



Reuters

Palestinian journalists in blue PRESS flak jackets mourn a colleague killed by Israeli forces

A PICTURE OF HELL

After over three months of Israel's relentless air and land offensive in Gaza well over 22,000 people, mostly women and children, have been killed.

The scale of devastation has ensured that normal life is now impossible.

A *Wall Street Journal* report (30/12/23) presented these stark facts: Up to mid-December Israel dropped 29,000 bombs, munitions and shells on the strip and 75% of Gaza's 439,000 homes and about half of its buildings have been damaged or destroyed. It quotes Robert Pape, a political scientist who has written about the history of aerial bombing: "Gaza is one of the most intense civilian punishment campaigns in history."

More than 85% of the 2.3 million population, forced from their homes to take refuge in

Granville Williams on the impact of the Israeli military assault on Gaza

the south, live in overflowing apartment blocks, schools, hospitals, buildings used by the UN and tents.

Israel's war has created a humanitarian catastrophe. People queue for hours for bread or to use a toilet and a UN report predicts half of Gaza is at risk of starvation.

Devi Sridhar, the global public health expert, points out, "We are now likely to see more children dying from preventable disease than from bullets and bombs."

Since the onset of the war western news organisations have not been allowed by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to report independently on the carnage in Gaza.

Some journalists have been with the IDF in Gaza but they have had to agree to be constrained by IDF rules.

It is local journalists who have provided crucial first-hand reports of conditions in Gaza. The handful of existing Gaza bureaus from major international outlets (Reuters, the BBC, the Associated Press, the BBC, the Associated Press, Al-Jazeera, Agence France-Presse, and others) are overwhelmingly staffed by Gazan residents.

They work under extreme, hazardous conditions. More than 50 media premises or offices in Gaza have been completely or partially destroyed by Israeli attacks. Media workers now live and report amid fre-

quent communication black-outs and military destruction.

The other threat is that the IDF, according to Reporters Without Frontiers (RSF), targets journalist. It has filed two complaints with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague for alleged war crimes committed by the Israeli army against Palestinian journalists in Gaza. The second, filed on 22 December, concerns the deaths of seven Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza from 22 October to 15 December.

Now there are fewer voices to report this stark Gazan reality to the rest of the world. There are fewer because so many of the people who were doing this work are dead, and so many of the ones who have not been killed now face a daily battle to survive along with their families.

MLN

Too pro-war? The BBC has history

Tim Gopsill examines the way the BBC reports on wars including the current Gaza conflict

All governments lie in wartime and they need the media to propagate their lies. Media propaganda can come from what they don't say as much as what they do: when they don't challenge the lies, or even ask the questions.

In the war on Gaza, the BBC never questions Israeli assertions of its indefinite right to slaughter at will, nor its account of what took place on 7 October. Palestinian statements on the other hand are not just questioned but denounced as lies in advance.

Every reference to Hamas must carry the gratuitous 'designated terrorist' health warning. Before they are allowed to speak, Palestinians or others suspected of supporting their cause must first condemn Hamas.

On *Newsnight* Kirsty Wark interviewed Husam Zomlot, London Ambassador for the Palestinian Authority, who had just lost members of his family in the blitz on Gaza. She was keen that he blame Hamas, saying: "I am sorry for your personal loss, can I just be clear though, you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel"

But the BBC has been most loudly criticised for bias against Israel, since the rocket attack on Al-Ahli hospital on 17 October. Reporter Jon Donnison said within minutes: "The Israeli military have been contacted for comment and they have said that they are investigating. But, you know, it's hard to see what else this could be [but an Israeli attack]."

Israel had just announced that it had fired 6,000 bombs and missiles at Gaza, so this was a reasonable reaction, and widely shared. But the pro-Israeli lobby launched a coordinated attack on the report and the BBC duly apologised, saying Donnison had been 'wrong to speculate in this way'. Director-General Tim Davie said he would take personal charge of ensuring compliance with the Israeli line.

All this was an enactment of a curious ritual that takes place at the onset of every war. Governments launch a head-on attack on the BBC, which, after token protest, caves in. It doesn't matter what the row is about.

Pack of lies

In 1999, when the NATO planes bombed Yugoslavia during the Balkan war, the Labour government accused John Simpson, BBC World Affairs Editor, of 'biased reports' and 'Serbian propaganda' for reporting the casualties and damage caused by the bombardment.

With the invasion of Iraq five years later there was a ferocious attack, centred on a story quoting a weapons scientist saying that the government had exaggerated the case for war. It is now accepted that it

Millions have marched against this war, but anti-war or pro-Palestinian voices are rarely heard on the BBC



Photo: Ailsdare Hickson

No sign of BBC as London protesters demonstrate against Israel's war on Palestine.

was a pack of lies, but the BBC endured the most serious crisis of its existence, in which the chairman and Director-General were forced to resign (*see page 12*). Like Davie, the Director-General Greg Dyke had installed special measures to ensure the government line was adhered to and anti-war sentiment suppressed. Studies after the war duly showed that BBC reporting was the most pro-government of all the broadcast channels.

Nothing has changed. While millions have marched against this war, anti-war or pro-Palestinian voices are rarely heard on the BBC. And while evidence emerges from Israeli sources that many of those who died in the ghastly scenes of 7 October were killed by the IDF, not a word has been on the BBC.

BBC looks the other way

Paris correspondent Lucy Williamson was drafted into southern Israel and taken to view the destruction at Kibbutz Be'eri near Gaza, where houses were in ruins and walls badly charred. Witnesses have said on Israeli media that after Hamas fighters took residents hostage, IDF

tanks shelled the place and raked it with gunfire, killing terrorists and residents alike.

At the same time Hellfire rockets were being fired from Apache helicopters at crowds fleeing the Hamas attack on the nearby music festival, killing indiscriminately; the IDF also shelled the Erez crossing into Gaza and other command posts, after Hamas overran them, killing its own troops.

Early Israeli accounts of babies with their heads cut off or roasted in ovens are now conceded to be false and there are doubts about the allegations of mass rape. These things are now well known, but the BBC looks the other way.

It is wrong though to say that the BBC is pro-Israel; neither is it anti-Palestinian, still less Islamophobic. The issue is not religion, or race, but security. It sees its role as to protect Britain, Britain's people and Britain's culture, from whoever its rulers declare the enemy. In essence, the BBC is just pro-war.

MN

Tim Gopsill is the former editor of the NUJ magazine The Journalist

The BBC is rarely out of the headlines these days as it cuts programmes and staff. Now the Culture Secretary has reneged on an agreement to allow the licence fee to rise in line with inflation from April 2024. **Tom O'Malley** analyses the threats the BBC is facing

The BBC gets a battering

In December 2023 the government made three major announcements. It set the level of the licence fee, announced a review into the future funding of the Corporation and appointed Samir Shah as chair of the BBC.

Since the 1980s the free market Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) has been campaigning for the BBC to be funded by subscription. In 2020, IEA supporter Philip Booth asserted that 'there are strong arguments for the BBC becoming a subscription service'.

People like Booth, and those who write editorials for the *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph*, have banged away at this, or similar themes, for over four decades. In spite of massive commercialisation of communications, they resent the fact that the BBC is still publicly funded. The aim is to reduce public service broadcasting to the margins of a commercially dominated system.

On 5 December a group of editorial directors from the local and regional press attacked the BBC. Because 'the BBC's funding is guaranteed by the licence fee ... the British public is underwriting the biggest threat local journalism has ever faced'. The attack was public lobbying designed to undermine support for the BBC.

'No evidence'

The BBC responded by stating that 'there is no evidence that the BBC crowds out local competition through its online activity' citing evidence from the media regulator OFCOM.

In a statement on 7 December, in which she failed to

The Mail and Telegraph: two national newspapers that regularly attack the BBC



mention public service broadcasting, the Secretary of State for the DCMS, Lucy Fraser, confirmed that the licence fee would rise by £10.50 to £169.50, an increase well below inflation. The BBC and the NUJ both pointed out that this will mean cuts in programmes and jobs, estimated by the BBC at some £90 million. This is on top of huge job cuts in local radio, the World Service and News and Current Affairs.

She also announced a review into the way the BBC is funded.

Appointments to senior positions are still done behind closed doors without proper public involvement



Thirty nine years ago, the Thatcher government set up a public inquiry, the Peacock Commission, into the funding of the BBC. This new review will neither consult the public, nor will it be conducted in public - unlike Peacock. It will be run by civil servants, supported by a 'panel of experts', and will seek evidence from 'relevant stakeholders'. It will examine whether the BBC should provide more services on 'a fully commercial basis', and what potential it has for generating more commercial revenue. It will scrutinise the 'sustainability of the BBC's current funding model'. The IEA's ideas lurk beneath the wording.

The person leading the BBC during what will be a turbulent year is Dr Samir Shah - former BBC employee and TV executive. Andrew Neil, who edited Murdoch's *Sunday Times* in the 1980s, in the columns of which he pressed the BBC to shed local radio and privatise or take adverts on Radios 1 and 2, suggested he apply for the job. Ac-

ording to Shah, "He rang me and said that the closing date was coming and he felt quite strongly that I should go for it."

In a 2008 book Shah queried whether the BBC should be the sole beneficiary of the licence fee. According to the *Guardian*, the government may have been attracted by his 'anti-woke' credentials. He was part of the Boris Johnson appointed Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021). Its report was controversial, not least because its chair, Dr Tony Sewell, stated that: "No-one is saying racism doesn't exist ... However, evidence of actual institutional racism? No, that wasn't there, we didn't find that."

'Unwilling to express a view'

After Shah gave evidence to the Parliamentary Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, the Tory Chair, Caroline Dineage, said: "We were disappointed that Dr Shah was unwilling to express a view on such fundamental principles as board-level interference and political impartiality, nor demonstrate an appetite for the robust challenge that is needed at the top of the BBC."

Time will tell whether he will stand up for a BBC independent of government pressure. But, if anything, his selection underlines the fact that appointments to senior positions in communications are still done behind closed doors without proper public involvement.

In 2024 the BBC will be under intense criticism from its opponents in the Tory party, the right wing think tanks, the newspaper industry and rivals like Netflix. If Labour wins the General Election, it has to reverse the attacks on public service broadcasting. Labour will only do that if enough pressure is generated from as wide a range of organisations and people as possible. **MN**

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Issues from the strike still resonate today

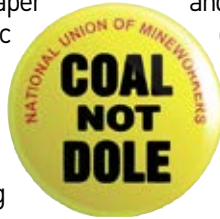
ONE THING IS CERTAIN. The 40th anniversary of the miners' strike will attract enormous media attention. We can expect a stream of books, television documentaries, and newspaper and magazine articles revisiting events during the epic year-long struggle.

There was huge support both from within mining communities, as families and striking miners were fed, and from beyond as trade unions collected money and food to sustain the struggle. There was also an amazing international response in support of the miners, particularly in the run-up to Christmas 1984.

The strike was a watershed moment, a defining point which

saw, after the return-to-work, Thatcherism triumphant. New employment laws to tackle trade unions had been introduced in 1980 and 1982, but it was only after the strike that unions were marginalised, losing members and power; state industries were privatised, and economic inequality deepened.

We live with the consequences today. Britain's infrastructure is crumbling whilst millions struggle in a broken, low-pay economy. Other issues raised by the strike continue to resonate: The wave of industrial action in 2022 and 2023 took place against a government intent on attacking trade unions and limiting the right to protest, just as Thatcher did in the 1980s.



MN

Linking Otley and Sharlston

Miners' support groups played a key part in ensuring mineworkers and their families were fed during the bitter year-long strike against pit closures in 1984-85. **Anne Oddy**, active in the support group in the market town of Otley, outside Leeds, recalls the experience

Otley Miners' Support Group started in April 1984 in response to the call for support by Arthur Scargill published in the *Morning Star*. Initially it comprised *Morning Star* readers from my Saturday round.

In addition to me and Bernard Scott who were Communists, there were some members of Otley Peace Action Group (opposed to nuclear power stations, because they produce plutonium for nuclear weapons) and some left-wingers from the Labour Party.

We first did a leaflet drop for food collections in support of families. What we collected included baby clothes and a cot, featured being delivered on the regional TV news, although we weren't mentioned by name.

We organised a weekly collection outside the supermarket – then called Presto. Every week the manager donated dented tins. Cash collections were unlawful, but Leeds City Council, which was then 'old

Labour and supported the strike, authorised street collections.

Normally a Saturday charity 'Flag Day' was permitted once a year. I arranged a licence (I think it was May Day Holiday Saturday) and made collecting tins. Each collector had to have a permit issued by me. We had to give donors a 'flag' which was a 'Coal Not Dole' sticker. But then, apart from me and Bernard, nobody dared go out on the streets to collect, because the anti-strike propaganda was so vicious.

I rang comrade Mick Appleyard from Sharlston Colliery and asked him if any miners could come to Otley to collect – and that's how the miners got involved. The miners that came to Otley put the Sharlston branch banner up against the Jubilee Clock in the Market Place and got a very lively mixed response that first day, which nearly developed into a fight, when there were threats to tear down the banner – min-



Feeding a child at a food kitchen run by miners' wives and women's support groups during the 1984/85 miners' strike.

From Images of the Past: The Miners' Strike (Pen & Sword Books)

ers feel a deep loyalty to their pit banners.

A contingent of police arrived to stop us collecting, but I produced the official permit and they had to agree that we were complying with the conditions. I can't remember how much was collected that day, but I do remember that it was far more than we'd expected.

We went into the Manor House pub to count it and folk in the pub were buying them pints of beer. Technically, Saturday street collections were supposed to be a once-a-year charity, but the council turned a blind eye and allowed us to collect every week – on a Friday market day, which was even better than a Saturday.

The miners became well known in Otley and their per-

sonal presence in the community did a lot to counter the hostile propaganda. They gained a lot of sympathy. Even people who felt they could not support the strike gave them pork pies, chocolate, gloves, etc.

The Bondgate Bakery froze their unsold loaves each day and donated them to the soup kitchen. The peace campers outside Menwith Hill were vegan, so they donated all the non-vegan stuff they were given – tinned sausages, sheepskin coats, etc.

The miners repaid the support. Until the peace camp closed in 1987, the miners made an annual delivery of a lorry-load of coal to the camp, when they organised a collection of a sack each from their free issue.

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40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Morag Livingstone and **Matt Foot** on the significance of the police assault on printworkers at Warrington in November 1983

A brutal prelude to the miners' strike

The power of the police was dramatically increased after the Brixton Riots of 1981.

Thatcher's Home Secretary William Whitelaw commissioned the Scarman report, publicly endorsed by the Government, which recommended community policing of protests.

However, the reality was that behind closed doors the Home Office secretly instigated a different approach. New brutal paramilitary tactics enshrined in a secret manual were developed in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers. Six months after the manual's creation they were implemented at Warrington.

New employment laws were also introduced in 1980 and 1982 to limit trade union effectiveness during industrial action. They were first used in support of Eddie Shah in a dispute which saw police tear up the rules of 'normal policing'.

Police battle pickets

On the night of 29 November 1983, 4000 pickets gathered at the *Stockport Messenger* print works. In what became known as the Battle of Winwick Quay, around 2000 police tore into them, arresting some but pummelling far more with batons.

The Warrington dispute was, on the surface, a local one where six men, the 'Stockport Six', were sacked for trying to save their jobs but in the words of one of them, Alan Royston, it became a 'monster'. Why?

Shah was portrayed by government and media as an isolated figure up against the might of the unions. However, infor-



Riot police make an arrest at Warrington

mation buried in Home Office reports reveal that 'the pickets' main tactic was not to use violence, but to try to stop vehicles entering or leaving the premises by sheer weight of number'.

The *Sunday Times* said the 'Establishment' had steered clear of Shah but in fact he was introduced to Thatcher on the day he won two injunctions under her new laws. Shah was to suggest it was just a 'Hello, goodbye situation', and that she didn't even know about the dispute, but a copy of the judgment marked 'Secret' is in the prime minister's Industrial Policy file of November 1983.

The violent policing of this dispute, using paramilitary tactics, was completely unexpected by the trade unions. It followed a period of strength that brought more equality

"The miners should have learnt from our experience with the police"

support units from neighbouring forces, including Greater Manchester's Tactical Aid Group.

Conversations that *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil asked to be kept secret were helpfully put in a Home Office file lodged at the National Archive. These confirm that Neil got involved in contacting Shah just before his company's negotiations with the NGA union broke down.

Neil also called the home secretary Leon Brittan in the middle of the night of the mass picket of 29 November demanding more action be taken as Shah thought he and his staff were going to be killed. Shortly after, the riot police snatch squads went in and police vehicles were set against protesters, all tactics from the new manual.

Government interference

Many trade unionists suspected government interference in policing at the time. Thanks to National Archive government papers this is now proven true.

The Stockport Six dispute, coming at the end of 1983, was the first big battleground for the police to test out their new powers bestowed by the Home Office earlier that year. It was never going to be an even playing field. Rather it was like David and Goliath, with the latter having the secretly sanctioned military tactics in their back pocket.

Shah also went to the courts, using the anti-union laws to penalise the union through fines which totalled £800,000.

Warrington dramatically changed how the police dealt with trade unions and protest. It set the scene for the policing of the miners' strike. As Tony Burke, then president of the Stockport branch of the NGA, said, "The miners should have learnt from our experience with the police." **MN**

Morag Livingstone and Matt Foot are co-authors of Charged: How the Police Try to Suppress Protest (Verso, 2022)



Optimistic headline in print union's paper *TUC Library.*

during the 1970s, including the 1970 Equal Pay Act following a strike of the sewing machinists at Ford Motor company, as depicted in the film *Made in Dagenham*.

In the days before a mass picket of 29 November 1983 the Cheshire Chief Constable George Fenn questioned the lawfulness of stopping pickets with road blocks but was told such roadblocks were legal. The Chief Constable also began to put requests out for police

The Art of Class War

Nicholas Jones, who reported the 1984-5 miners' strike for BBC Radio, reflects on how the dispute was seen through the eyes of news cartoonists – their visions of heroes and villains, police brutality, working class solidarity, and the growing despair of communities starved back to work

Perhaps the best comparison when looking back at the hundreds of cartoons printed in newspapers and magazines during the 1984-5 miners' strike is that they were the equivalent of today's postings on social media, often provocative, abusive, and sometimes downright cruel, intended to prompt comment and debate.

The miners' struggle against pit closures divided the country. Cartoonists from right to left offered their take on an unfolding and unyielding polarisation between the state and the mining communities.

No cartoonist could have asked for more: a cast of larger-than-life characters in a fight to the death. There were plenty of opportunities to poke fun at the leading protagonists, but the overarching challenge was to keep pace with the anger and disarray that erupted during a dispute from which there seemed no way out.

Imagery around the violence generated by the strike was pushed to the extremes. Some cartoons depicted a country at

war with itself. Striking mine-workers were characterised as thugs, wearing hoods, wielding baseball bats; their leader Arthur Scargill a Communist stooge, branded with the hammer and sickle; police officers with truncheons constantly cracking down on the heads of peaceful pickets; and reigning supreme, often above the fray, Margaret Thatcher, in a Churchillian pose.

15 million copies a day

No single British industrial dispute has ever equalled the year-long pit strike for generating so many cartoons.

National, regional, and local newspapers were in their heyday in the early 1980s, with ten national dailies selling almost 15 million copies a day.

There was no rolling television news or the likes of Facebook and X for the press to compete with.

Most nationals printed a daily cartoon, sometimes two or three a day. There was no colour printing then, just black and white, but the cartoons had great impact and leapt from the page.



"Sorry Arthur – we were told it was the home of somebody who had worked flat out all though the

Cartoons in Conservative-supporting national newspapers often reinforced the hostile front page headlines and reports attacking the miners



LAST WEEK reported the case of the policeman accused of making an unprovoked attack on two football fans. The two fans both received serious head wounds after being struck by the constable's truncheon. You will be glad to know PC Parkes was cleared. He said he was acting in self defence.

Occasionally a cartoon caught the mood of the nation, having a greater effect than a press report or photograph.

Day after day the imagery on display tended to exaggerate the storylines in newspapers and on radio and television, reinforcing the widening divisions between the British establishment and the miners and their families.

As the violence intensified and the positions of both sides became more entrenched, the manipulation of the political and news agenda grew.

Conservative-supporting newspapers demonised Scargill in his role as President of the National Union of Mineworkers, whereas Mrs Thatcher, hero of the hour, was the Prime Minister defending the rights of working miners, resolute in

her determination to defeat the strike and end unlawful picketing at the pits.

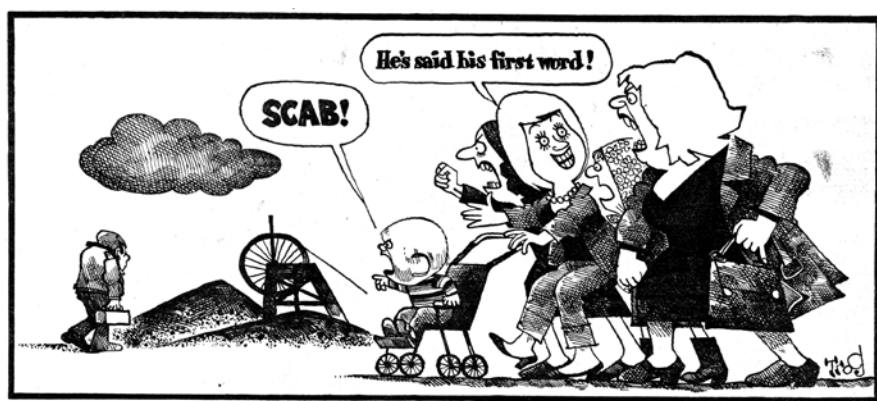
Scargill was portrayed as the law breaker, a representation fleshed out to extraordinary lengths by Michael Cummings, cartoonist for the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, who visualised the NUM President as a puppet of the Soviet Union, threatening Britain's democratic institutions.

Personal offence

Of all the cartoons published during the strike, Arthur Scargill singled out those by Cummings as causing him the greatest personal offence for the way in which he was smeared and abused. He counted 50 in the *Daily Express* and 34 in the *Sunday* edition, all intended, he said, to isolate him from union



Striking mineworkers were characterised as thugs, wearing hoods, wielding baseball bats; their leader Arthur Scargill a Communist stooge, branded with the hammer and sickle ...



members and his leadership colleagues.

Across the trade union movement there was anger at dire anti-union bias in the coverage of most newspapers and deep frustration over the government's success in manipulating the news agenda so that all too often broadcasters became cheerleaders for Mrs Thatcher and her campaign for a return to work.

While most trade unionists understood and even sympathised with the violent response when police confronted angry strikers on picket lines, they were horrified that so much of the media criticism was directed solely at the NUM and its members.

Wildly exaggerated cartoon imagery caused great offence, especially in close-knit mining

communities where the miners' wives and their supporters organised soup kitchen and food deliveries.

Why, they asked, were the pickets so often depicted as bully boys? Their thuggish demeanour was highlighted by the *Daily Mail's* cartoonist Mac (Stanley McMurty). In one cartoon, pickets wore hoods and carried baseball bats. Another by Cummings had strikers with clubs corraling working miners.

As the strike progressed and the police gradually gained the upper hand, a constantly recurring image deployed by cartoonists on left-wing newspapers and magazines was that of a constable cracking his truncheon down on the head of a picket.

Here was heartfelt mock-

ery validated by the medieval scenes at the Battle of Orgreave when police on horseback charged through the massed lines of pickets.

Photographer John Harris captured the moment a mounted officer, who had his baton raised, only just missed the head of protestor Lesley Bolton – one of the iconic images regularly reproduced by the left as a reminder of police brutality.

Orgreave omission

As I leafed through my vast collection of newspaper cuttings, I was struck by the absence of cartoons depicting the police charges at Orgreave.

Film of mounted police chasing the pickets is rebroadcast almost without fail when tv news bulletins and programmes revisit the strike. In

the immediate aftermath of Orgreave trying to imagine a humorous slant on such barbaric scenes was perhaps a task no cartoonist could stomach or was possibly seen as a step too far by newspaper editors.

Again, in my cuttings, cartoonists appeared to have been absent from action at the end of strike in March 1985.

Amid harrowing scenes of men returning to their pits, after a year's sacrifice, without any guarantees for the future of their industry, the Conservative supporting press did not want to remind readers of the dreadful damage inflicted by Mrs Thatcher's victory and cartoonists on the left had no wish to remind their supporters of the fallout from what had been a terrible defeat for the union movement.

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Shifted: Seaham art show honours women who supported strike

Artist and academic **Jean Spence** previews this forthcoming exhibition in County Durham

The fortieth anniversary of the start of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike will be commemorated by an artists' exhibition in Seaham in honour of the women who supported the strike.

The exhibition, entitled *Shifted*, is being organised by members of East Durham Artists' Network (EDAN) in collaboration with National Women Against Pit Closures (NWAPC). It will open on 5 March 2024 at the EDAN Gallery, following the NWAPC celebration of women's strike activism planned for Saturday 2 March in Durham City.

Shifted will focus more generally on the contribution of women to mining life, politics and culture. The strike was a concentrated moment of female activism in which the women took independent action in support of the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) in an effort to protect jobs and a way of life that were threatened by the

policies of the Thatcher Government. The women demonstrated a political commitment to the strike that was grounded in practical experience and action.

Their commitment seemed remarkable in 1984 because women had hitherto been largely invisible in public perceptions of the world of coal mining. Mining was male work and women simply did not appear in the narratives and depictions of the mining industry. Yet the skills deployed by the women during the strike were the outcome of a long, but largely unrecognised, active female history.

Crucial activism

Female activism was integral to mining life operating through private, informal networks as well as within formal institutions to sustain and reproduce cohesive mining families and communities. Female labour and activism, energised by the



Jac Seery 'Untitled'

experience of the strike, continued to be important in the aftermath of pit closures, and it remains crucial within efforts to commemorate the legacy of mining.

The 40th anniversary event in Durham, represents something of that determination to keep alive the political heritage of working class women as represented by female activism in the miners' strike.

Most of the publicly accessible art that addresses mining history focuses on mining and the world of men, and artists who have depicted mining life and society have themselves

been mostly men. The EDAN exhibition includes work from women artists who grew up in mining families and have lived through the historic shifts that have taken place in what were once thriving, self-contained mining communities.

All EDAN artists, men and women, whether or not they are of mining heritage, have been asked to look beyond the stereotypes of men's and women's roles in mining life, and to centre the experiences and skills of the women whose labour was crucial to the welfare of the mining workforce.

The EDAN exhibition will seek to emphasise the importance of women's roles in this longer history of mining society, to broaden the view by shifting the focus to the world of women. In doing so, the artists involved will consider how the strike shifted the power balance between men and women, shifted perceptions of women's capacities and shifted expectations of what women might achieve in a rapidly changing environment.

MN

The Art of Class War

Nick Jones will be giving two talks in Yorkshire on how the 1984-85 miners' strike was reflected through the eyes of news cartoonists.

THURSDAY 8 MAY – 7.30pm

Wakefield Town Hall, Wood Street WF1 2HQ
A joint MediaNorth/With Banners Held High event

SUNDAY 18 AUGUST – 2.00pm

Unison Room, Wortley Hall S35 7DB
MediaNorth/South Yorkshire Festival event

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

David Miller reflects on the key role Kellingley Miners' Social Club played in the strike

When social solidarity meets communal action

The dominating images and expressions of the 1984-85 miners' strike are now thoroughly embedded in both common and academic memory: the confrontation at Orgreave with its charging mounted police; the dramatic arrest of Scargill at the same location; the marches with banners at the end of the strike, and the television shots of a smirking Thatcher and Ian McGregor.

Alongside these images, there are numerous phrases: Thatcher's infamous 'enemy within' and the shouts of 'scab' and the cries of 'here we go...' from pickets and activists on the sharp end of the confrontation.

As a politically aware young striking miner and NUM member at the time, these emblems are an indelible part of my recollections. The strike was on every level a confrontation. Yet, at the same time, other images, expressions and symbols come back to me expressing solidarity, care, communality, mutual recognition, and comradeship.

My direct experience of these rest mainly on Kellingley strike centre, our collective strike 'home' where, after arrest or detour, delay and distraction, we inevitably returned.

Strike remembrance

There are many symbols and images of what could be termed 'strike remembrance' that are integral to the strike centres and welfare locations. I want to describe three.

The first is the image and memory of social solidarity that became visible and, as the strike went on, took on a dense political nature.

It was not merely that at Kellingley strike centre families



The North Selby banner (designed by Andrew Turner) was the last NUM branch banner ever made and vividly depicts the forces deployed against the union

Credit: NUM

and individual miners came together to eat, discuss, assist, and support each other. All that was a necessary and predictable function of the strike centres in general. At Kellingley and at other strike centres, however, partly due to the efforts of politically educated branch officials and members, a form of political awareness emerged that cannot be taught via political speech, pamphlet or direct political instruction.

A hungry striking miner recognises the political significance of the offer of a plate of decent food over a pamphlet about hungry striking miners

The Thatcherite ideology of anti-social individualism was directly contradicted by the care, help and mutual recognition and communal action generated from within the strike centres, and that was my experience at Kellingley.

Supported by trade union structures and working-class organisation, the fact that the people around you genuinely care if your child has a Christmas present or a birthday gift, or if the bailiffs are threatening you, makes a very strong and lasting political difference.

The second point follows from the first. At Kellingley we had many visits from radical political groups. Many soon came to appreciate the necessity of the deeper strands of solidarity and day to day care and help that they encountered at the strike centre. They soon saw that a hungry striking min-

er recognises the political significance of the offer of a plate of decent food over a pamphlet about hungry striking miners.

Thirdly, the strike centre at Kellingley not only attracted committed political groups, but also people regarded as partial social outcasts. This raises questions of social acceptance and recognition, and touches upon different forms of solidarity. Tramps, vagabonds, homeless people, acute alcoholics, and others would come in and simply hang around looking for a meal and company. These people were not only tolerated, but greeted, recognised, and helped. This turn towards mutual recognition of people habitually regarded as social failures, was based on a fundamental recognition of basic humanity; that when all else has been stripped away by force or circumstance; when job, status, home, and possessions are lost, all that is left is the last meagre hope of human contact.

The 1984-85 strike taught many lessons. Certainly the lessons to be drawn from the memory of confrontation are deep and necessary. Yet, when the anniversaries come around, the necessity of learning the lessons of political confrontation should not obscure the wider significance of those other lessons from the welfare and strike centres. The inner nature of the strike centre provided a nourishment more than simply food. The lessons of care, solidarity, hope, humour, and the nourishing of the essential bareness of our basic humanity were there too. **MN**

David Miller was a coalface worker at Kellingley for ten years, from 1979 until 1989. Both his father Davey and grandfather Jimmy were Kellingley NUM branch secretaries. He is now Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Literature, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Barry White on how the media treats the climate emergency

Papers are ‘out of touch, out of date, out of ideas’

Just how does the media cover the climate emergency and what treatment will it get as we approach the general election? *Toxic News? Covering Climate Change* attempts to tackle these important questions post-COP 28. Twenty five journalists, commentators and academics analyse the questions from various perspectives.

The challenge is laid out in the book’s preface by Tom Heap, TV and radio reporter, best known as a presenter to BBC One’s *Countryfile*. “Climate change should be the most gripping story around. So why does an audience turn off, whether in print or broadcast?” he asks.

With 25 contributors there is some overlapping, which I suppose is understandable unless there is ruthless editing, which would probably upset some of them!

Polling specialist John Cur-



TOXIC NEWS? COVERING CLIMATE CHANGE

Edited by John Mair,
John Ryley and Andrew Beck
Bite-Sized Books £9.95

rice gives a view into public opinion admitting that most people in Britain are concerned about climate change. He quotes from a July 2023 survey which found that almost 8 out of 10 said they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ concerned, but he suggests some proposals for reducing carbon emissions are more popular than others, leaving scope for the issue to become divisive at election time.

Uxbridge effect

The point is taken up by Julian Petley who reminds readers that in the June 2023 Uxbridge by-election, “The perceived unpopularity of London mayor Sadiq Khan’s expansion of the London Ultra Low Emission Zone to the outer boroughs was successfully mobilised by the Tories

in order to engineer the victory of their candidate, albeit with a majority of only 495 votes, reduced from 7,210 in 2019.” The measure of course has little to do with the climate emergency but is an important public health issue. However, this did not stop the government announcing rolling back on some of its net zero policies.

Petley also detects a considerable overlap between Tory Brexiters and climate sceptics (once climate deniers) and how Brexit supporting right wing newspapers are supporting the government’s weakening of its climate policies.

The electoral lessons of Uxbridge were not lost on Greater Manchester’s Mayor Andy Burnham who announced in mid-December that public investment in buses and taxis would bring clean air to Greater Manchester more speedily than charging drivers to use the roads (as in London and elsewhere).

Another contributor, Liz Gerard, is pessimistic: “Our newspapers look out of touch, out of date and out of ideas.” She concludes, “Tackling climate change is the number one issue for younger generations. But it’s the older generations who vote and buy newspapers.”

MN

Sports Illustrated fires CEO for using AI

By Tony Burke

The prestigious US magazine *Sports Illustrated* recently sacked its CEO Ross Levinsohn for using Artificial Intelligence to produce news articles and headshot photos generated by AI.

The company also fired its chief operating officer, media president and corporate counsel after revelations that the magazine had published articles by non-existent authors with AI-generated biographies and headshots.

The magazine’s publisher Arena Group said the removal of Levinsohn had been decided after a meeting on actions to “improve the operational efficiency and the revenue of the company”.

The AI articles were unveiled by an online magazine *Futurism*, which discovered that articles supposedly written by ‘Sora Tanaka’, a fitness guru, were fictitious.

Similarly, an article about volleyball by ‘Drew Ortiz’ who, *Futurism* says, has no social media presence, no publishing history and whose profile



The Sports Illustrated case raises wider questions about publications using AI

photo on *Sports Illustrated* was for sale on a website that sells AI-generated headshots, where he’s described as ‘neutral white young-adult male with short

brown hair and blue eyes’.

Arena denied the allegations, stating the content was from AdVon Commerce, an advertiser, which used ‘pen names’. The group has now severed ties with AdVon.

Levinsohn was replaced by Manoj Bhargava as interim chief executive. Bhargava is the founder of the energy drink ‘5-hour Energy’ who outlawed his staff using Powerpoint presentations telling them to ‘stop doing dumb stuff’ and said the ‘amount of useless stuff you guys do is staggering’.

MN

● **MediaNorth will be running an online event, AI: Threats and Opportunities for the Media, during the 2024 Festival of Debate. It will be on 25 April 18.00-19.30. Put the date in your diary**

Nick Jones reviews a new biography of the RMT union leader

Mick Lynch: Trade union bureaucrat to TV star

Remaining at ease in front of camera, and fearless in the face of hostile questioning, is a tough call when caught in the eye of a media storm, a challenge that did not unsettle rail union leader Mick Lynch.

His skill in standing his ground while forcing renowned television presenters onto the back foot won him many plaudits during the 18 months of strike action in the RMT pay dispute with the rail operators.

Taking on all comers at impromptu doorstep news conferences was a strategy that helped to establish him as a media personality, a transformation that did not happen just by chance.

Gregor Gall's biography of the RMT leader – *Mick Lynch: The Making of a Working-class Hero* – reveals the thinking behind the union's media strategy.

Having seen how 'unfazed and agile' Lynch was when addressing union meetings or being interviewed by the media, the RMT press officer John Millington considered how best to deploy their 'secret weapon'.

"I suggested a rough-and-ready press conference outside our HQ – with Lynch fielding questions from journalists I invited. This way, people got to see an articulate, working-class union leader speak plainly, ducking no questions, clearly setting out the union's position."

Lynch had an innate understanding of how to play along with his media tormentors while going directly over their heads to get across his message, but the tactic might have backfired.

During the many years I spent at the front of the media pack, arm outstretched with my microphone, I witnessed countless examples of union leaders and politicians failing to seize



The Sun reported ASLEF offer, but put RMT's Mick Lynch (centre) in the picture

the moment, stumbling in their responses, clearly harassed by the jostling in front of them.

Like Lynch, Arthur Scargill clearly thrived on such media melees during the 1984-85 miners' strike, but the NUM President could not resist the chance to berate what he said was the bias of the 'vermin' in front of him, who would forever 'go on supporting Mrs Thatcher'.

In recent years Donald Trump's outbursts against the US mainstream media at presidential election rallies have more than matched Scargill's

menace and bombast, whipping his audience into a frenzy with tirades about the dishonesty of reporters corralled in cordoned-off media pens.

When provoked during doorstep confrontations in the RMT dispute, Lynch avoided the potential pitfall of a blanket denigration of all journalists, preferring instead to express what Gall described as 'mild bemusement' at the evident ignorance displayed in some of the questions, only occasionally becoming a 'little rattled'.

A bad-tempered exchange with Richard Madeley on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* was a perfect illustration of what turned the RMT leader into a TV star. Lynch, clearly exasperated and irritated, did not become visibly angry and instead mocked Madeley's failings as an interviewer: "You're just ranting now. You're just talking to yourself, now, Richard. Why don't you just interview yourself?"

Gall is to be congratulated on his painstaking research into Lynch's rise through the ranks of the RMT and his success in building a high public profile.

Union-bashing in the Tory tabloid press and their attempt to demonise him as a latter-day Scargill worked to Lynch's ad-

vantage and he retained his folk hero status despite the RMT voting overwhelmingly in November to accept an offer that he conceded was 'very modest' and not as good as he might have hoped.

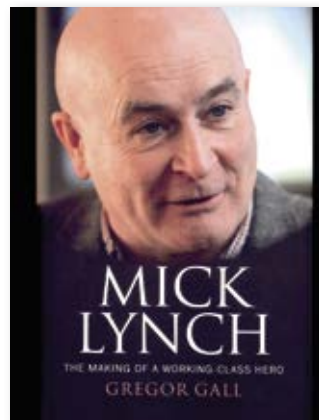
When the book went to print, the dispute still had several months to run so Gall had no way of knowing how it might end. Instead, Gall used an opinion column in the *Guardian* (27.12.2023) to offer his concluding thoughts on the effectiveness of the RMT's strike action and his assessment of Lynch's record as RMT leader.

His judgement was harsh: Lynch's status as 'a magnetic leftwing figurehead is undeniable', but he had 'arguably failed to stave off a government attack on rail workers conducted under the guise of modernisation'.

At issue was the value of the pay deal and a failure to gain a promise of no compulsory redundancies beyond December 2024. When the RMT finally voted to end the long-running dispute Lynch insisted the union would continue to fight against any attempt by the train operators to allow their terms and conditions to be 'cut to pieces'.

I sided with Lynch: with Christmas in the offing, it was far better to accept a pay rise of 5 per cent backdated to 2022 and job security guarantees, while preserving the 'steadfastness' of the membership to mount another defence of their terms and conditions.

Train operators will continue to push for greater flexible working. If Labour do win the general election and it is all change in the management of the railways, any RMT leader will still need to repeat the left foot work that Lynch displayed in the 2022-23 rail dispute. **MN**



MICK LYNCH: The Making of a Working-class Hero
Gregor Gall
Manchester University Press
£20

Letting in the light

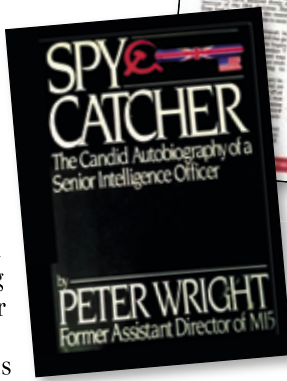
Granville Williams on what our governments really got up to

Two media stories are in the latest files released from the National Archives at the end of December.

They are the *Spycatcher* debacle resulting from the attempts by Margaret Thatcher's government to ban the book's publication, and the extent of the animosity of Tony Blair and his spin doctor Alistair Campbell against the BBC over media coverage leading up to the Iraq war in 2003.

Thatcher was 'utterly shattered' by the revelations in Peter Wright's book, including those that a small group of MI5 officers plotted against the Prime Minister Harold Wilson and that Sir Roger Hollis, the director General of MI5 from 1956-65, had been a Soviet mole.

Other revelations in the files include her agreeing on 10 June 1980 a recommendation by her Cabinet Secretary Sir Robert Armstrong to leak information about the Hollis affair to Chapman Pincher, a *Daily Express* journalist. This plan backfired and Pincher used the information in his book, *Their Trade Is Treachery*, published the following year.



Above: Free Press October 1987. Left: Sales of Spycatcher made Peter Wright a millionaire

Armstrong was also a witness to the government's failed attempt to block the publication of *Spycatcher* in Australia in 1986. He lied in court to cover up the leak which Thatcher had approved. He told the court it was 'totally untrue' that he had helped Pincher write about Hollis. In exchanges with Wright's lawyer Malcolm Turnbull, he was derided for his definition of the difference between a lie and a misleading impression as 'perhaps being economical with truth'.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom was very active in support of the book's publication and produced a record, *Ballad of a Spy-*

catcher, written and recorded by Leon Rosselson with Billy Bragg and the Oyster Band.

Threat to set lawyers on the BBC

A letter from Tony Blair to the BBC Chair Gavyn Davies on 19 March 2003 in the run-up to the Iraq War reveals that the government was at loggerheads with the BBC two months before the *Today* report by Andrew Gilligan on 29 May which claimed that the government had 'sexed up' its case for the Iraq War.

Blair complained that there had been a 'real breakdown' in the separation of news and comment at the BBC. He wrote, "I believe, and I am not alone in believing, that you have not got the balance right between support and dissent; between news and comment..."

Alistair Campbell wrote to Blair on 6 July, "If the BBC remain belligerent, I think the rhetoric has to be stepped up, up to and including the threat of putting the issue in the hands of lawyers."

In the fallout from these tensions between the government and the BBC the files show that the No 10 Press office lost 'all credibility' under Campbell's combative manner. And, of course, the weapons expert David Kelly took his own life, and both BBC Director General Greg Dyke and Gavyn Davies lost their jobs. **MN**



Maforie Lipan

John Pilger: Sorely missed

John Pilger: campaigning journalist

John Pilger's death, announced by his family on 30 December last year, triggered a flood of tributes.

What was striking was they reminded us both of the range and variety of his output – his books, journalism on papers like the *Daily Mirror* and his documentaries and films – and also their enormous impact.

Books like *Hidden Agendas*, *Distant Voices* and *Heroes* opened our eyes to conflicts that were rarely reported in the mainstream news.

Pilger was a war correspondent for the *Daily Mirror*, exposing the crimes of the West in Vietnam and Cambodia among other conflicts. He was twice named journalist of the year.

His documentaries like *Palestine is Still the Issue* (2002) spoke plainly about the abandonment of the rights of the Palestinian people. Many of his documentaries for ITV fell foul of the regulator. He regarded the IBA's code for balance and impartiality as 'code for the establishment view of the world'.

John was a supporter of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, spoke at our conferences and wrote for *Free Press*. In his final years he was also a steadfast and prominent campaigner for the release of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

His work and actions inspired people. He will be hugely missed. **MN**

MediaNorth

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Harry v. Mirror

A court judgement has found evidence that 'habitual' phone hacking went on at Mirror Group newspapers for years. This extraordinary vindication for Prince Harry has repercussions for the British press, since the judgment names a number of editorial and executive figures as complicit in the *Mirror's* unlawful activities. **MN**