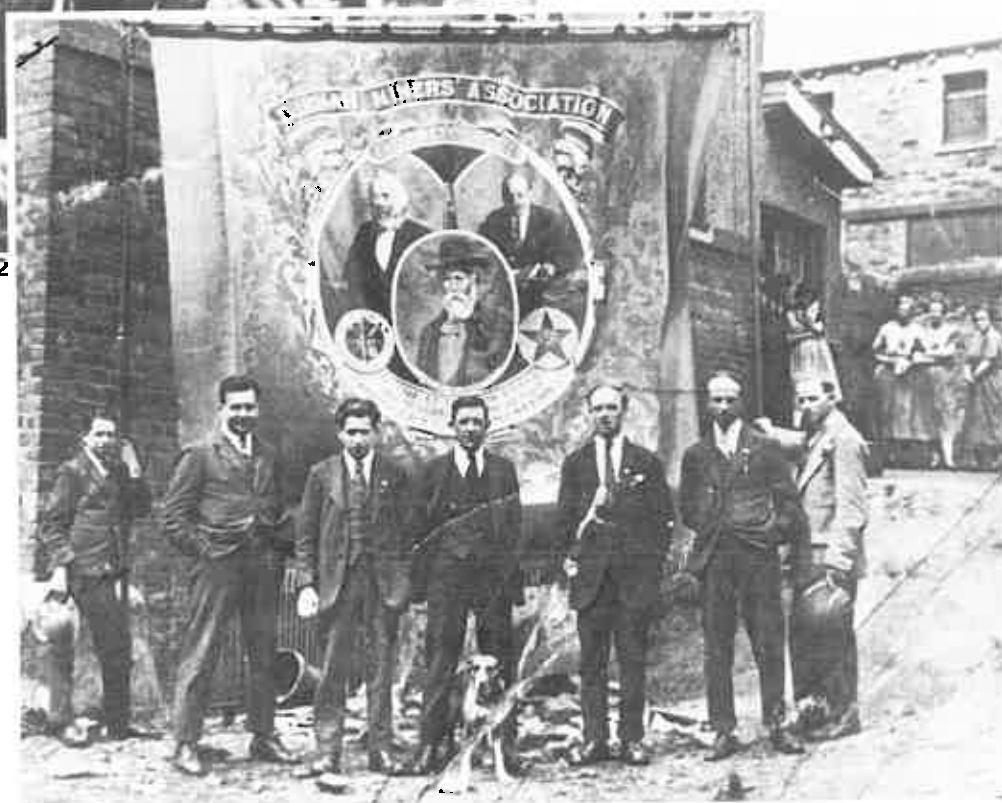




82 A miners' delegation to the Soviet Union is greeted at Rostov on the River Don in the late summer of 1926. The miners in Britain were to receive well over half their financial support during the lock-out from the Soviet working class

83 MFGB Secretary Arthur J. Cook (left) meeting a senior Soviet member of the Anglo-Russian trade union committee, Mikhail Tomskey

84 Amongst those with the Chopwell lodge banner in August of the 1926 lock-out is Will Lawther (second from left) who later became MFGB President. The famous lodge banner carries portraits of Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin and Keir Hardie



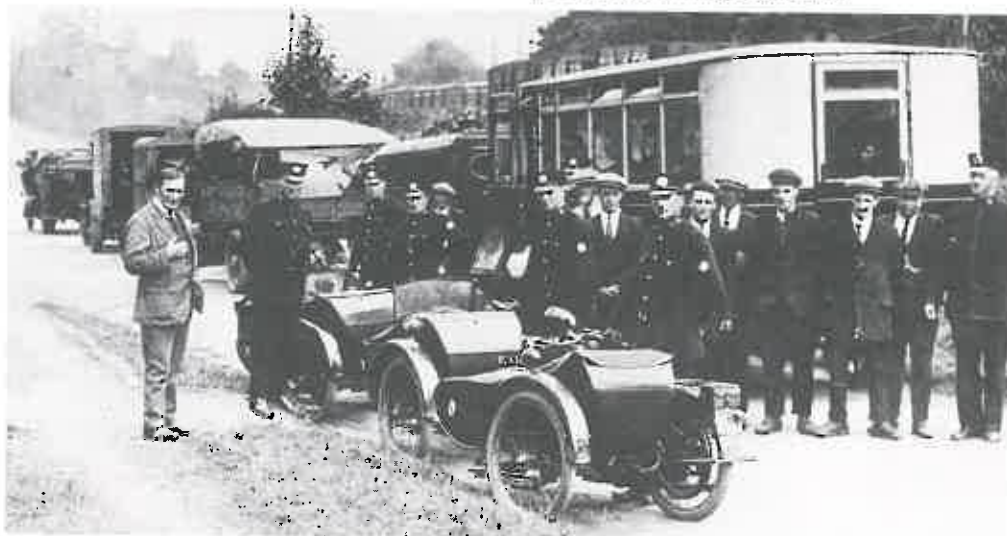
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85 A huge crowd turned out in Glenraig, Fife, to welcome the release of 14 miners jailed during the 1926 lock-out. The village was the scene of a brutal night raid by police in mid-September



86 Scabs protected by police, Brereton, Staffordshire, summer 1926



They struggled on into the autumn. Then, in November, came the news that suspended members of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, led by George Spencer MP, had decided to meet local coal owners to negotiate a district settlement of the dispute.

The purpose of this tactic (to undermine the national unity of the strike) was revealed fully when a breakaway company organisation, the 'Nottinghamshire and District Miners' Industrial Union', came into existence.

Towards the end of November 1926, miners around the country — exhausted, betrayed, deserted — resumed work in all the major coalfields with the exceptions of South Wales, Yorkshire and Durham. Then, on November 30, South Wales and Yorkshire returned to work, with the Durham Miners' Association instructing its men to return. They went back to conditions imposed by the owners.

The lock-out had lasted for seven months. Never in the history of the British trade union movement (or that of any other nation) had there been such an industrial struggle. Commentators, observers and some participants themselves believed that never again would the British working class see such a confrontation.

Only time would tell.

Miners' Leader No. 12.

CAN THEY PAY?

TAKE THE CASE OF THE

GRIFF COLLIERY CO. LTD.

The Capital is £240,000, of which £120,000 were brought in by the public in November, 1918.

The balance brought in from its profit and loss account to its balance sheet each year since 1921 was:—

1920	-	-	-	51,089
1921	-	-	-	32,442
1922	-	-	-	45,894
1923	-	-	-	58,368
1924	-	-	-	85,459
1925	-	-	-	65,662

That is an example of what the Warwickshire Collieries were making out of you on a 7 hour day and a National Agreement. What will they make out of you on local agreements with lower wages or longer hours?

The owners are making huge profits out of the men who have gone back. Before the lock-out the total costs in the Eastern Division were about 15s. 8d. a ton; and the average pit-head price was 16s. 1d. per ton.

Now wages costs are lower. But the owners are now getting between 58s. and 60s. per ton, so that they are making round about 40s. per ton out of the men who have gone back.

DON'T PLAY THE BOSSES' GAME!

STAND FAST BY THE M.F.G.B.

M.F.G.B.

Stick It!

The Other Side is Cracking Up.

Capital wants Coal for Industry.

But coal is not to be had.

In Britain the shortage of coal is over 10,000,000 tons a month—(The world shortage is nearly 20,000,000 tons a month)—

and

Coal Prices are Going Up and Up.

Household coal is selling now from 54 to 55 a ton in London. Manufacturers in some places are having to pay over 80s. a ton for coal—they would have refused to pay 20s. for it before the lock-out—

So

The Workers are being Robbed

and

The Boss is also feeling the Pinch.

Sir Max Muncroft, President of the Federation of British Industries, says the lock-out is costing nearly FOUR MILLION POUNDS a day.

"It is the length of the stoppage that matters" said Winston Churchill, 21 weeks ago.

In a long fight—THE MAN WHO STICKS IT WINS. BUT—

Printed by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain at the Labour Press, 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4. Printed by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain at the Labour Press, 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.



88 Marching to the Durham 'Big Meeting' in 1935 where the speakers included Labour Party leaders Herbert Morrison and George Lansbury

Into the thirties

The courage displayed by mining communities during the 1926 struggle had been fired by worry and fear of what would happen should they submit to the coal owners' demands. In the period that followed the long strike, their worries and fears were confirmed.

On the one hand, there was economic 'slump', which under capitalism meant unemployment and intensified hardship. But for the miners in particular there was now lower pay, longer hours and the mine owners' demands for higher productivity.

Unemployment in the coalfields, poor pay and conditions, victimisation by the owners and the existence of a breakaway organisation, all took their toll on the MFGB, whose membership by 1930 was down to little more than half its 1920 peak.

Entire mining regions suffered. Medical studies in the coalfields revealed that malnutrition affected a total of one million men, women and children in these communities. So terrible were conditions that a special Miners' National Distress Fund was set up.

Public sympathy for the miners' suffering forced the Government (now a Labour administration) to partially reverse implementation of the 1926 Samuel Commission findings. Mineworkers' shifts were thus reduced to seven-and-a-half hours' length, half an hour longer than the pre-1926 shift!

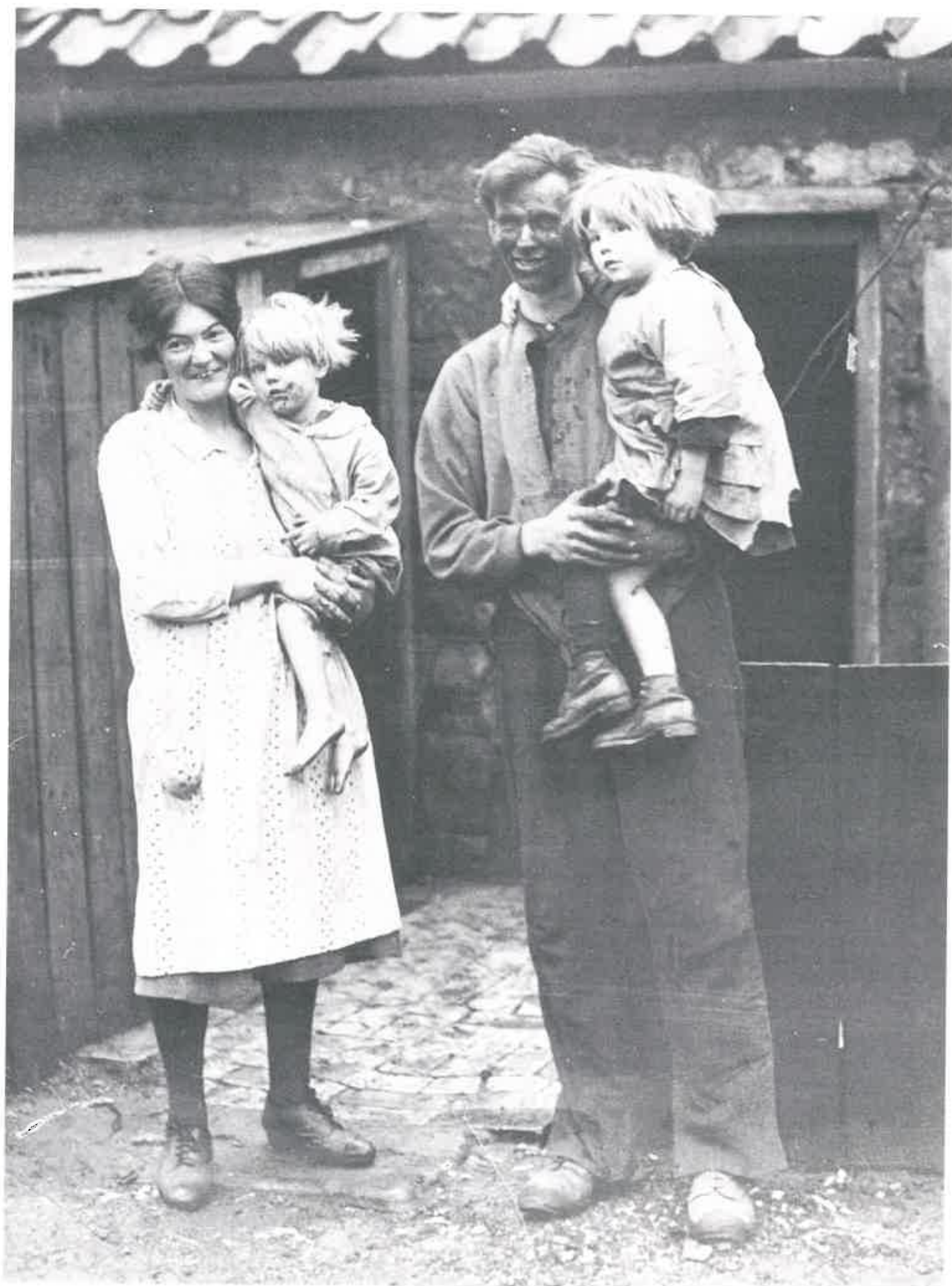
By 1931, unemployment in mining districts was up to 41 per cent, with most of those miners employed earning no more than six shillings



89 Some of the Maerdy Council of Action 'anti-baliff' defendants who were jailed in 1932 for unlawful assembly and incitement to riot after trying to prevent the removal of furniture from the home of Bill Price. They were joined in the dock by Maerdy miners' leader Arthur Horner, who was sentenced to 15 months hard labour

90 A row of Scottish miners' cottages in the 1930s. Mining families had to endure terrible conditions, overcrowding and poor sanitation. Little was done to improve their lot until the 1940s, in spite of a damning report by a Royal Commission on Housing as far back as 1921







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91 A Derbyshire miner and his young family remaining cheerful in spite of the severe privations of the 1930s

92 Welsh miners' children protesting in 1936 against the Means Test which slashed benefits to the unemployed. Hundreds of thousands were mobilised in the Welsh valleys against the Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB) regulations

and ten pence per day (half the wage, for example, of dockers).

The 1930s were the years of the hunger marches, in which legendary MFGB leaders and activists (including future NUM General Secretaries Arthur Horner and Will Paynter, and Nye Bevan, then a miners' agent in Wales) all played prominent roles.

The most famous of the marches, from Jarrow in County Durham, focused the nation's attention on the plight of Britain's unemployed. Among the workers on the march, miners were in the vanguard.

The steadily worsening conditions in the coal industry were

glaringly exposed in the terrible Gresford Colliery disaster of September 22, 1934. The Denbighshire pit suffered an explosion which took the lives of 265 men and boys. In its aftermath, numerous breaches of law, evidence of speed-up and victimisation of MFGB members were all revealed. Ultimately, however, the pit's manager and its owners were fined only £140 each.

In the wake of the Gresford disaster, a Royal Commission on mines safety was established; but it was to be another twenty years before the lessons of that tragedy yielded fresh legislation in the form of the 1954 Mines and Quarries Act.



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93 The Mid-Rhondda contingent on the 1936 Hunger March to London. Organised by the South Wales and Monmouthshire Joint Council Against Unemployment, the 504 marchers had the support of trade unions in every industry, political parties, civic and religious bodies



94 Arthur Horner addressing miners at Wardley, County Durham. Behind him stands the Follonsby lodge banner with the portraits of Lenin, Keir Hardie, A.J. Cook, James Connolly and George Harvey, who was lodge secretary at Follonsby and known locally as 'Wardley's Lenin'

95 Durham Hunger Marchers passing through Houghton-le-Spring in October 1936

96 Lanarkshire miners' contingent on a Hunger March in the 1930s

97 The famous Jarrow Crusade on the road to London in 1936 to protest against mass unemployment and poverty

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In the period prior to 1926, the coal industry's death rate had actually fallen, but ten years later, annual fatality figures of 134 per 100,000 reappeared, statistics which had not been seen since the turn of the century. These years of attrition and suffering led (slowly but steadily) to a national MFGB campaign for a fight back, culminating in November 1935 in a ballot that produced the largest majority vote for strike action in the Federation's history, forcing the State to oversee some concessions on pay. These concessions could not disguise the fact that in the period leading up to the outbreak of World War Two, miners were placed eighty-first in the wages league table!

As events in Europe caused grave concern to all British trade unionists, the miners were witnessing a blow-up in Nottinghamshire, where wages had fallen even lower than those in other coalfields.

The breakaway 'Spencer Union', based in Notts but with tentacles wrapped around other parts of the British coalfield, had continued inevitably to weaken effective trade unionism in the industry and to attack the strength of the MFGB.

Such a role had been intended by those who had founded the breakaway and by those such as the coal owners who supported it. But rank-and-file hatred of the 'Spencer Union' was so great that the breakaway could only be maintained in an area like Notts by the virtual outlawing of the MFGB. Even though



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the owners refused to recognise the Federation, nearly one in five (20 per cent) of Notts miners had held fast to the Union, and throughout the decade after 1926 continued a long, heroic campaign against 'company unionism'.

This campaign came to a head in 1936 at Harworth Colliery, where the Notts Miners' Association/MFGB members came out on strike for trade union recognition. Their strike lasted six months, during which time they and their families endured arrest, police harassment, evictions and owners' intimidation.

When it was over, the union's branch president, Mick Kane,

having been charged with 'riot', was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour. Of the seventeen charged with him, eleven miners and one woman who was a miner's wife were given sentences ranging from four to fifteen months jail with hard labour; the remaining five people were bound over.

The ferocity of these sentences showed how important the dispute was; while the strikers aroused the support of the labour movement, the strike itself heralded the increasing isolation of the Spencer breakaway, which was growing steadily weaker in terms of members and influence.

With miners' wages in Notts even lower than in other coalfields, it was obvious that miners there were in need of trade union protection.

Against this background, talks on the possibilities of reconciliation between MFGB leaders and those of the Spencer breakaway had opened by the end of 1936.

Mineworkers' hatred for Spencerism was so great that when the MFGB put the question of a merger with the breakaway to a ballot vote, the Union's membership overwhelmingly rejected it!

Despite this rejection, the Federation's leadership proceeded to negotiate a merger, agreeing to

Free the Harworth Prisoners Fighters for Trade Union Liberty



J. A. Wilson

F. Jobson



G. Barker

T. Richardson



H. E. Risdale



G. A. Chandler



B. Murray



Mrs. M. Haymer



T. Smith



Mick Kane

W. Carney

J. H. Smith



99

terms that allowed George Spencer to become President of the Nottinghamshire Miners within the MFGB.

So, in May 1937, the breakaway returned to the Union, bringing with it both the perspective and apparatus which had engineered disastrous division in 1926. The nature of Spencerism thus re-entered the body politic of the MFGB, where it would remain in later years as part of the National Union of Mineworkers.

By now, the Spanish Civil War had begun, and British miners gave wholehearted support to the Spanish workers' fight against fascism. A large number enlisted in the

International Brigade, including leaders like Will Paynter of South Wales and Tommy Degan of Yorkshire; they went off to Spain to fight for democracy alongside their Spanish brothers and sisters, while the MFGB campaigned at home against the embargo on arms for the Spanish Republic imposed by the British Government.

Miners, like other workers, saw this war as an historical turning point. With the tragic fall of the Spanish Republic, MFGB members (like their colleagues throughout the trade union movement) knew that before long another world-wide war was inevitable.

98 Notts miners voting at the pit head during a ballot organised by the TUC in 1928. Under the slogan 'Vote for real trade unionism' a campaign was waged against the newly-formed company union. The miners voted solidly 9 to 1 in favour of the Nottinghamshire Miners Association and the MFGB

99 Pages from a 1937 pamphlet urging support for the eleven miners and one miner's wife jailed following the six-month strike at Harworth, Notts, for union recognition. Mick Kane was sentenced to two years. The other sentences ranged from four to fifteen months jail with hard labour

South Wales Miners' Federation. TO THE BEDWAS COLLIERY WORKMEN.

Look at this - - and this.

In Germany Now.
NO FREE TRADE UNION
NO FREE SPEECH
NO SECURITY OF EMPLOYMENT
NO TRADE UNION BALANCE SHEET
STATE APPOINTMENT OF WORKMEN'S REPRESENTATIVES.
INTIMIDATION
VICTIMISATION
PERSECUTION OF JEWS
NO FREE WORKMEN'S INSTITUTE
NO WELFARE ORGANISATION.
COMPULSORY DEDUCTIONS OF STATE UNION CONTRIBUTIONS FROM WAGES
CONCENTRATION CAMPS
A SPY IN EVERY STREET

In Bedwas Now.
NO FREE TRADE UNION
NO FREE SPEECH
24 HOURS NOTICE
NO TRADE UNION BALANCE SHEET
COMPANY APPOINTMENT OF WORKMEN'S REPRESENTATIVES
INTIMIDATION
VICTIMISATION
PERSECUTION OF WELSHMEN
NO FREE WORKMEN'S INSTITUTE
NO DEDUCTIONS FOR WELFARE
COMPULSORY DEDUCTIONS OF COMPANY UNION CONTRIBUTIONS
BLACKLEG BARRICADES
A SPY ON EVERY CONVEYOR

"The Patriot," the political organ of a Die-Hard group of Tories, records both "Fascism" and the "Non-Pok" with equal ardour. It regards "World Jewry" and the Miners' Federation with equal hatred.

Do the Officers of the Bedwas Colliery realise that they are announcing a sign that will bite the hand that feeds it?

Do the workmen of Bedwas realise that you are being compelled to support the industrial counterpart of Hitler and Mussolini?

BE READY FOR THE CALL TO FREEDOM.

For the South Wales Miners' Federation,
THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

101 The parallel between the growth of fascism and scab unionism was highlighted in this poster produced by the South Wales Miners' Federation. SWMF leader Arthur Horner described scab unionism as 'fascism in embryo'



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100 Police protecting two scabs in 1932 on their way into Bedwas Colliery, South Wales, during the long and bitter struggle to defeat company unionism, represented by the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union (Spencer Union)

102 A welcome home in Treharris for miners jailed for their part in fighting the scab union at the Taff Merthyr colliery, 1936. Sentences of up to 15 months hard labour provoked large demonstrations throughout the Welsh coalfield

103 Friends cheering some of the 'stay-in' strikers as they surfaced after two days underground at Taff Merthyr pit in October 1935. The colliery at Trelewis was the scene of running battles between miners and police drafted in to protect scabs belonging to the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union

104 Miners at the Parc Colliery in the Rhondda at the end of their eight-day stay-down strike against the scab union in October 1935

105 Welsh volunteers in the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. Alwyn Skinner (back row, left) and Harry Dobson (middle row, second from right) were killed in action. Dobson, a miner from Blaenclydach Lodge, had been imprisoned for his part in the 1936 anti-fascist demonstration in Tonypandy



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106 An arcwall coal cutter in use at Ashington Colliery in 1936. As its name suggests, this compressed air-driven machine would cut in an arc

107 Undercutting has been completed, and now holes are being drilled for the shotfirer to fill with explosive. This photograph dates from 1936, at Ashington, showing how late such manual methods remained common

108 When a district of a pit worked under the old pillar and stall system was deserted, miners were sent in to 'rob out' the coal pillars. It was one of the most dangerous jobs underground to have to load tubs, with props cracking all around after the shots were fired. Nowadays, with the longwall technique no pillars are left and the roof is allowed to collapse behind the advancing coal face

109 Hand-putting or 'trammings' a tub in Brancepeth pit, County Durham, in 1929. This primitive means of transport was itself an advance on dragging sleds across the bare ground to the shaft bottom. Hand-putting was increasingly superseded by endless rope railways and more recently, high-speed conveyors passing through drifts to the surface thousands of yards from the shaft

110 Hand-filling direct to tubs at Ashington Colliery in 1936. Notice the exposed candle flame, as well as the narrow gap for loading the coal. The use of the arcwall cutter brought about the transition in mining methods from the traditional pillar and stall technique to the modern longwall cutting



110



111 The victory of the Harworth miners at the end of the 1930s paved the way for the establishment of the National Union of Mineworkers. Mick Kane (with raised fist) who was jailed for his fight against Spencerism, on a May Day march

Birth of the NUM

During the years of World War Two, support was growing both inside and outside the coal industry for the mines to be nationalised.

The outbreak of war exposed the coal owners' callous treatment of the vital energy source under their control. Indiscriminate colliery closures, investment starvation, safety standards ignored – these were the hallmarks of private ownership.

Consequently, when with the onset of war the Government needed a dramatic increase in coal production, the privately-held industry had been ill-equipped to meet demand.

In this period, regular talks began between Government ministers and MFGB leaders, discussing how best to tackle the industry's problems and ensure a flow of coal for Britain's war effort.

For their part, the miners made clear that it was essential for coal to be nationalised once the war was over. Nationalisation was a cherished dream that thousands upon thousands of miners had striven to attain in countless struggles.

No group of workers had been more cruelly exploited by the profit motive and greed which characterised coal owners who had always been able to turn their backs on the suffering of mineworkers and their families.

While campaigning for public ownership, they also began to move towards establishing a truly National Union to replace the federated structure that had operated since 1889.

Initial steps in this direction were taken in 1942, when an MFGB sub-committee drafted proposals 'to merge all the districts and sectional miners' unions into one national organisation covering all mine-workers employed in and around the collieries of Great Britain'.

British miners had begun drawing up the blueprint for one industry and one union.

The war-time coalition Government had assumed emergency powers and, with a shortage of manpower in the pits, young men were conscripted into the coal industry in the same way as into the armed forces.

These 'Bevin Boys' as they were known (named after the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin) came from all walks of life and included people such as John Platts Mills QC who throughout his long career as a barrister (and MP) has remained a solid friend and supporter of British miners.

Despite the desperate need for coal, however, miners' wages remained low, and conditions extremely difficult. How low, and how difficult can be seen from the fact that during the war, miners were prepared to defy the Essential Work Order imposed in May 1941 (legislation which made each colliery a 'scheduled undertaking' from which a worker could neither go nor be dismissed).

Miners at Betteshanger in Kent took strike action in 1941 defying not only the law but the court which found them guilty of breaking that law. Their determination to fight

for a just wage made the name Betteshanger famous.

In 1944, miners in Scotland, Yorkshire and South Wales also took strike action, and forced the Government and coal owners to agree to the establishment of a national minimum wage which lifted mineworkers from eighty-first to fourteenth place in the wages league.

By their steadfastness, courage and unity, they had redressed the injustice of 1921, and re-established a guaranteed minimum wage.

In that same year, 1944, as the long-cherished dream of nationalisation appeared to take shape on the horizon, a founding conference held in Nottingham established the National Union of Mineworkers.

This conference made clear its firm desire to put into effect a Miners' Charter of demands on behalf of those who toiled in the bowels of the earth. During the 1945 General Election campaign the new Union declared:

'Labour stands for a nationally owned and controlled mining industry. The Churchill Tory Government is against all forms of effective control and national ownership. It prefers to put private interests before national needs. Give Labour the mandate to make the coal mines public property.'

Labour's landslide victory in 1945 cleared the way for passage of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act. All the rights, assets and liabilities of the industry were to be transferred from the coal owners to the new National Coal Board.



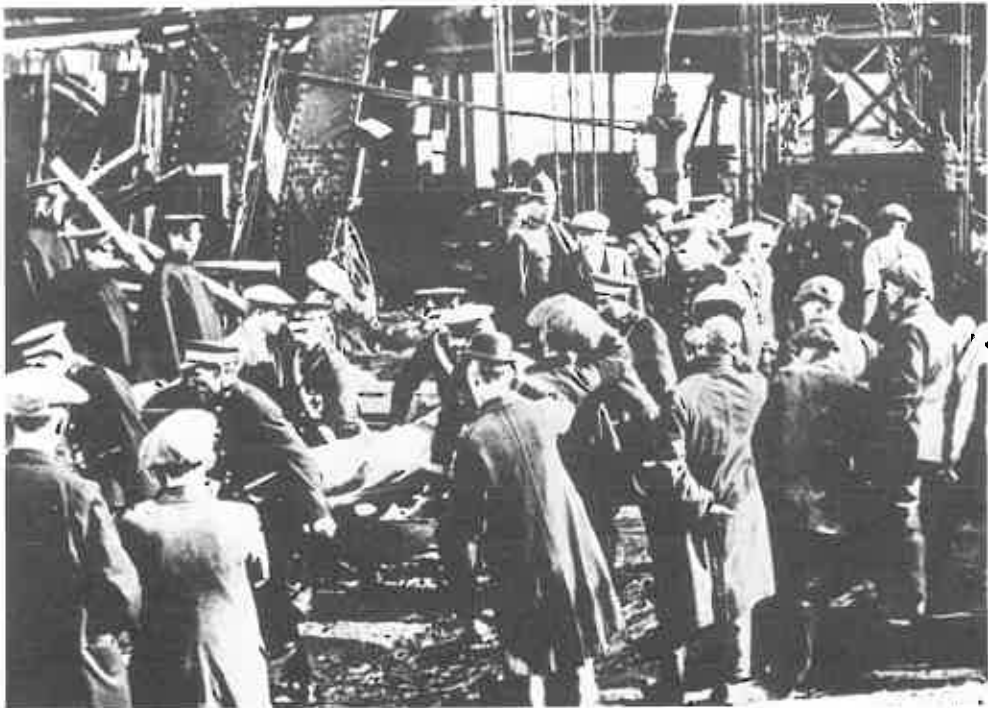
A dangerous trade

Since 1850, more than 100,000 miners have perished in accidents at work. The callous disregard for safety demonstrated by mine owners was most dramatically brought home in the evidence presented to inquests into colliery disasters. The kinds of conditions which led to explosions were described after the Gresford disaster of September 22, 1934, by miners' MP D. Grenfell as follows: "There is no language in which one can describe the inferno of 14's [the name of a district]. There were men working almost stark naked, clogs with holes bored through the bottom to let the sweat run out, one hundred shots a day fired on a face less than 200 yards wide, the air thick with fumes and dust from blasting, the banjack hissing to waft the gas out of the face into the unpacked waste, a space 200 yards long and 100 yards wide above the wind road full of inflammable gas and impenetrable for that reason.'

112 Relatives crowd round an ambulance during the Redding Pit rescue attempt. Sixty-six men were trapped by water, five were entombed for nine days, and by December 3, 1923, a total of 40 bodies had been removed from the Stirlingshire colliery

113, 114 Scenes from the worst mining disaster in history, in which 439 died at the Universal Colliery, Senghenydd, South Wales, October 14, 1913

115 These men and boys were saved from the Stanley disaster of February 16, 1909, in County Durham. The explosion claimed 168 lives



113



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116 Whitwick Colliery disaster, Leicestershire, 1898. **119** Bodies being removed after the Cadeby Colliery disaster in Yorkshire, July 9, 1912. There were two explosions on the same day. The first killed 35 miners, and the second killed 53 members of the rescue parties



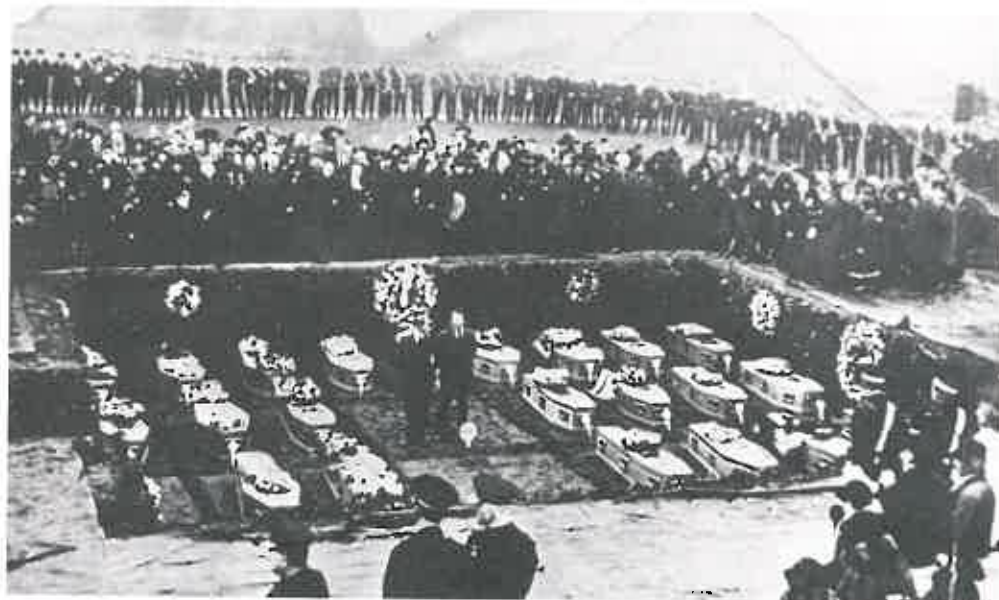
117 The mass funeral of victims of the 1910 Whitehaven disaster. The 137 victims were deliberately entombed by the owners, who claimed no-one was still alive beyond an area affected by fire. In fact, many were alive as their escape was being sealed off. Their fellow miners suspected as much, but were prevented from getting near the pit by several lines of police. **118** Water from the flooded Redding Pit being pumped out on September 25, 1923



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120 Burial of the victims of the Bentley Colliery disaster at Arksey Cemetery on November 25, 1931. The explosion was so ferocious that many of the 45 bodies were unrecognisable

121 Grim news being relayed to crowds at the Gresford Colliery disaster, when 265 men and boys were killed in an explosion on September 22, 1934

122 Waiting for news at Easington Colliery gates, County Durham, after the disaster on May 29, 1951. Firedamp was ignited by coal-cutter picks striking pyrites. This in turn ignited coal dust, killing 81 miners. Two members of the rescue team were also killed. Stone dust barriers were subsequently installed in roadways



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Post-war disasters

After nationalisation, the Union secured some long-sought improvements in safety underground. But these did not prevent several major post-war disasters. One of the worst took place at Creswell Colliery, near Worksop, on September 26, 1950. Fire broke out at the junction of two conveyer-belts about a mile from the pit shaft during the early morning shift. Rescue teams fought the blaze, but were unable to reach eighty miners, who were tragically killed. Apprentices taken on that day were handed the grim task of digging a mass grave for the victims.



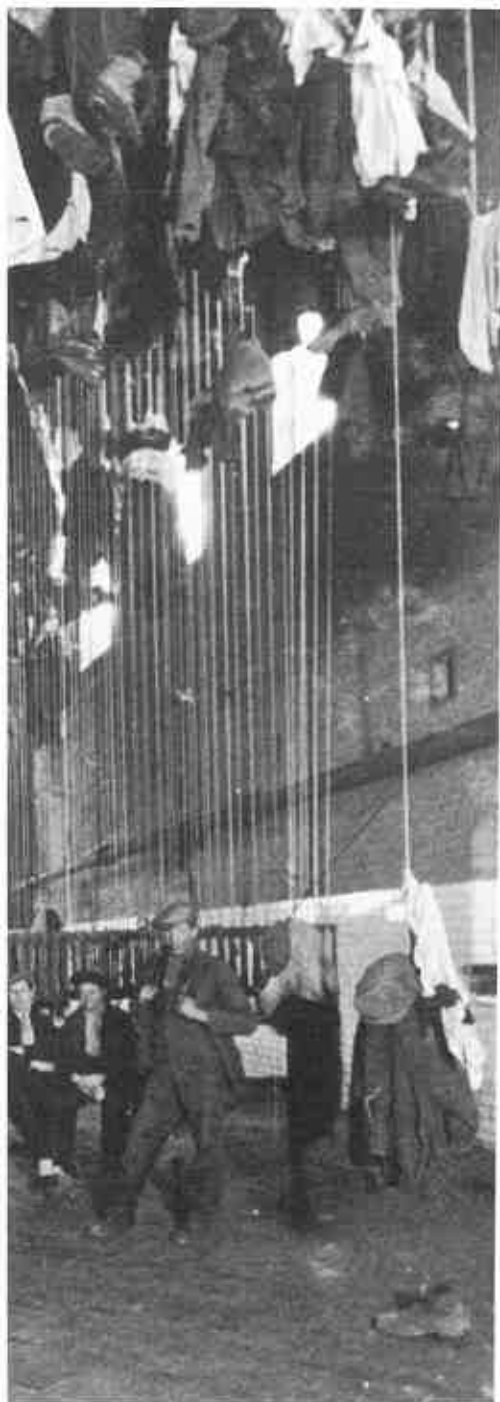
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123, 124 Creswell Colliery disaster in Nottinghamshire. A view of the pithead and the crowd waiting for news





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125 The interior of the pithead baths at Ellington Colliery, Northumberland, 1936. Coal owners were legally required under the 1911 Coal Mines Act to build baths if two-thirds of the workforce demanded it. But the bulk of the money had to come from the miners' welfare fund

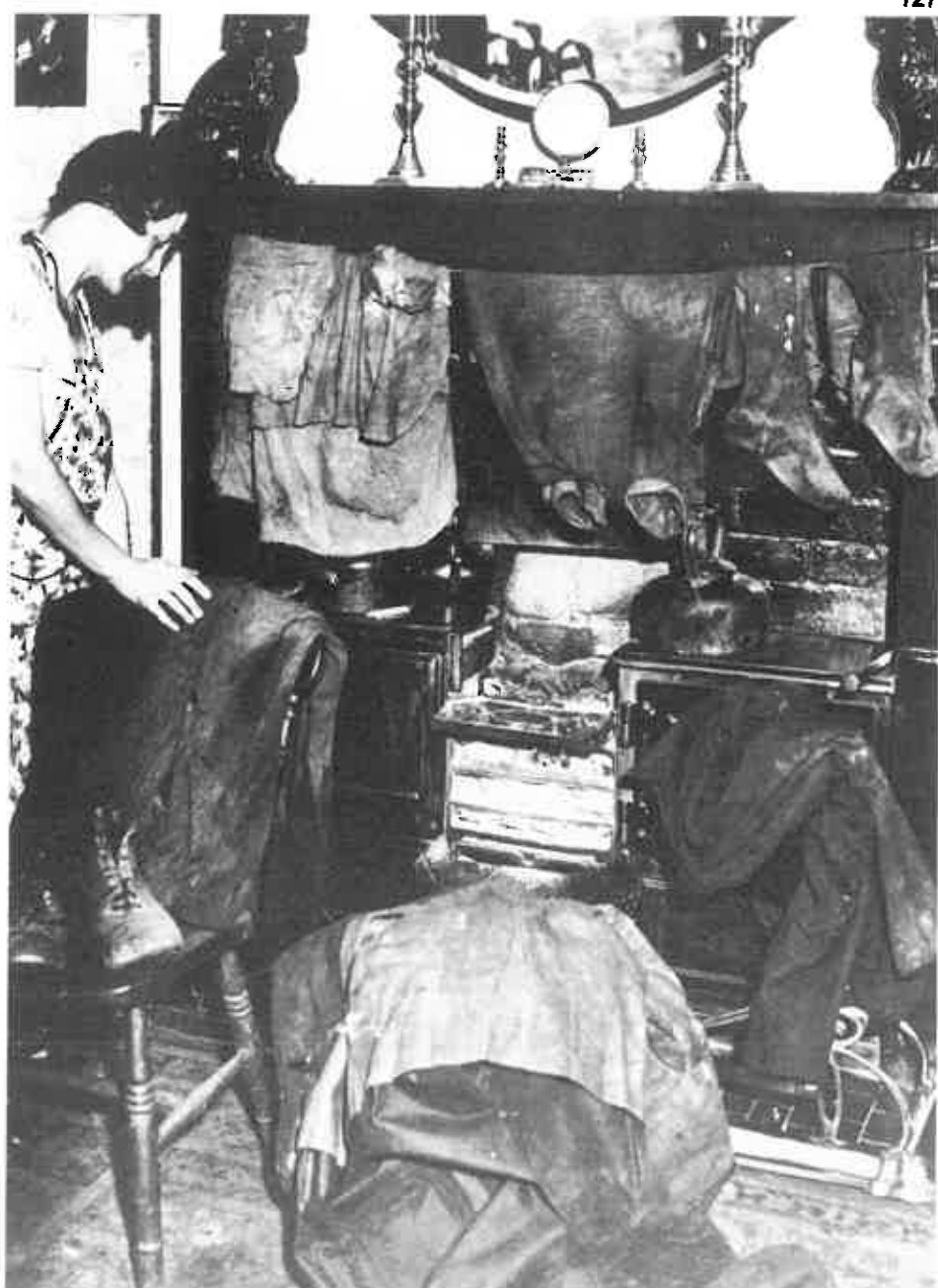
126 Men at Eldon Drift, County Durham, washing their boots before using their new pithead baths. They were opened in November 1954 by area NUM leader Sam Watson (carrying briefcase)

127 In the showers at Denaby Main, Yorkshire, shortly after the Second World War

128 This typical domestic scene explains why the struggle for pithead baths was so important to the Union



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129 Plaques like this one were unveiled at pits throughout the British coalfield when the National Coal Board took over all the rights, assets and liabilities of the coal industry

Nationalisation!

Vesting Day, January 1, 1947, saw the nationalisation of Britain's coal industry. Mining communities believed this marked the winning of an epic struggle for decent wages, family security and public ownership of a vital resource.

On Vesting Day, miners and their families marched in thousands behind banners and colliery bands to the pitheads. They cheered, and some openly wept, as the blue and white flag of the National Coal Board was unfurled above them. They crowded round the unveiled plaques which proclaimed: 'This colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people.'

The dawn of nationalisation brought hope to the miners who had lived with the evils of privately owned pits all their lives. One could almost hear the cheers of heroes and heroines from the past as well as the present, celebrating the reality of public ownership.

The National Union of Mineworkers had drawn up a 'Miners' Charter' setting out a strategy for the industry and those who kept it going; it called for modernisation at existing pits together with the sinking of new ones; adequate training for young people; new safety laws; proper compensation payments for industrial injury and disease; a five-day week without loss of pay; adequate pensions at the age of fifty-five, and the construction of new towns and villages with good housing in mining areas.

The five-day week was won at last in the famous Agreement of 1947, while miners' wages began to

rise steadily; by 1950, they were at the top of the industrial wages league, in startling contrast to the starvation pay of pre-war private enterprise.

Under the terms of the 1946

Nationalisation Act, the National Coal Board was charged with providing Britain with adequate supplies of fuel which in quantity and price were 'in the public interest'. This was welcomed as bringing an



130 Some of the first coal cut under nationalisation. These miners are clearly happy to see the end of private ownership in the pits

end to the cut-throat competition which had been the hallmark of private coal owners as they grasped at individual profits in national and international markets.

Soon, however, hopes and dreams began to sour as miners became increasingly aware that private ownership had been replaced by State rather than common ownership. It was now apparent that control and management of the industry had been left in the hands of those who had previously been either managers or actual owners of private mines.

To add injury to this injustice, the fledgling nationalised concern was forced to pay compensation to former owners, including compensation for pits which had already been closed!

Miners soon realised that 'their' industry was labouring under a number of unfair burdens, burdens which did not affect other, private enterprises, and which would weigh heavily in the decades ahead.

The NCB was instructed by the Government to sell its coal at less than the commercial price applicable throughout Europe: a policy which, according to senior management's later estimates, lost the industry over £2 billion income during the ten years following nationalisation. This meant that the newly nationalised NCB, which was in reality extremely profitable, consistently showed a loss on its balance sheet because of Government policy and direction.

But while certain industries in post-war Britain were getting 'cheap coal' on Government instruction, domestic users had to pay very much higher prices; it was thus, so soon, that the first seeds were sown for anti-nationalisation campaigning.

Another injustice was that whilst the coal industry itself had been nationalised, the main supply and service concerns directly connected with coal mining – distribution, the manufacture and supply of equipment and machinery – were left in



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131 Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee addressing a huge crowd of miners and their families at the Racecourse in Durham on Gala Day in 1949

132 Yorkshire miners at Denaby Main Colliery looking forward to the benefits of nationalisation

133 Young Durham miners revelling in the atmosphere of a gala in the 1950s

134 Miners at Mosley Common Colliery in Lancashire are congratulated by NCB officials in 1948 after breaking production records. Developed as a 'super-pit', Mosley Common was shut down in the 1960s after a political smear campaign against the militant local NUM branch



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the hands of private companies.

These were among the burdens the NUM would be forced to carry. But there were others. In the aftermath of war, there was a desperate shortage of coal. The Government and Coal Board sought an agreement with the NUM in a major drive for increased production, and asked the Union to agree to miners working a sixth shift voluntarily on a Saturday.

The NUM accepted this proposal in a spirit of co-operation, but many within the Union worried that not only was the arrangement in conflict with the Five Day Week Agreement, but it could eventually be used more extensively against mineworkers.

The Coal Board's demands for increased production and higher productivity within months of nationalisation clashed with miners' growing unease. There was a major strike at Yorkshire's Grimethorpe Colliery, and action spread like wildfire through the coalfields. Both the MFGB and the NUM had been born from anger against private enterprise tactics, and miners were in no mood to accept those same tactics from the NCB.

In the ten years following Vesting Day, miners, who represented 4 per cent of the nation's workers, accounted for one-third of all work days lost due to industrial action. It was obvious that the exploitation and injustices of centuries would not be fully ended or redressed by what many saw as 'capitalist' nationalisation.



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135 Music while they worked. A brass band accompanies the construction of the Fryston welfare hall in Yorkshire

136 Women preparing food at a soup kitchen for miners at Betteshanger Colliery during their 1938 strike against the coal owners' abuse of labour. They are standing on the site of Deal Miners' Welfare built a year later. In 1941, miners at the Kent colliery defied wartime legislation, and staged a successful strike for a just wage

137 Denaby & Cadeby Home Coal trucks in Yorkshire. The Union not only fought for concessionary coal for its members and widows, but also ensured that delivery was as cheap as possible



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138 Children in Fryston, Yorkshire, crowd round a new invalid car used by a local miner who suffered a broken back in a pit accident

139 Nationalisation and the creation of a National Health Service after the war led to the first regular medical check-ups. Health has always been a major priority for the Union, which was instrumental in founding many cottage hospitals. Today, the NUM is one of the staunchest defenders of the NHS



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140 A pre-war training manual from Bentley Colliery, Yorkshire, showing primitive methods of treating injuries in the mining industry — and this is the coal owners putting on a show for the camera!



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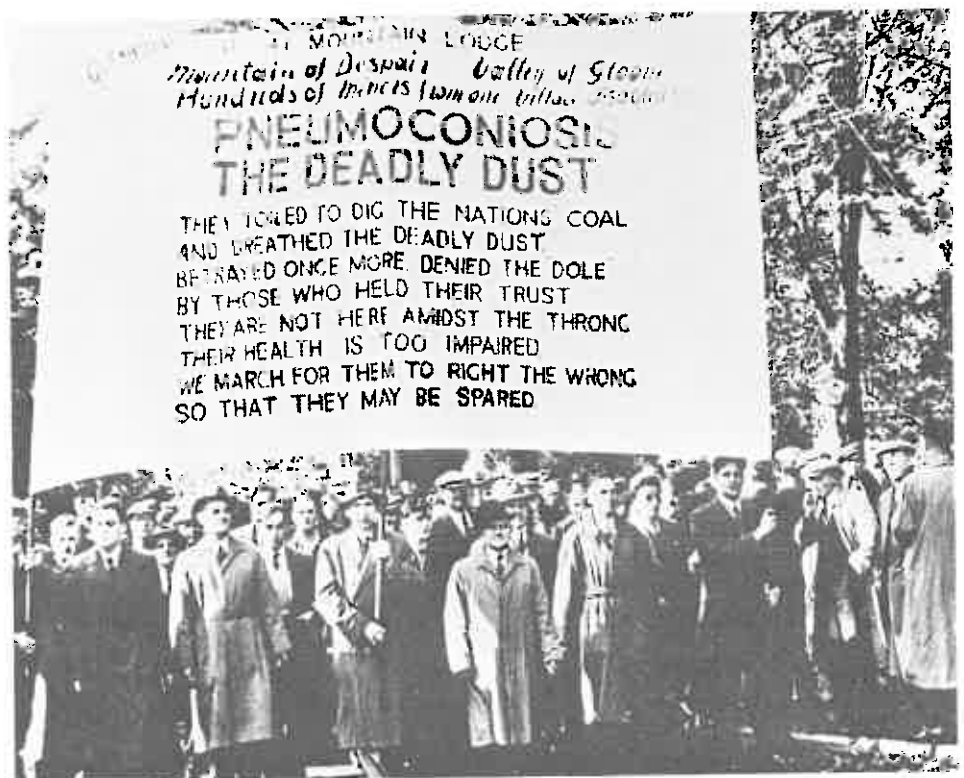
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141 Miners from the Hetton Lyons Colliery took their protest against closure to the Durham Gala in 1950. Between 1954-56, 4,000 Durham miners were forced to leave the area because of colliery closures

142 Miners from the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent taking part in a demonstration in the 1950s against German rearmament

143 A series of disputes at the two collieries in Gwaen Cae Gurwen, South Wales, were used as an excuse by the Coal Board to ban the use of newly constructed pithead baths at Steer pit in April 1956. These miners are attending a pithead meeting to discuss the NCB provocation. The pit and its £30,000 baths were closed soon after, in 1959

144 A Gwendraeth Valley miners' banner on a demonstration in Cardiff, 1952, demanding justice for victims of pneumoconiosis. A survey of Rhondda in the same year revealed that more than half the miners had this disease. One in five suffered its severest and most deadly form



144



145 On the move. These miners are being transferred to other local pits in Lancashire following the closure of Wheatsheaf Colliery in June 1961. Closures became so numerous at this time that miners accused the NCB of turning them into 'industrial gypsies'

Butchery of an industry

Nationalisation had taken place within the context of a development programme for coal, with the Labour Government and NCB planning an annual output of 250 million tons. Nevertheless, the 1947 total of 950 collieries had dropped by 1957 to 822. Then, towards the end of the 1950s, the Tory Government and NCB began to implement a systematic pit closure programme.

The argument was that Britain's energy needs should be met by 'cheap oil' from the Middle East instead of 'expensive coal' produced at home. At the same time, the Government was pumping funds into the new nuclear power programme, which Labour as well as the Tories strongly supported.

Between the years 1957 and 1963, no less than 264 collieries were closed, while the number of miners fell by nearly 30 per cent. During this six-year period, Scotland lost 39 per cent of its pits, while 30 per cent of those in South Wales, Northumberland and Durham were wiped out.

Throughout the 1960s, with a Labour Government in office from 1964, the pit closure programme accelerated; it decimated the industry. During this period, nearly 300 more pits were closed, and the total workforce slumped from over 750,000 in the late 1950s down to 320,000 by 1968. In many parts of Britain, miners now became known as 'industrial gypsies' as pit closures forced them to move from coalfield to coalfield in search of secure jobs.

They were victims of madhouse



146 Monmouthshire miners with retired NUM general secretary Arthur Horner demonstrating against pit closures in South Wales, 1963. At that time, there were 77,000 miners working in the area



147 The Queen opened this Scottish pit in 1957. Despite the Coal Board's boasts about projected output, the colliery was shut down in 1962 before reaching full production



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148 Betteshanger miners coming to the surface after a stay-down strike lasting nearly a week in 1960. The 127 miners were fighting NCB proposals to slash jobs at the Kent pit

149 Their comrades keep a tally of the hours spent underground. The Kent pit was occupied again during the 1984-1985 strike to counter poisonous propaganda from the Coal Board about the condition of underground workings. Those who took part in the sit-in were sacked, and have still to be reinstated

150 Will Paynter, NUM General Secretary, who spearheaded the campaign to end the divisive piecework system





151 Leaving the pit for the last time. The last shift at Cambrian Colliery, Clydach Vale, Rhondda, September 1966

economics. Britain's dependence on oil imports from the Middle East (and on coal imports as well!) would have severe adverse effects on the nation's balance of payments.

Meanwhile, as pits described as 'uneconomic' were being butchered, the Government continued to pump funds into the grossly uneconomic and deplorably unsafe nuclear power industry. Central Government seemed determined to smash

Britain's coal industry. Other European governments were decimating their coal industries as well.

Throughout this period, the National Union of Mineworkers conducted lobbies and campaigns, but took little or no industrial action. When the closure programme began, British coal met between 75-80 per cent of the nation's needs, and an NUM strategy involving industrial action could not only have

halted the closure programme but helped set the energy agenda for the future.

However, the Union during this period refrained from taking up the challenge and fighting back. There were honourable exceptions; both Arthur Horner and Will Paynter, successive NUM General Secretaries, warned of the economic madness of depending upon imported energy from the Middle East.

Their warnings, though, had no effect on a Government determined to accelerate a so-called 'coal rationalisation programme'.

Throughout the 1960s the NUM appeared as a body immobilised, as though paralysed by some fear, and despite intense provocation of pit closures, as well as low wages and poor conditions, the Union took no real action to defend its members

and the mining industry itself.

By now, the NCB was in the process of implementing key changes, based on a report prepared by the chairman of ICI, who had recommended complete restructuring as a prelude to an inevitable mechanisation programme.

The industry had by now seen the introduction of a national struc-

ture which paid all surface and underground workers other than those at the coal face a common rate on a 'day wage' basis. By the mid-1960s, however, coal face workers still laboured under a piecework arrangement that was divisive, unsafe and not in the interests of workers or the industry.

Will Paynter and many coalfield leaders like Jock Kane of York-



152 Despite the introduction of pithead baths in most collieries by the end of the 1960s, some miners, like Roy Anderson from Old Meadows Colliery, Bacup, Lancashire, were still washing in a tin tub in the yard

shire had always advocated the introduction of a common wage agreement so that all miners would receive the same wage for the same job irrespective of which coalfield they worked.

In 1966 the Coal Board, for reasons completely different from those advanced by the NUM, did introduce the National Power Loading Agreement which set a standard shift rate for face workers and which would by stages reach parity for all miners in all areas by 1971.

In this process, levelling-up and levelling-down of wage rates were involved, but the important principle of achieving standard rates for all was welcomed by everyone who wanted to see real unity within the NUM.

Disagreement with management over piecework earnings had been the key factor in a spate of local and area strikes during the 1950s and 1960s. There had not been any national action since 1926; to some it seemed unlikely that such action would ever occur again. In the late 1960s, however, young miners in particular were becoming increasingly frustrated with conditions and Coal Board tactics.

A demand for the eight-hour day for surface workers sparked an unofficial strike that changed the Union and the industry dramatically.

It began in Yorkshire, and within days over 130,000 miners were on strike all over the British coalfield. So serious was it that the TUC became involved, holding meetings with the strike committee in Yorkshire. Following telephone conversations between TUC General Secretary Vic Feather and NCB Chairman Lord Robens, the NCB agreed that if striking miners returned to work, the Board would, within a few months, introduce an eight-hour day for surface workers!

It was a major victory; suddenly around the coalfield miners began to be aware of a power which for so long had been dormant.



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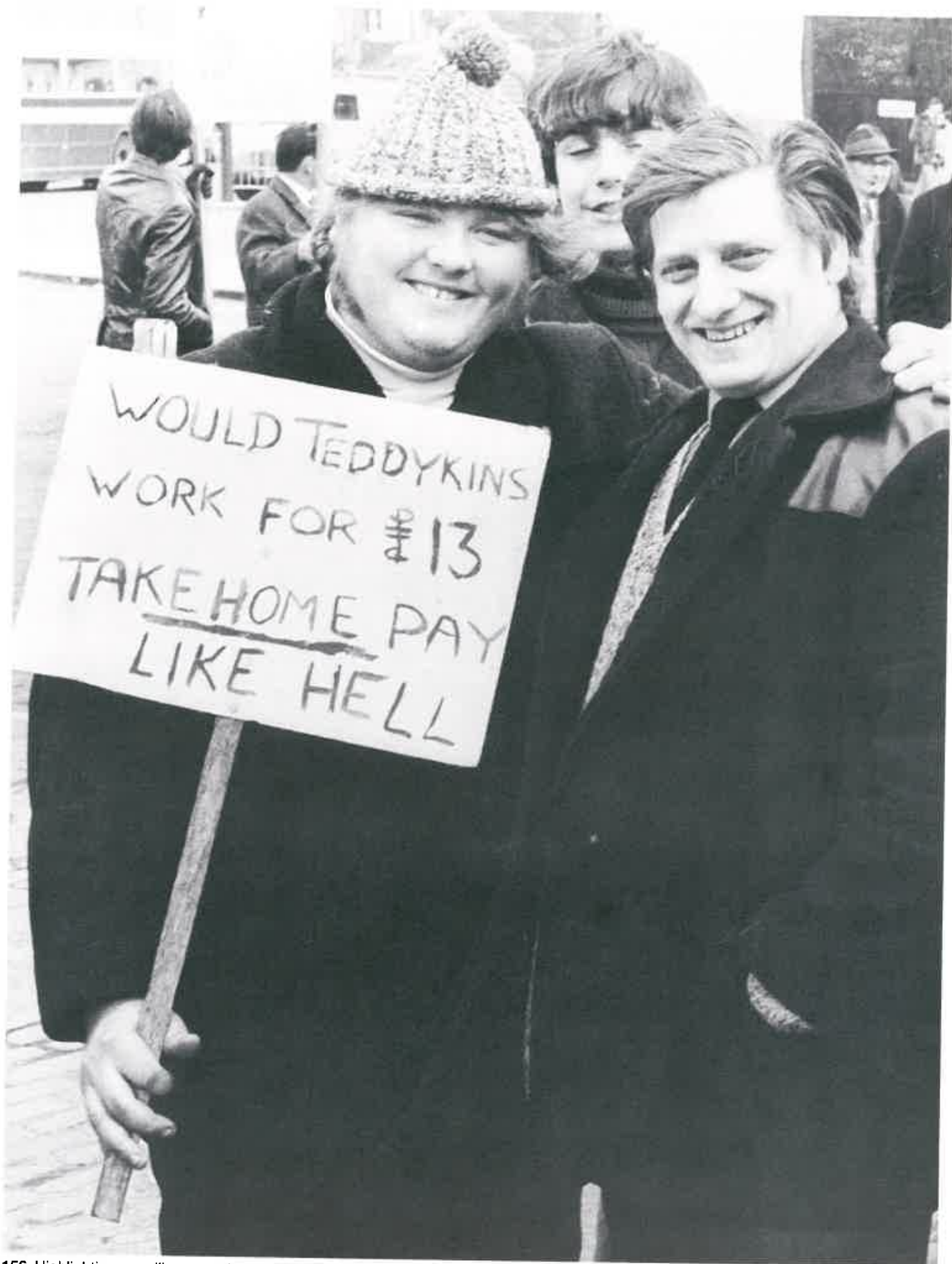


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The struggle to improve housing conditions was a key priority for the Union: 153 A terrace of miners' cottages in Coalville, Leicestershire, 1960. 154 Miners' homes at Bothwellhaugh, Lanarkshire. 155 New housing in Cotgrave, Nottinghamshire, built by the Coal Industry Housing Association in 1964



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156 Highlighting appalling wage levels on a demonstration during the 1972 strike

The fight back

The years 1971 and 1972 were those in which the NUM was to stage its fight back, after long years of savage pit closures, massive job losses and increasingly low wages.

Britain's miners had simply had enough. There was now an undercurrent of anger and frustration, manifested in unofficial meetings, disputes at local and area level and a new wave of militancy sweeping through the coalfields.

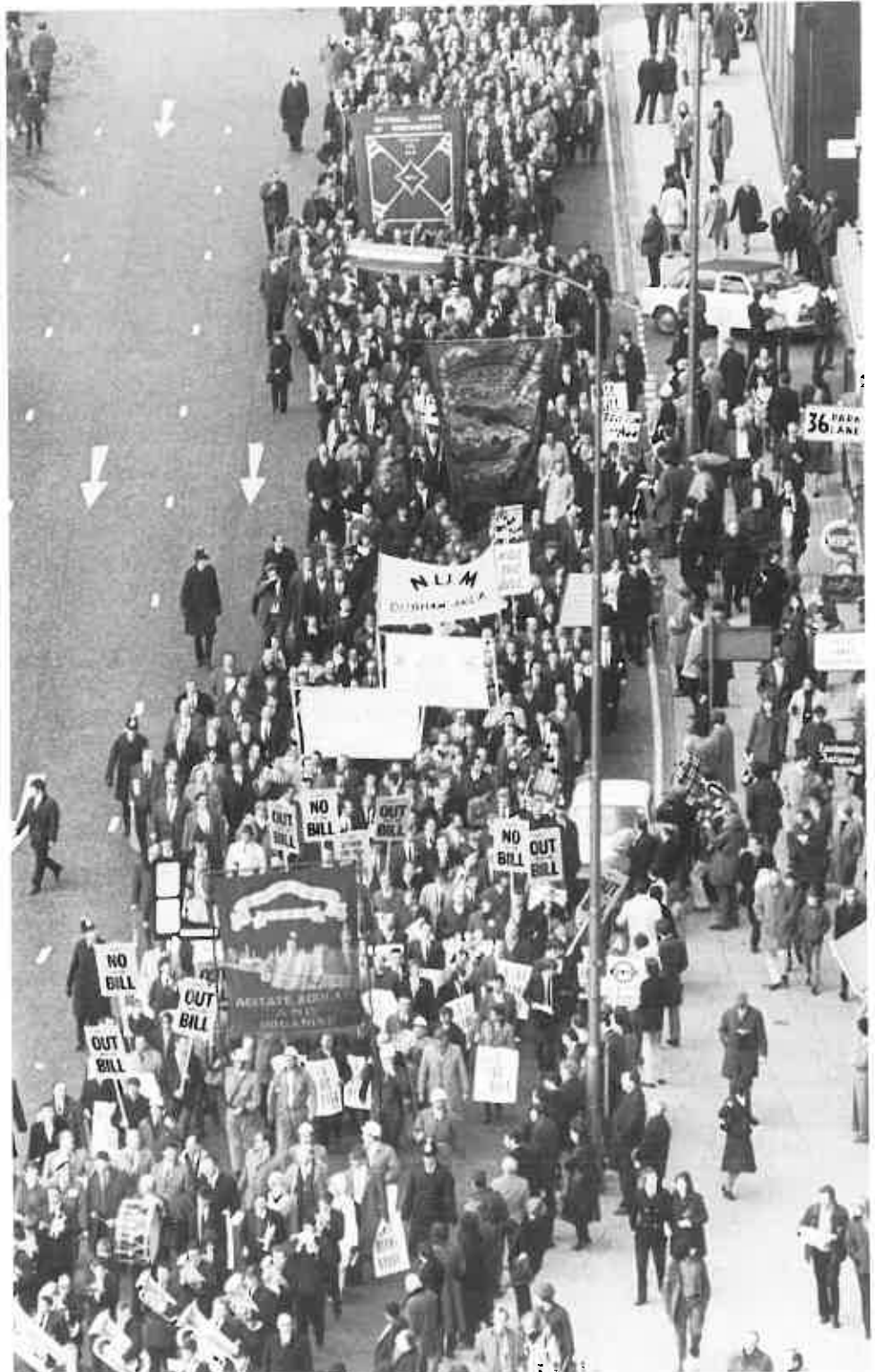
It was obvious in the large number of resolutions that were submitted to the Union's annual conference in 1971, where the scene was set for the beginning of the miners' fight back.

The conference decided to demand pay rises of £5 per week for coal face workers (then earning £30), £9 per week for underground workers (earning £19) and £6 per week for surface workers (who were earning £18).

The NUM called for the membership to take industrial action in the event of these wages not being conceded.

The Coal Board, acting directly within guidelines laid down by the Tory Government, offered the Union a meagre £1.60 per week, and said there was no prospect of any further negotiations.

With the NCB refusing to negotiate, the Union called a national overtime ban from November 1, 1971; it then proceeded to campaign to win a ballot vote in favour of strike action. That ballot saw a 58.8 per cent majority in favour of national strike action. The NCB still refused to negotiate.



157 Miners marching against the Tories' Industrial Relations Bill on February 21, 1971



158 Welsh miners picketing during the 1972 strike. The deployment of thousands of pickets ensured the closure of coal depots

The entire British coalfield was called out on strike on January 9, 1972, the first national action since 1926. These events, too, would prove epoch making.

Within a week, virtually all movement of coal had been brought to a standstill. With coal stocks standing at more than 21 million tonnes (enough to meet demand for eight weeks) the NUM sent 'flying pickets' to power stations, docks,



159 Showing support for the NUM in London, February 6, 1972

ports and wharves all over Britain to prevent coal moving. With the backing of the transport unions and workers inside power stations, coal and coke shipments were effectively blockaded and oil supplies limited.

Quite soon, major power cuts were taking place; Prime Minister Edward Heath declared a state of emergency on February 9, 1972, a month after the strike began.

Widely accepted as the strike's

turning point was a massive picket at the coke depot at Saltley in Birmingham. Miners' pickets, confronted by hundreds of police, called upon the workers of Birmingham for assistance in halting the movement of fuel.

To their credit, the engineers, transport workers and others came out on strike themselves on Thursday, February 10. The action closed the gates of Saltley, ensuring that

the miners would be victorious.

The Government now agreed to set up a public inquiry into miners' wages. The NUM was urged to return to work whilst the inquiry took place, but bitter memories of the 1925-1926 Samuel Commission were indelibly fixed in the minds of Britain's miners. They refused to return to work while the inquiry was being held.

Under the chairmanship of Lord



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160-163 The Battle of Saltley Gate. Twenty thousand engineering and transport workers marched to the gates of the Saltley coke depot in Birmingham to reinforce the miners' blockade, February 10, 1972. After one thousand police failed to hold back pickets, the Chief Constable of Birmingham admitted defeat and ordered the gates to be closed

Wilberforce, it took evidence from NUM members who gave details of their wages, demonstrating how they had dropped so dramatically down the wages league table over the past few years.

The Wilberforce Inquiry finally concluded that 'the present is a time when a definite and substantial adjustment in wage levels is called for in the coal industry'.

It recommended a wage of £34.50

for face workers, £25 for others underground and £23 for surface workers.

Progressive elements on the Union's National Executive Committee demanded there should be further concessions, and in all, sixteen major claims were conceded before a settlement was agreed.

The euphoria in the coalfields could be felt when, the day after the settlement, miners carried NUM



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164 Banners festoon the plinth in Trafalgar Square during a mass rally of 20,000 miners and supporters on February 6, 1972, in the fifth week of the national strike. The speaker is Kent miners' leader Jack Dunn. **166** A delegation of Kent miners and their wives outside Parliament on the same day. **167** More than 12,000 miners joined the demonstration a week later on February 15

165 The funeral of Hatfield Main picket Fred Matthews was attended by 10,000 miners from all over the country. He was crushed to death by a lorry outside Keadby power station in February, 1972. Printworkers staged one-hour strikes as a mark of respect

General Secretary, Lawrence Daly shoulder-high through Mansfield in Nottinghamshire.

The victory of 1972 went a long way towards healing the wound inflicted by the Government in 1926.

For the first time in nearly half a century, miners had felt the power that comes with united national action. It was a lesson in trade unionism, and it was not lost on the wider labour and trade union movement! Other unions quickly acted on the NUM's breach in the Government's incomes policy, winning major wage rises for their members.

The year 1972 saw Britain's miners not only win a major victory but inspire workers throughout the world with their courage, determination and solidarity. The strike had lasted seven weeks, and in that short time had welded the Union together more effectively than all the campaign speeches of the past fifty years.





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168 A call to the rest of the labour movement to stand by the miners

Fall of a government

Following the success of the 1972 strike, Britain's miners were in no mood to see their living standards eroded through the incomes policy of the Tory Government. In the autumn of 1973, the NUM introduced an overtime ban in pursuit of a wage claim.

The Government's swift response contrasted sharply with its approach in 1971 and 1972. On November 13, the day after the overtime ban commenced, a state of emergency was declared, aimed at limiting industry to a three-day working week! Shops and offices were severely restricted in their use of electricity for heating or lighting, and television channels were to close down not later than 10.30pm.

Meanwhile, the Coal Board would not negotiate on the Union's claim. The Union proceeded to ballot the membership on taking strike action. The result astounded even the most militant NUM members: 81 per cent voted in favour of action.

Then, in early February 1974, as the NUM National Executive Committee was making plans for the strike, Prime Minister Edward Heath announced that Parliament was to be dissolved, and a General Election would be held at the end of the month, on February 28.

The Prime Minister wrote to the NUM President Joe Gormley, asking that the National Executive Committee suspend the strike during the election campaign period and that Union members be asked not to take action.

Joe Gormley sympathised with

Edward Heath's point of view, and recommended a positive response to his request. But the NEC disagreed; by twenty votes to six, it decided to continue with the strike, which was after all about miners' wages.

The Government's tactics in calling the election were clear. The issue before the British people, said the Tories, was: 'Who governs Britain?' By blaming the miners for the Government's crisis, they hoped

both to win the election and strengthen their hand in the ongoing struggle with the NUM.

The strike went ahead. Other trade unions rallied to support the miners as they had done in 1972. As in 1972, the NUM did not put the situation in the hands of the TUC; the betrayal of 1926 was not forgotten, and miners were not going to be put in that position again.

The strike was highly effective; the large-scale 'flying pickets' which



169 Nottinghamshire miners lobbying NUM headquarters in October 1973. Mick Walker, who later supported strike action in 1984 and died prematurely, is second from right in front holding placard



170 Mass lobby of the NUM headquarters on January 24, 1974, urging Union leaders to fight for the full wage claim

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featured so prominently in 1972 were not seen on the same scale this time; there was simply no need of them. Other trade unions, including the NUR, ASLEF and the T&GWU, stopped the flow of coal and oil to power stations and industry.

Ironically, just before the strike began, the Government had at last made a move, referring the issue of miners' wages to a Relativities Pay Board. The NUM agreed to give evidence to this Board, but refused to be bound by its finding. When the strike was only one week old, General Secretary Lawrence Daly presented the evidence on the Union's behalf as he had done to the Wilberforce Inquiry in 1972.

The Pay Board ended its deliberations on February 22, but agreed not to report its findings until after the General Election and the formation of a new government.

The Tories lost the election, and a Labour Government came to power, with Michael Foot as the new Secretary of State for Employment, responsible for dealing with the miners' strike.

The Pay Board's report recommended that miners should be given 'exceptional increases'; a substantial rise in wages, payments for unsocial hours, holiday pay and other benefits proposed were accepted by a Union Delegate Conference. The miners marched back to work victorious for the second time

in just over two years on Monday, March 11, 1974.

As a direct consequence of the strike, the Labour Government invited the Coal Board and Union to join in tripartite discussions. From these talks there eventually emerged the 'Plan for Coal' which set both shorter-term (150 million tonnes per year) and longer-term (200 million tonnes per year) production targets for the industry.

For the first time since nationalisation, there was a real plan; it seemed that ahead lay expansion and development, as opposed to contraction and butchery.

During the 1970s new coalfields such as Selby in Yorkshire were opened up, along with drift mines



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171 NUM President Joe Gormley and General Secretary Lawrence Daly (right) watch as the ballot for industrial action is announced. NEC members Eric Clarke and Jack Collins are seated left

172 Picket line in Yorkshire during the 1974 strike

in various parts of Britain. For the first time in two decades, investment poured into the industry, while over £200 million was put into a pneumoconiosis scheme for the victims of that disease.

But the Labour Government, instead of implementing true socialist policies, sought to make capitalism work more effectively and efficiently than the Tories had. This inevitably brought Labour into conflict with the trade union movement, culminating in a bitter dispute with the public service unions in what became known as the 'winter of discontent'.

The policies pursued by the Labour Government elected in 1974 led to its defeat in 1979.



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The incoming Tory regime led by Margaret Thatcher was determined to have revenge on the miners, whom it saw as having brought down its predecessor in 1974, and it set about that revenge ruthlessly.

After pledging to honour the 'Plan for Coal' the Government in 1981 authorised the Coal Board to implement a closure programme in-

volving 23 pits. The miners' response was swift. Within days, over half the British coalfield was on strike, including areas such as Nottingham and the Midlands, traditionally known as 'moderate'. It is interesting to note that this strike action took place without a ballot or even a conference decision.

The Government, following a meeting with the NUM National Executive Committee, agreed in the face of the action to withdraw the closure proposals and put them through the industry's normal review procedures! Many hailed this as a 'U-turn' by the Tories and a victory for the Union.

But there were others such as



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National Vice President Michael McGahey, who saw it merely as a 'body-swerve', comparable to the infamous 'Red Friday' of 1925. Within a short space of time, this view was to be fully vindicated; the Government had merely gained breathing space while it continued to prepare a major assault on the mining industry.



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173 Comradeship underground. This team from Wath Main Colliery, Yorkshire, are working with a modern shearer in February 1977

174 Powered hydraulic supports being adjusted at Bentley Colliery, Yorkshire, in 1976. The modern supports are self-moving, and provide a greater area of support than earlier hydraulic supports, which were a source of concern to the Union

175 Changing the teeth on a modern longwall coal cutter at Bentley Colliery in 1973. The spread of mechanisation had led to the ending of piecework through the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement in 1966. This forged a new unity in the NUM, witnessed in the 1972 and 1974 strikes



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176 Miners at Polmaise Colliery were among the first to take strike action in 1984

The Great Strike

In 1982 and early 1984 respectively, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield were elected National President and Secretary of the NUM; together with Vice President Michael McGahey, this 'troika' would become involved in one of the most important periods of NUM and British trade union history.

It was in the autumn of 1982 that Arthur Scargill disclosed at a press conference a secret Coal Board document, leaked to the Union, which had been prepared for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. This document clearly showed that between 75 and 95 pits were earmarked for closure over the coming ten-year period.

In the months that followed, fear of closures grew in the coalfields; in October 1983, with a number of pits under threat and the Coal Board refusing to negotiate on wages unless the Union agreed to job losses and closures, the NUM informed the new NCB Chairman, Ian MacGregor, that it was calling an overtime ban from November 1.

The ban was very successful, cutting production over the next few months by between 25 and 30 per cent; then the Coal Board confirmed its intention to close twenty pits and axe 20,000 jobs in the coming year.

It was, however, a decision to close Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire, Snowdown in Kent and Polmaise in Scotland that actually sparked off the 1984-1985 miners' strike.

On March 8, 1984, the NUM National Executive Committee granted permission for areas to take



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Hands off our pits! 177 Snowdown miners protesting against the threat to close the Kent pit in 1982. 178 Fighting to save Cortonwood Colliery, 1984. The threat to shut these two pits, and Polmaise in Scotland, triggered strike action

strike action in defence of pits and jobs. On April 19, a Special Delegate Conference held in Sheffield, home of the Union's national headquarters, called on all areas and members to support the strike.

In the large Notts coalfield, however, miners (with 5,000 honourable exceptions) tragically refused to give this support; some of their leaders argued that a ballot should have been held, ignoring the fact that in 1981 Notts miners had supported a national unofficial strike against closures without any ballot vote.

The 1984-1985 miners' strike produced an unprecedented conflict between the State and the miners' Union. During the first week of the strike a young Yorkshire miner, David Jones was killed on a picket line at Ollerton in Notts; a few months later Joe Green, also of Yorkshire, was killed on a picket line outside Ferrybridge Power Station.

In the course of the dispute, which lasted altogether sixteen months, a total of 11,000 miners were arrested; 7,000 injured; eleven people died, and 1,000 men were sacked, victimised for supporting their Union's policy in the most bitter industrial conflict ever seen in trade union history.

Railway workers and seafarers took solidarity action; print workers and sections of the T&GWU gave tremendous support. There was international assistance as well, as there had been in 1926,





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179 Clashes at Ollerton Colliery, Nottinghamshire, the night that Yorkshire miner David Gareth Jones was killed on the picket line, after only a week on strike

180 The three NUM national officials during the Great Strike: Peter Heathfield, Arthur Scargill and Michael McGahey

181 Occupation of the Union's Lancashire headquarters thwarted attempts to undermine strike action

182 Part of the huge demonstration of 45,000 through Mansfield on May 14



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with trade unionists worldwide supporting the historic fight of Britain's miners and their families.

The struggle of 1984-1985 revealed a new dimension in British political life with the creation of women's groups in mining communities which not only staffed food centres and collected cash but took their place on picket lines in defence of jobs and what was obviously a fight to save the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Government responded to the miners' dedication with increasing savagery and a massive, co-ordinated police operation was set up to combat effective picketing. The coalfields of Britain became battlefields in which civil liberties and human rights were smashed by the truncheons of riot police.

Scenes at the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire in May, June and July 1984 horrified participants and observers alike. At the height of the picketing, 10,000 miners faced 8,000 police equipped with riot gear, horses, dogs and motorised vehicles.

It was against this turbulent and emotive background that the TUC and Labour Party Conferences in September and October pledged support to the NUM, but as in 1926 failed to give a clear call for other unions to come out in solidarity action. As in other recent disputes, the TUC appeared paralysed with fear about breaching Tory anti-trade union laws which prohibited



183 Pickets clash with police outside Shirebrook Colliery in North Derbyshire







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184 Women fleeing a police baton charge outside Hatfield Main Colliery, Yorkshire, in August

185 Under police occupation. Riot squads block the road outside Houghton Main Colliery in Yorkshire, February 1985

186 Living under siege. Riot police outside Easington Colliery, County Durham, August 1984



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key forms of supportive industrial action.

Other individual trade unions, excepting railway workers, seafarers and key sections of the T&GWU, did not respond to the NUM's call for support, and in some cases, as with the leaders of the EETPU, actually opposed the miners in their struggle.

The odds against the NUM were overwhelming; imported coal was flooding into Britain; tiny harbours around Britain's coast were used as almost impromptu landing points. Obsolete oil-fired power

stations were put back into use at enormous financial cost, whilst nuclear stations were run beyond the time limits normally maintained for safety reasons.

By October and November of 1984, the Union had had all its funds sequestrated and had become the first trade union to be placed by the High Court in the hands of a receiver.

Despite these attacks, the NUM fought on into 1985 for the future of the coal industry.

But after one year of national strike action following four months



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of partial strike action in the form of an overtime ban, the NUM at a special conference at the TUC's London headquarters on March 3, 1985 voted (by a slender majority of three) to end the strike and return to work without having negotiated a settlement with the Coal Board.

This strike had not been about wages, better conditions or any material gain. It had been waged on principle: the principle that miners' jobs were held by each generation of workers in trust for those who would come after them, and must not be wantonly destroyed.

The Tory Government had spent £12 billion of the nation's money to try to defeat the National Union of Mineworkers. This they had failed to do; despite the fact that the NUM did not achieve its ultimate objective. The resolute stand of men and women over sixteen months marked a tremendous step forward in workers' power and solidarity.

This strike had set a new example in working class struggle, marking another milestone in a long road. It had been hard, bitter, painful, and as in 1926, there were those who said that never again would the British trade union movement see such a conflict. As in the aftermath of 1926, only time will tell.



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The Battle of Orgreave:

187-191 NUM pickets faced the full might of the State machine at the Yorkshire coking plant – police in full riot gear, cavalry charges and dogs. Hundreds were savagely beaten and arrested in late May and early June 1984, including NUM President Arthur Scargill



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Civil liberties under attack: **192** Arrest during the march to Parliament, June 1984. **193** Police were used by the Thatcher Government to clamp down on the right to picket. **194** Police snatch squad seizes an NUM picket outside the Port Talbot steelworks. **195** Pickets shackled to a lamppost during a mass picket of Creswell Colliery, July 1984

192



The backbone of the strike: **201** Women's march, London August 1984. **202** Anne Scargill under arrest at Mansfield. She was charged with obstruction and later cleared. **203** Derbyshire women's march, January 1985, including Betty Heathfield (in beret). **204** Edlington women confront police outside Yorkshire Main pit. **205** On the picket line at Cortonwood, nearly a year into the strike **206** May 12, 1984. The mass rally at Barnsley brought together women's support groups from all over the country

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Fighting victimisation:

207 Cortonwood miners refused to go back to work when Kent miners picketed their pit at the end of the strike

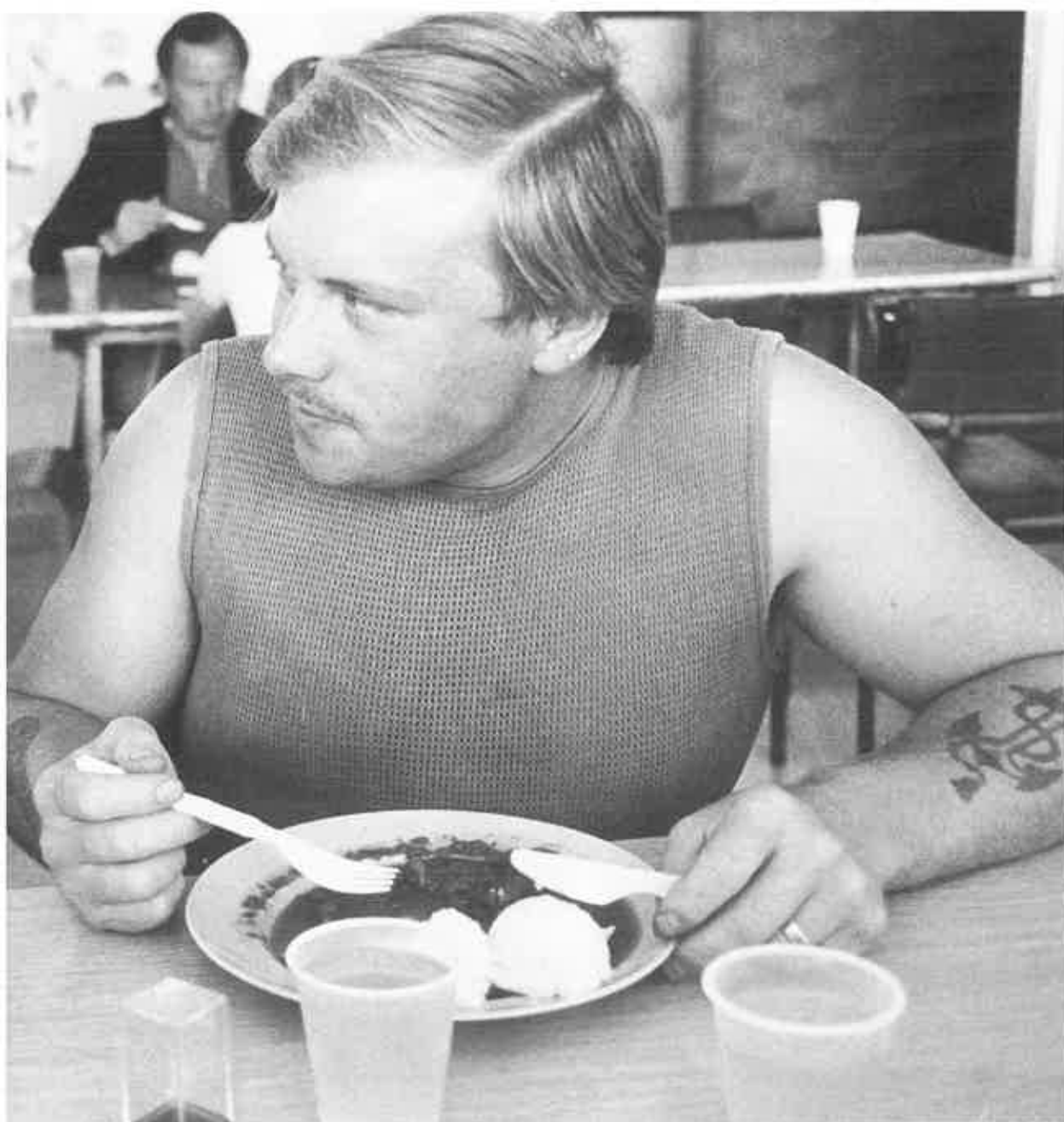
208 The late Kent miners' leader Jack Collins with local miners demanded the release of their jailed brothers

209 Scottish wives demand an amnesty for sacked men

210 Welcome home for an Easington miner on his release from jail



211 Resistance to closures continues. Opposition to the closure of Hordern Colliery, County Durham, 1985



199

Communities stand firm:

196 Preparing for winter in Yorkshire

197 Donations of food poured in from all over Britain and the Continent

198 Strike canteens set up by women throughout the coalfield provided at least one hot meal a day

199 Enjoying a hearty meal at Keresley, Coventry

200 Miners' wives and children at an NUM rally in Rotherham



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The struggle goes on

Since the end of the 1984-1985 strike, the National Coal Board, now renamed British Coal, has brutally dismembered the mining industry; 79 pits have been closed, and over 100,000 miners' jobs have been destroyed. While technological change has resulted in productivity rising by 75 per cent, the industry's economic problems, far from being resolved, have been compounded.

British Coal has lost £4 billion over the past four years; its 'macho' management has proved an unmitigated disaster. Harassment and intimidation of mineworkers has meant constant flare-ups of local industrial action and statistics on working days lost in this way reveal the levels of frustration and anger found in the coalfields today.

Now the Government, already preparing the de-nationalisation of the electricity supply industry, has signalled its plans for passing coal back into private hands.

Once again, miners and their Union face major battles. The dream of a truly nationalised coal industry, whose initial form took a century of struggle to create, cannot and must not be given away. The sons and daughters of those who built the great National Union of Mineworkers have an obligation to defend these hard-won gains obtained through blood, sweat, toil and tears.

After the strike, sections of the Notts miners formed a breakaway organisation, as had happened in 1926. Having withdrawn from the struggle for pits and jobs, they now

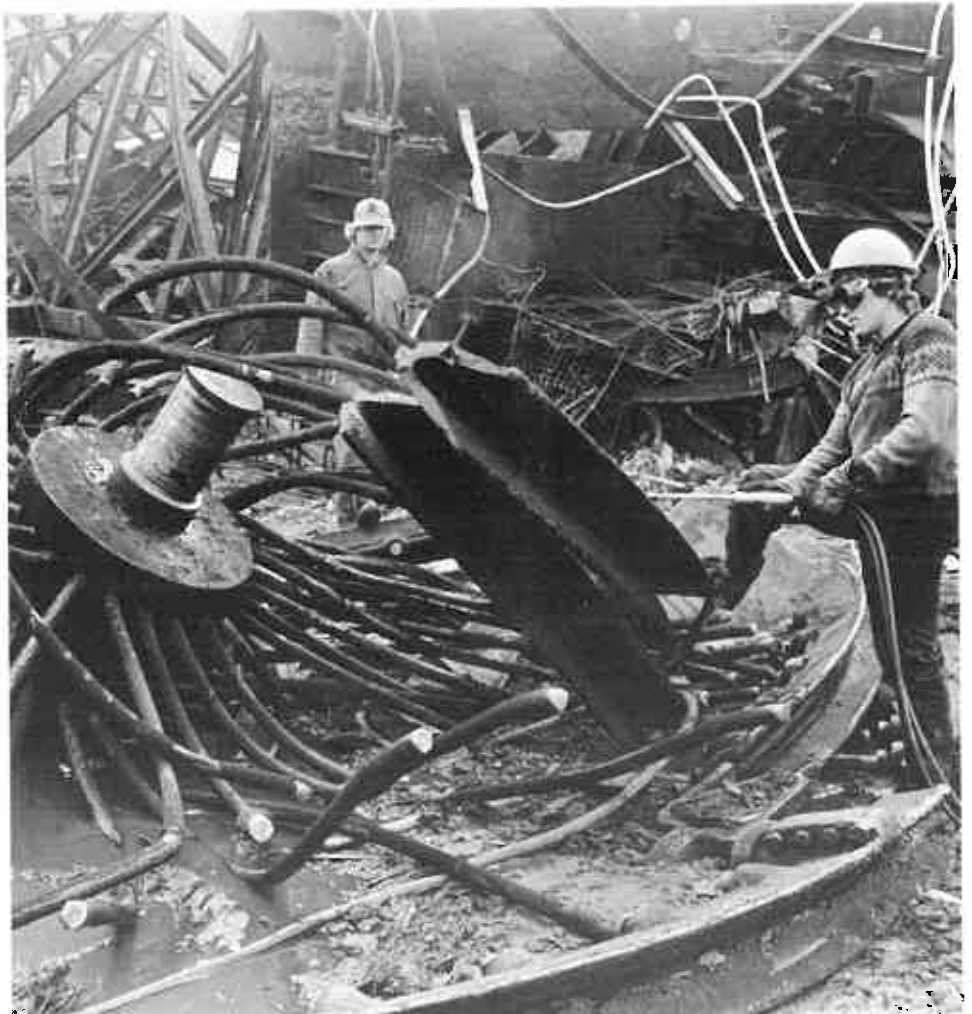
established with the encouragement of Coal Board and Tory Government a body known as the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. The same bitterness and anger directed at the 'Spencer Union' after 1926 has been shown by miners towards the UDM.

They feel that while there is a place in the NUM for all miners, there must never be any place for the leaders of this breakaway.

The lessons of 1926-1937 must

be learned; there can be no merger, collaboration or co-operation with an organisation which has been established to destroy everything that the NUM stands for and has struggled for.

In its attempts to weaken the NUM and support the breakaway, the Coal Board, or British Coal, unilaterally scrapped the conciliation and consultation agreements which had formed the bedrock of the industry since nationalisation



212 The Thatcher Government's programme for industry. Penrhawceiber Colliery, South Wales, 1986



213 NUM officials waiting anxiously for the result of the Eppleton Colliery review, March 1986



214 Kinsley Drift branch lobby the NCB against the proposed closure of their pit

in 1947. British Coal has continued to give every encouragement to the breakaway in Notts, and has conducted a war of attrition against the NUM.

But in 1989, as the Union looks back on its first hundred years, it can draw strength from the experiences of the past. The NUM will continue to fight for economic, social and political justice. It will fight for good wages and conditions, and, like the founders of the Union, it will also fight for a Socialist Britain.

In celebrating a century of struggle, NUM President Arthur Scargill has said: 'Faced with a choice of compromising with or confronting the Tory Government, I am proud that Britain's miners decided to stand and fight for the future of our industry; I know that history will vindicate us.'



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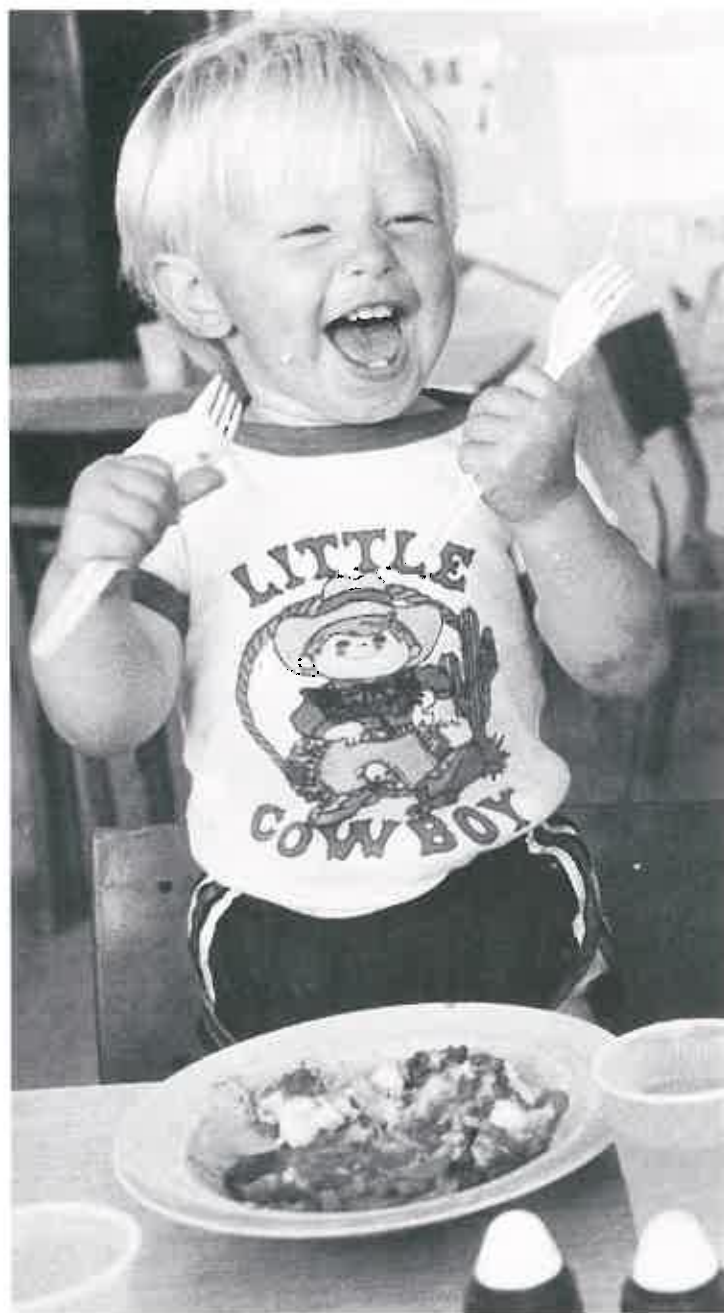


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215 Miners coming off shift at Maerdy Colliery, South Wales, the last pit in the Rhondda, where there were once 52 pits



216 Loyal Nottinghamshire NUM members and supporters march through Mansfield on gala day, September 1986



217 Yorkshire NUM Gala, 1986. The campaign to win the reinstatement of victimised miners remains a central question for the Union

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