

Radical and Revolting

The English Working Class

Revolutions Per Minute number 12

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Revolutions Per Minute
BCM Box 3328,
London WC1N 3XX

0845 345 3958

www.red-star-research.org.uk

revoperminute@ukonline.co.uk

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"Our task must be to rescue the words of the Diggers and Levellers from obscurity and to locate them quite firmly in the context of working-class history and struggle; to seek inspiration from their words and actions; to ensure that all of these disparate voices are united under the common theme of working class resistance to poverty and oppression."

"I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he, and therefore truly, sir, I think it is clear to every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government."

Leveller, Colonel Thomas Rainborough

"We renounce, repudiate, and condemn all hereditary inequalities and distinctions of caste; we declare that the earth with all its natural productions is the common property of all."

Julian Horney - 1846

"The rich and the great will never act to alleviate the distress and remove the poverty felt by the working people of England. What then is to be done? Why, the labouring classes must do it themselves, or it will for ever be left undone."

George Loveless, Tolpuddle Martyr

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Welcome to issue 12 of RPM.

In 1929 Theodore Rothstein, who had worked on the staff of *The Tribune*, the *Daily News* and *The Manchester Guardian*, before being refused re-entry to the country when he visited Russia in 1920, famously wrote 'The English people are notoriously ignorant of their own history'.

Seventy five years later little has changed; schoolchildren continue to be 'educated' about members of the Royal Family who died hundreds of years ago. Television stations and papers are crammed with stories about the rich and famous. The struggles of working people rarely feature, unless they take strike action to defend their jobs and conditions, when they will inevitably find themselves under attack in the media and on picket lines from the police.

The year 2003 marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of 'The Suffragettes', who were a vital part of the struggle that established women's rights to vote. Did anyone notice the articles that were written, the celebrations that were organised, the highlighting of these heroic women? No, well join the queue!

And how many of those children and young people who took strike action in 2003 to join the massive protests against the war in Iraq knew they were following a long path that included the schoolchildren at Burston in Norfolk, who in 1914 recognised an injustice and refused to co-operate with the school authorities when they sacked the teachers they loved? Not many I bet, as the struggles of working people and their children must be ignored in case they are used to inspire those living today.

The English working class is expected by the ruling class to be proud of being English. And why shouldn't it be? But it is not expected to be proud of being working class. I can't see why it shouldn't be proud of being both.

Proud of being amongst the first to organise its trade unions, attempt democracy within the army, resist fascism and create the first political party committed to the overthrow of capitalism. Proud too that in recent times it was able to mobilise itself to oppose the ravages of Thatcherism during the year-long strike by miners twenty years ago.

On February 15th 2003 between 1 and 2 million people marched in London against Blair's backing for the war in Iraq. The large majority of marchers

were working class and included massive numbers of black workers. This unity in action between white and black workers will be vital in the struggles of the English working class in the future.

In fact UNITY between all groups of working people in England and abroad against a common enemy, capitalism, is going to be needed if the English working class is going to be able to role back the long list of defeats which it has been forced to endure since the defeat of the Miners strike in 1984-1985.

This pamphlet, with its series of short articles on the Levellers, Chartists, Luddites, Suffragettes, Tolpuddle Martyrs, Burston strikers, Cable Street anti-fascists, miners and anti-war demonstrators is a small attempt to bring to the attention of the working class people of England their history; which includes their long struggles over hundreds of years against the rich and powerful to improve their working conditions, rights and their access to the corridors of power and decision making.

Contributors to this issue are Jim Fox, Lesley Kipling, Carol Farmer, Jeanie Molyneux, Doreen Purvis, John Breen, Alan Walsh, Dave Black, Chris Ford, Reg Weston, Tony Hall, Mark Metcalf and Steve Green. Thanks also to Sheila Seacroft for proof reading some of the works.

If you have a piece of work you would like to be considered for publication then please make contact.

Mark Metcalf
Sunderland - January 2004

This pamphlet is dedicated to over 100,000 Miners and their wives who heroically fought to defend their jobs and communities in 1984. In doing so they were forced to fight the Thatcher Government, the police, courts and the leadership of the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress.

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The English Civil War: Diggers and Levellers

During the course of the English Civil War in the seventeenth century [effectively two conflicts between 1642–1646 and 1647/48] the political and social upheaval that resulted led to the development of a set of radical ideas centred around movements known as 'Diggers' and 'Levellers'.

The Diggers [or 'True Levellers'] were led by William Everard who had served in the New Model Army. As the name implies, the diggers aimed to use the earth to reclaim the freedom that they felt had been lost partly through the Norman Conquest; by seizing the land and owning it 'in common' they would challenge what they considered to be the slavery of property. They were opposed to the use of force and believed that they could create a classless society simply through seizing land and holding it in the 'common good'.

To this end, a small group [initially 12, though rising to 50] settled on common land first at St George's Hill and later in Cobham, Surrey and grew corn and other crops. This small group defied the landlords, the Army and the law for over a year. In addition to this, groups travelled through England attempting to rally supporters. In this they had some successes in Kent and Northamptonshire. Their main propagandist was Gerard Winstanley who produced the clearest statement of Digger ideas in *'The Law of Freedom in a Platform'* published in 1652. This was a defence and exposition of the notion of a classless society based on secularism and radical democracy.

The relatively small group of followers of Digger ideas was never particularly influential and was quite easily suppressed by Cromwell and Fairfax.

The most significant of these movements were The Levellers whose revolutionary ideas resonated throughout the succeeding centuries, mostly notably in the demands of the Chartists in the nineteenth century.

The Levellers' ideas found most support in the ranks of the 'New Model Army', formed by Oliver Cromwell in 1645 and were largely responsible for the defeat of the Royalist forces led by Charles I, particularly in the decisive Battle of Naseby in June 1645.

By the end of the first civil war in 1646 Leveller ideas were particularly influential and culminated in the Putney Debates where ordinary soldiers debated revolutionary ideas with their generals; it was at this series of meetings that Leveller Colonel Thomas Rainborough argued the case for universal suffrage:

"I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he, and therefore truly, sir, I think it is clear to every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government."

Unfortunately, this outbreak of democracy within the ranks of the army was relatively short-lived; the outbreak of the second civil war in 1647 allowed the generals to reassert their authority and Leveller influence began to wane. An attempted mutiny by Leveller soldiers was brutally suppressed in Burford, Oxfordshire in 1649; leaders were executed by Cromwell's soldiers and others were tried for high treason.

Why this brutal suppression? What did the generals find so threatening about the Levellers?

Who were the Levellers?

The Levellers were a relatively loose alliance of radicals and freethinkers who came to prominence during the period of instability that characterised the English Civil War of 1642–1649. The most prominent Levellers were John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn, John Wildman, Edward Sexby and Colonel Thomas Rainborough.

What bound these people together was the general belief that all men were equal; since this was the case, then a government could only have legitimacy if it was elected by the people. The Leveller demands were for a secular republic, abolition of the House of Lords, equality before the law, the right to vote for all, free trade, the abolition of censorship, freedom of speech and the absolute right for people to worship whatever religion [or none] that they chose. This programme was published as 'The Agreement of the People'.

These ideas came out of the social classes from which the Levellers originated; they were mainly skilled workers and peasants and the 'petty bourgeoisie'. Since many of them had fought in Cromwell's New Model Army they were used to discussion, argument and the free dissemination of ideas; it was this intelligent debate allied to the need for discipline that had led to the defeat of the Royalists and the victory of the republic.

The Levellers were essentially radical idealists; their demands could be seen as a form of early socialism [they were pretty much the same as the demands of the Chartists some two hundred years later], but they had little or no understanding of the workings of a capitalist economy. It is unfair, though, to expect this of them since capitalism as an organised form of social production would only assert itself much later in the development of Britain as an industrial nation.

Indeed, it is important to note that their views on the social order were not particularly progressive; these were rooted in the notion that prior to 1066 and the Norman Conquest a democratic society had existed in Anglo-Saxon times where the land was held in common by the people [perhaps this is in line with Karl Marx's idea of the concept of 'primitive communism'; that is, the form of social organisation that existed in pre-industrial society].

The victory of William the Conqueror in 1066 had enabled him to impose a form of foreign [that is, Norman] domination on the people.^[1] This enabled him to reward his followers with huge swathes of land seized from the formerly 'free men' of England. This was particularly so in the North of England where opposition was brutally suppressed.

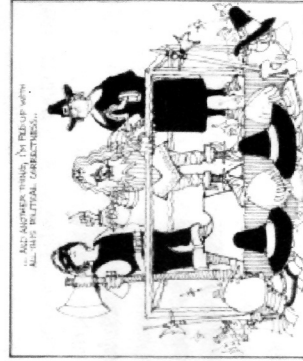
The Levellers argued that since God had created all men as equals, the land belonged to all the people as a right. Their programme was, then, essentially an attempt to restore the situation that they believed had existed previous to the Norman Conquest; they wanted to establish a 'commonwealth' in which the common people would be in control of their own destiny without the intervention of a King, a House of Lords and other potential oppressors.

The Agreement of the People was drawn up by a committee of Levellers including John Lilburne which was to have been discussed at a meeting of the commonwealth armies at Newmarket in June 1647. In brief this asked for:

- Power to be vested in the people
- One year Parliaments, elected by equal numbers of voters per seat. The right to vote for all men who worked independently for their living and all those who had fought for the Parliamentary cause
- Recall of any or all of their MPs by their electors at any time
- Abolition of the House of Lords
- Democratic election of army officers
- Complete religious toleration and the abolition of tithes and tolls
- Justices to be elected; law courts to be local and proceedings to be in English [not French!]
- Redistribution of seized land to the common people

'there had never been anything like such a spontaneous outbreak of democracy in any English or Continental Army before this year of 1647, nor was there anything like it thereafter till Workers' and Soldiers' Councils met in 1917 in Russia!'^[2]

It is hardly surprising, given this programme of demands, that the rich and powerful felt threatened by the Levellers. This is particularly so, given that some of the Leveller demands, almost 400 years on, have still not been met! Since Leveller demands went so much further than Cromwell and other republican leaders could even begin to meet, then they had to be crushed.



The first and to date only English Monarch executed was Charles I during the English Civil War

The outbreak of the second civil war gave them the opportunity to do this and so the movement which would have surely rid the people of the parasitical classes once and for all was brutally put down.

The final victory of the Parliamentary forces later in 1648 not only led to the execution of the King, but also the suppression of Leveller ideas for a time. Leveller ideas, though, posed a real challenge to the power and authority of Cromwell particularly with their attitude to the situation in Ireland. The New Model Army had been set up to defend Parliament at home, not to act as a mercenary force which would advance the imperialist ambitions of the English ruling class. The Catholics in Ireland, it was argued, had a claim to freedom and equality which was just as valid as that which the Levellers were arguing for at home.

In 'The English Soldier's Standard', it was argued that military intervention in Ireland would only mean that the Irish would become a subject people exploited by precisely those who the Levellers were struggling to overcome in England. The point was that influential levellers were implacably opposed to the reconquest of Ireland.

When significant elements of the New Model Army refused to embark for Ireland it was obvious that a crucial point had been reached. Radical elements had to be crushed in order for Cromwell to assert his authority. This was achieved at Burford in Oxfordshire where Fairfax and Cromwell surprised the Levellers and defeated them [albeit it with only a handful of casualties]. From this time [May 1649] the New Model Army was completely in the control of Cromwell.

This does not mean, though, that Leveller ideas were totally eradicated. On May Day 1649, the third and final version of the 'Agreement of the People' was published. This is the last collective statement of the Leveller leaders and is their most complete political programme. Its preface stated:

"Peace and freedom is our design; by war we were never gainers, nor ever wish to be."

In this version of the Agreement, there is a restatement of essential Leveller ideas, though there is a divergence between them and the aims of the Diggers to eradicate the ownership of private property. In all other respects, the



Oliver Cromwell

programme is not dissimilar to earlier versions; the emphasis is still on universal [male] suffrage, accountable government, religious toleration, civil rights, and so on.

Leveller ideas mainly appealed to the dispossessed in society; that is, those who were most threatened by what the Levellers were proposing were unlikely to be persuaded by appeals to the 'common good'. Since the Levellers were unable to mobilise their followers to any great degree and, given their defeat at Burford, they lacked the ability to challenge the army or government, it is almost inevitable that they were unable to pose any future threat to the ruling class or [restored] Monarchy.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that Leveller ideas are irrelevant or were consigned to the 'dustbin of history'. Both the Levellers and Diggers are of crucial importance to the development of working class history since they stand in the proud tradition of English radicalism and challenge to the ruling orthodoxy.

Like the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Chartists of a later period, the Diggers and Levellers posed a serious threat to the ruling class; their direct appeals to the poor and dispossessed resonate throughout the centuries – whilst the language and mode of expression may have changed, the essential demands of these radicals remain as vibrant and necessary today as they were when they were first put.

Some 450 years after the Diggers established their commune at Cobham, we still need to establish the common ownership of property and the development of society based on need, rather than profit. The words of Winstanley echo throughout the centuries:

"When men take to buying and selling the land, saying 'This is mine', they restrain other fellow creatures from seeking nourishment from mother earth.....so that he that had no land was to work for those, for small wages, that called the land theirs; and thereby some are lifted up into the chair of tyranny and others trod under the footstool of misery, as if the earth were made for a few and not for all men."

Our task must be to rescue the words of the Diggers and Levellers from obscurity and to locate them quite firmly in the context of working-class history and struggle; to seek inspiration from their words and actions; to ensure that all of these disparate voices are united under the common theme of working class resistance to poverty and oppression.

Jim Fox

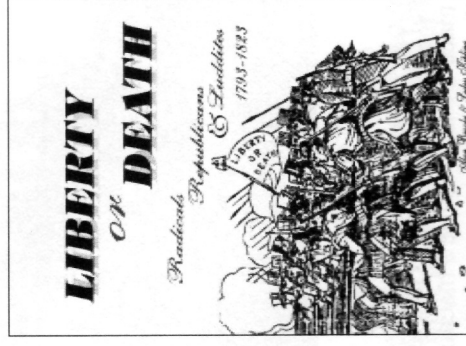
[1] See RPM issue 9: 'Rich at Play – foxhunting, land ownership and the Countryside Alliance' which reveals how even today many of the major landowners in Britain are descended from those whom William allocated land to.

[2] P181 – The Levellers and the English Revolution by H.N. Brailsford

LIBERTY or DEATH – The Luddites

with reference to Huddersfield and West Yorkshire

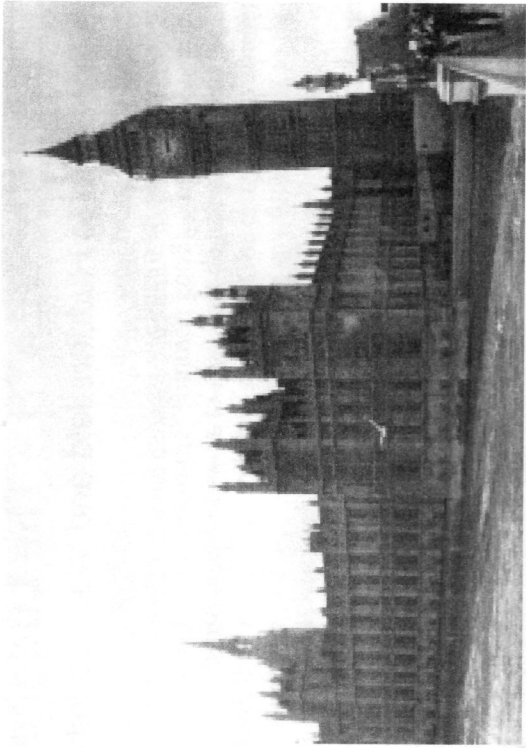
Taken from an interview with Lesley Kipling, co-author with Alan Brooke of 'LIBERTY AND DEATH! – Radicals, Republicans and Luddites 1793 –1823'



The majority of Luddites in West Yorkshire were Croppers. These were the elite of the cloth finishers in an area largely reliant on the sale of its cloth products as well as agriculture. At the beginning of the 19th century around half of those employed in the cloth manufacturing industry worked in small cottages and the other half in the mills. The average cropping shop employed around 8 people but the trend was towards larger establishments as economies of scale were sought by the employers in order to increase productivity and profits.

The revolt centred on the determination of the Luddites to prevent the introduction of cropping machines, which were unlike previous inventions because they actually put people out of work, leading directly to unemployment at a time when to be without work meant either Parish Relief if lucky, or starvation.

There had been past attempts to introduce the cropping machines, some stretching back twenty years previously. It was therefore a surprise to see them being brought back in 1812, especially as this was a period when demand for cloth was falling and people were already being laid off work. It was as if the factory owners were determined to attack the people when they were at their weakest and force through a series of radical and permanent changes in workplace practices, pay and conditions.



House of Commons

In 1806, following a Legal Enquiry, Parliament had repealed laws going back to Tudor times that had made it illegal to use a machine that replaced people. A new breed of capitalist entrepreneurs now had the chance to break the stranglehold of the skilled craftsman or artisan over the pace, control and location of production. Workers were to be forced to work in factories or starve.

The risings in Huddersfield centred almost exclusively on one year, 1812, and followed similar acts of resistance in the Nottingham area. Folklore has suggested that the name adopted 'Luddites' is a reference to the mythical leader, a General Ludd, and it is an undoubted fact that a number of threatening letters to various members of the establishment and the factory owners carried the signatures of General Ludd, but there is no evidence to suggest such a man existed. Rather there were a series of leaders in different areas and the name Luddites was drawn from ancient folk heritage where Ludd was possibly a corruption of the name of one of the Celtic gods.

Workers began by petitioning Parliament to prevent the introduction of the cropping machines but when it became obvious that Parliament was unable and unwilling to act in the workers interests the cry went up of 'We Petition no more, that won't do, fighting must.'

Secret meetings of angry people were organised, these taking place at a time when it was illegal to be a member of a trade union. One can only imagine the misery, fear and hunger that would have accompanied such a meeting, these were desperate times. The Parish Relief was only available to people if they



Luddite meeting places

were very well behaved and the social security system we have in place today to protect the unemployed, poor and handicapped, limited as it is, was not even thought of.

Those at the meeting determined to get rid of the cropping machines either by persuading the manufacturers to voluntarily get rid of them or by smashing them up themselves; an act guaranteed to throw them into conflict with the employers, their supporters, the police and the military.

On Saturday February 22nd 1812 forty five men, led by George Mellor, approached Joseph Hirst's cropping shop where a man and two boys were still up working late at night. Admittance was demanded and armed gunmen stood guard as seven frames and 24 pairs of shears were smashed. James Balderstone's shop was then visited, machinery destroyed and warning shots fired.

Of those who took part the authorities later denounced ten who took part and Mellor and eight of them were subsequently arrested, along with around 40 others. Lawrence Gaffney escaped and fled to Ireland, which as his name suggests he possibly originated from.

On Sunday February 23rd a Committee of Merchants and Manufacturers was set up to suppress the Luddites. They succeeded in having two troops of dragoons [soldiers] stationed in Huddersfield to provide patrol and guards.

This did not prevent further attacks being organised. Initially these were on small premises but as those involved became more confident an attack on the premises of Frank Vickerman, a large merchant manufacturer, who was mainly

responsible for bringing in the soldiers, was planned for March 15th 1812. Success would depend on an attack being planned with military precision and by evading the guard the Luddites were able to destroy ten frames and thirty shears. Shots were fired but no one injured, the aim appearing to be to frighten rather than injure or kill. This, however, was not to be the policy employed by the defenders of property.

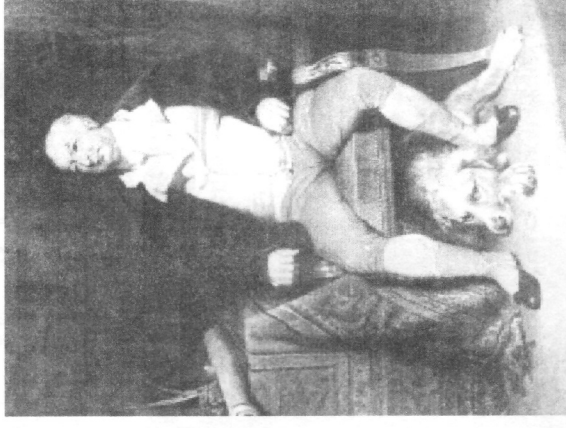
On April 1st an attack on Cartwright's mill at Rawfolds, Liversedge, just outside Huddersfield left two of the attackers dead and many wounded and injured. George Mellor announced "there was no method of smashing the machinery, but by shooting the masters." Consequently in the following months whilst machine breaking was not entirely abandoned it was pushed behind a campaign of individual terror against local opponents and the attempted seizure of arms in preparation of an uprising. Some employers were shot at and on April 28th William Horsfall the owner of Ottiwells Mill was fatally wounded at Crosland Moor.

Over the next few nights Luddites visited and took away guns and pistols from a number of owners of small cropping shops. No one was hurt in any of these actions, discipline was very tight and the men involved well organised. Oaths, which at the time were very illegal, were administered to new entrants. The Luddites were bound together in common resistance to both the changing economic order and the government. They saw themselves as a paramilitary force, an 'Army of Redressers' as they called themselves. Like any other guerrilla fighters, however, they could not have survived as an underground group without the support of their own community.

The Leeds Mercury reported that in May 1812 only arms were taken on raids but in June small amounts of money were taken, possibly to pay for items essential for an uprising. The authorities were determined to prevent such an uprising and to crush the Luddites – they offered rewards, up to £2,000 [equivalent to £90,000 at today's prices], issued threats of punishment, including hanging, and exhorted the general public to come forward with any information on the Luddites. Few did, reflecting the support they had but the information gathered allowed the authorities the chance to arrest, prosecute and as we shall see below act ruthlessly and without mercy.

The authorities were unwilling to call out the local militia against the Luddites, at Rawfolds described earlier six soldiers had refused to open fire on the attackers and one was ordered to be given '300 lashes', an action which would have almost certainly have killed him.

The militia was composed in those days of very common workingmen who couldn't afford to buy themselves out of service. Many could be expected to be sympathetic to the Luddites cause. Samuel Hartley, one of the Luddites killed at Rawfolds was a private in the Halifax Militia. Hartley's funeral was well attended by the public. In June 1812 there were just under 400 militia



The much hated Justice Radcliffe

enacted Legislation to allow just such actions.

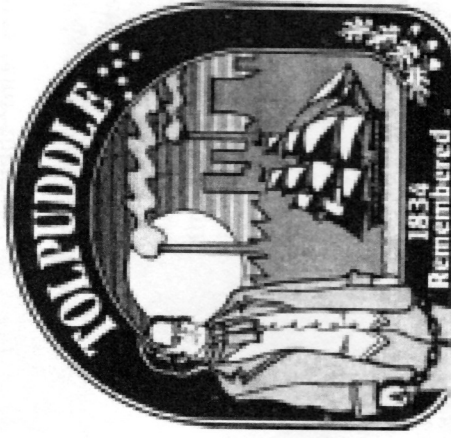
Despite being fully acquainted with the knowledge that if they were caught they were likely to be hanged, it should be noted that the Luddites were not the 'blood thirsty savages' some historians have attempted to portray them. In Yorkshire only one person, the hated William Horsfall, was killed, the Luddites if they had wanted could have killed a lot more. At a time when they were starving to death it has to be said they acted with incredible restraint and dignity.

This counted for nothing once Luddites came in front of the Courts. A Special Commission, under a reliable Judge was set up; Judge Bailey was deliberately excluded. Seventeen Luddites joined their two comrades killed at Rawfolds when they were hanged in January 1813, following a series of trials in York. Another seven were transported. It was not the Luddites who were 'bloodthirsty savages' but the employers – when has it ever been before or since?

These ruthless acts had the effect of suppressing the Luddites, but according to Lesley Kipling the Luddites represented 'a landmark in organising labour' in which those involved 'organised collective bargaining by riot' at a time 'when it was the only way'. In conclusion she commented 'the Luddites were a significant single movement that united working men against their employers and the emerging capitalist system of poverty and degradation.'

Mark Metcalf

Tolpuddle Martyrs: transported in 1834 for forming a Trade Union



In the history of the trade union movement, the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, six farm labourers from a small village in Dorset, is an important event.

Their story is set in the context of the development of trade unions in England in the early nineteenth century, with the growth of industry at that time. In 1799 Pitt's Government passed a series of anti – Combination Acts which banned all clubs and societies formed by working people for the purpose of improving their pay and conditions.

The rural landowners, who continued to dominate the Government, and the increasingly confident factory owners shared a joint fear of the democratic ideas of the 1789 French revolution with its popular proclamation of the principles of 'Freedom, Equality and Liberty'.

The Government, concerned to prevent an uprising here had in 1790 suspended the Habeas Corpus Act, using the pretext that supporters of the French revolution were planning something similar.

In his must-read book 'The Making of the English Working Class' E.P. Thompson claims that 'The Combination Acts were passed by a Parliament of anti-Jacobins [Jacobins was a common term for those supporting the ideas of the French Revolution] and landowners, whose first concern was to add to the existing legislation intimidating political reformers'.

The anti-Combination Acts had the effect of driving organisation underground, but it did not prevent workers continuing to combine, agitate and press for

improved wages and conditions and as more and more of them were driven from the land into the factories they increasingly realised that only by combining could they improve their lot.

After 1799 workers continued to issue demands, hold meetings and even on many occasions organise protests and/or strikes. During this period the more enlightened members of the ruling class also began to recognise that outright repression was not likely to work and that in fact it could well drive the workers into taking more drastic revolutionary action.

At the same time it also became increasingly obvious that the French revolution was not going to be exported to Britain.

Thus a combination of working class pressure, enlightened self-interest on the part of some sections of the ruling class and reduced concern about the impact of the French revolution led to the repeal in Parliament of the anti-Combination laws in 1824.

Within ten years, during which there was a period of economic growth, new organisations were formed to represent different groups of workers such that in February 1834 it was possible to establish a general union, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU), initially organised by socialists who were supporters of Robert Owen. The GNCTU's official journal claimed a membership of half a million, although it is felt unlikely that so many were able to pay their subscriptions as they didn't have the money to do so.

A number of leading politicians and the bosses however remained resentful and the economic slump and growth in unemployment, which began in 1833-34, gave the landowners and the factory bosses the chance to attack the unions.

In the countryside, workers were increasingly impoverished. Common lands had been taken from them by landlords through the Enclosure Acts. Labourers therefore became increasingly dependent on employment by landowners.

The average wage of agricultural labourers in the 1830s was 10 shillings, [50 pence today] but this began to be lowered. In Tolpuddle, in Dorset, wages were reduced first to 8 shillings and then to 6 shillings a week. Tolpuddle farm workers called a meeting with the local magistrate, James Frampton, appealing to him to fix wages. This was refused. Farm workers in Tolpuddle therefore looked to alternatives.

Following discussions with others, George Loveless, a farm worker and local lay preacher contacted the GNCTU and set up a meeting. This was attended by 40 farm labourers, virtually the entire male population of the village, and two representatives of the GNCTU. The meeting decided to establish a friendly Society of Agricultural labourers as a branch of the GNCTU. The first 6 labourers, including George Loveless, enrolled in the union, which involved

swearing an oath, in December 1833.

This gave the ruling class the opportunity to act. They resented and were fearful of the growth of trade unions and political societies, recognising their ability to increase wages and improve the conditions of workers. They also remained concerned that trade unions could politicise the working class about their own potential power. Lord Melbourne, the Whig Home Secretary at the time was particularly anti working class. He had family connections in Dorset and knew the Tolpuddle magistrate, James Frampton.

In February 1834, the six Dorset men were arrested and in March 1834, tried at Dorchester Assizes. George Loveless himself later wrote that,

"the whole proceedings were characterised by a shameful disregard of justice and decency; the most unfair means were resorted to in order to frame an indictment against us."

The jury had connections with many of the very landowners who had been cutting wages. One of the charges against the men related to the Mutiny Act and to the taking of oaths.

The men were found guilty and sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia. The sentence was met with widespread protests amongst the working class, including a meeting of 1,000 people in London, a one-day demonstration of 200,000 people in the capital and a petition of 800,000 signatories seeking a pardon for the men, which was initially refused.

The families of the six men were refused parish relief, but contributions were received for them from workers all over the country, enabling the families to remain in their homes. Instead of weakening the trade union movement, it was in fact strengthened, by the injustice shown to the Tolpuddle men.

The campaign for the men's release continued and free pardons were granted to the men in March 1836, and they returned to England in the following two years. Only one returned to Tolpuddle. Money was raised by supporters to buy seven-year leases on farms in Essex for the other five men, where they set up a branch of the Working Men's Association.

George Loveless wrote a pamphlet about their experiences entitled "The Victims of Whiggery", in which he wrote,

"the rich and the great will never act to alleviate the distress and remove the poverty felt by the working people of England. What then is to be done? Why, the labouring classes must do it themselves, or it will for ever be left undone."

Few words have ever been said more true than that.

Jeanie Molyneux and Mark Metcalf

From Chartism to Red Republicanism: the Legacy of George Julian Harney

In 1831, mass agitation and a general election brought down the Duke of Wellington's Tory regime. The masses wanted political change, but the new Whig administration had other ideas. Up to this time, the industrial centres of Britain had been largely unrepresented in Parliament, so the new manufacturing class, in order to overcome the electoral system known as 'Old Corruption', had formed alliances with the nascent workers movement against the common enemy of big merchants and landowners.

But once the Whigs had secured the vote for the middle-class (increasing the electorate to 620,000 — out of a population of 16 million), the working class were left out in the cold. Instead of democracy — a dirty word amongst the upper classes — the Whigs brought in the Irish Coercion Act and the New Poor Law, suppressed working class newspapers with the Stamp Act, and transported the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

The first effort to restart the campaign for democracy was launched by the London Working Mens Association, [LWMA] led by Francis Place and William Lovett. The 'moderate' LWMA was however, infused with Malthusian ideas that poverty was caused by overpopulation. Malthus and the political economists of the day supported the establishment of workhouses under the 1834 Poor Law. This measure, they argued, would force the unemployed to either submit to whatever conditions were on offer or emigrate.

The LMWA wanted to continue in alliance with the middle-class for further 'moderate' Parliamentary reforms. But opposed to these 'Moral Force' advocates was the 'Physical Force' tendency, with leaders such as Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien and George Julian Harney. Harney grew up Bermondsey, went to sea as a cabin boy, and then returned to London, where in 1833 he started working as a 'runner' for O'Brien's *Poor Mans Guardian*. Harney's distribution of this illegal paper cost him two terms of imprisonment before his 19th birthday. But by 1837, young Harney was in the leadership of the London Democratic Association, [DA] which by 1839 had a membership of 3000. The DA declared:

"We frankly state, that we consider the everlasting preaching of 'moral force', as opposed to 'physical force' to be downright humbug... We are resolved to be no longer slaves! We are determined to free our father-land, peaceably if we can — forcibly if we must!"

Harney was influenced by Thomas Spence, who, as far back as the 1770s, had called for the expropriation of the landowning aristocracy in favour of the common ownership of the land. Harney was also steeped in the ideas of

French Revolution and studied O'Brien's translation of Buonarroti's *History of Babeuf's Conspiracy For Equality*, a work which introduced the terms "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat" into the political vocabulary of the DA. Like the *Babouvistes*, the DA declared that the:

"aim of the Revolution is to destroy inequality and re-establish common happiness: Social equality means the mountains of wealth must be pulled down, and the valleys of want filled up."

For the DA, the achievement of the five points of the Peoples Charter (secret ballot, universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, payment of MPs and equal voting districts) was to be more than an end in itself. It was to bring about the repeal of the Poor Law, the "abridgement of the hours of labour", "the total abolition of child labour", and total freedom of the press.

A demand for female suffrage was **not** included, despite the fact that women had already come to the fore in the campaign against the Poor Law and the new workhouses, referred as "Whig Bastilles". William Lovett, who, drafted the People's Charter in 1838, had, to his great credit, included a clause for the extension of the franchise to women, but this was removed in the face of arguments that it would hold up the enfranchisement of men.

Nevertheless, the Female Chartist organisations sprang up throughout the country in the late 1830s. The women argued that democracy under Male Suffrage would, once established, need a new generation imbued with democratic ideas by a Chartist mothers as well as fathers. To impart such knowledge to their children, women would have to possess it themselves; and to get it they would need the same access as men to the political education that the movement provided. But, although a good number of male Chartists leaders (including Harney and O'Brien) favoured equal involvement by women in the movement, there was never any serious move to reverse the 1838 decision.

By summer 1838, a national movement was coming together for a petition to Parliament for the Charter. Petitions however, were nothing new; something more was needed; so various organisations called for a National Convention elected by mass assemblies to back up the agitation. This move was supported by the LWMA and its 'moral force' allies in the Birmingham Political Union, who believed that riding any forthcoming storm was the best way of keeping the revolutionaries in hand.

The 'physical forciers', for their part, wanted the Convention to be a People's Parliament; a body capable of actually challenging and if necessary replacing the sham parliament of Old Corruption. Harney wanted the Democratic Association to act as the Jacobins had done in the French National Convention of 1791 — pushing the struggle ever forwards and guarding against back-sliding and compromise.

The masses mobilised to elect their true representatives: 200,000 in Glasgow (marching behind the old banner of the Covenanters); 80,000 in Newcastle; 250,000 at Peeps Green, W Yorkshire; 200,000 at Birmingham; 50,000 at Manchester and 30,000 in London. Chartist workers marched at night: silently, carrying torches, waving pikes and firing the occasional musket. Respectable society was terrified. General Sir Charles Napier, reading the intelligence reports, entered into his diary,

"These poor devils are inclined to rise, and if they do what horrid bloodshed."

Although Lovett and co blocked DA supporters from getting elected as London delegates to the Convention, Harney stood at the mass meetings in Derby, Norwich and Newcastle, and with the support of Fergus O'Connor's paper, the *Northern Star*, was elected at all three. The petition was due to be presented to Parliament in May 1839. The question was, if it was rejected, as everyone knew it would be, what next? The DA believed that it was in the Metropolis "that the battle should be fought," and that the North could energise London, either by direct intervention, or leading by example. The Whig Government was in crisis.

Harney argued that in the event of the dissolution of Parliament before the Charter could be presented, the people should,

"take their affairs into their own hands... let the people of each county, city, and borough, wherever democracy hath reared its head" set about electing delegates, "furnished with a body-guard of sturdy sans-culottes" organised and varying in "according to the strength of the democracy in the district".
"What army", he asked, "could resist a million of armed men? ...within a week not a despot's breath would pollute the air of England."

Napier's preparations envisaged street fighting in Manchester and a Chartist march on London from the North. As repression began to mount against the agitators, Harney argued in the Convention for a move to Manchester, where it would have the support of,

"250,000 men who would be determined to defend their liberties".

He expected the Government to:

"commence the attack and they should be in a situation to meet the attack".

Harney's comrades in the *Northern Liberator*, writing on the 'Coming Revolution,' claimed that the Chartists could field a force of half a million. The Government fell before Parliament could be petitioned as planned and a Royal Proclamation was issued to establish armed associations of the upper classes. The Convention adjourned in May and moved to Birmingham, where Harney addressed a 50,000 crowd:

"if the government began the reign of terror, the people would end it... with the musket and the pike."

The same day in Newcastle, Chartists fought a pitched battle with Police. Harney's *London Democrat* took up the implications of the slogan; 'Peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must', commenting,

"It is vague – it can mean anything or nothing – The only matter worthy of the attention of the people is how, when, where force is to be acted upon".

On the rejection of the petition there was left only one feasible alternative, the 'only one of the plans here proposed, which appears to me to be at all feasible, is the national holiday', i.e. a general strike.

Harney has been criticised by historians for thinking in terms of 'street fighting and barricades, of *sans-culottes* rather than industrial workers in factories and mines', yet he, more than anyone, articulated the revolutionary **logic** of the general strike. With wages spent, the dynamic of hunger would drive workers to 'take by force the food from those who possessed it.' If a clash did not come from repression it would arise from necessity.

The new Parliament rejected the Charter on July 12th 1839. The Convention voted to call the general strike for 12th August, but then called it off to 'leave the holiday to the people themselves.' Against the moderates, Harney argued to bring forth the strike to the 5th August, and place the workers on a 'collision with their tyrants'.

"This movement", he argued, "could not fail, unless through the misconduct of their leaders."

His was no lone voice: the Hull Democratic Association had just promised that the miners would fight if need be to obtain the Charter and deliver the general strike; and on 30th July, the 'Battle of the Forth' broke out at Newcastle when six thousand Chartists struggled with troops and police. On the 3rd of August the Convention met again and abandoned the strike completely, instead calling for three days of public demonstrations.

By this time Harney had decided that anything short of a nationally-organised revolution was doomed to failure. But for some it was too late for further debate. Conspiracies had been hatched involving the Polish exile, Major Beniowski, who had written articles on military tactics for the *London Democrat*. In Newport, Wales in November 1839 Chartists rose in armed insurrection, only to be quickly and bloodily suppressed. Bradford and Sheffield followed in January 1840 with similar results.

Despite the repression and the betrayals, the movement continued to organise. In May 1842, the House of Commons rejected the Chartists' Second Petition and in August cotton spinners in Lancashire struck and called for a general strike for the Charter. The Manchester Chartist leadership, after some hesitation, decided to support the strike, fearing it might spin out of their control and the action spread out to the Midlands, Wales, Yorkshire and Scotland. The month-long strike ended when troops moved into areas of unrest.

After this defeat, the Chartists shifted energies to promoting O'Connor's Land Plan, a back-to-the-land scheme, financed by subscriptions, to create a Chartist 'yeomanry' on agricultural settlements, in which families — selected by lottery — would get a two-acre allotments. Harney, as a 'Spencean' advocate of land nationalisation, never bought the idea. But in 1844, when O'Connor moved the office of the Northern Star from Leeds to London, he appointed Harney as editor. Harney threw the paper's columns open to the German, Polish, Italian and French revolutionaries in the London *émigré* community and founded a new international organisation named the Fraternal Democrats.

At an international rally for the new organisation, Harney denounced chauvinism and xenophobia which was all too often manifested in the speeches of English radicals (such as William Cobbett and O'Connor); and to great cheers Harney declared:

"we repudiate the word 'foreigner' — it shall not exist in our democratic vocabulary."

At the founding banquet of the Democrats even the Mohammedan world was represented by a 'Democratic Turk', who entertained them with music all night.

On the first anniversary of the founding of the Fraternal Democrats on September 21 1846, Harney outlined the organisation's program, which was adopted in full:

"We renounce, repudiate, and condemn all hereditary inequalities and distinctions of caste; we declare that the earth with all its natural productions is the common property of all; we declare that the present state of society which permits idlers and schemers to monopolise the fruits of the earth, and the productions of industry, and compels the working class to labour for inadequate rewards, and even condemns them to social slavery, destitution and degradation, is essentially unjust."

In November 1847, Karl Marx, representing the Brussels-based Association Democratique, came to London to attend a secret congress of the Communist League. Marx also attended a meeting of the Fraternal Democrats called to commemorate the 1830 Polish Uprising. The Chartists, he said, were the 'real democrats' of England, and if successful, they would be 'hailed as the saviours of the whole human race'.

The Fraternal Democrats then debated and backed Marx's proposal to convene an international congress in Brussels of workers, independent of the middle-class, scheduled for September 1848. Owing to unforeseen circumstances however, the congress never took place. The news boards announcing the February 1848 Revolution in France sent Harney running through Soho 'like a bedlamite' to tell his exile comrades. Harney and fellow Fraternal Democrat, Ernst Jones were soon in Paris as guests of the

revolutionary government. Harney playfully sat on the emptied throne of Louis Philippe, and looked forward to performing a similar ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

When the Chartists called for a mass mobilization at Kennington Common on April 10th 1848 to present the Third Petition to Parliament, the government armed the middle-classes *en masse* as special constables. With perhaps 100,000 marchers assembling, O'Connor gave in to police threats to prevent the marchers crossing the river to Westminster, though he was allowed to send a carriage to deliver the petition. Torrential rain helped to ensure an orderly retreat and dispersal amid angry shouts of "No More Petitions!"

Some physical forcers regrouped with the Irish radicals and began to make plans for insurrection and London Chartists began drilling on the streets of Clerkenwell. Uprisings broke out in the North, but were quickly put down by troops and police. There were plans for a 'putsch' in London, but they were 'ripened' by government provocateurs who planted arms at meeting places. One of those hauled in for conspiracy was the taylor, William Cuffay, the son of a slave and a white woman. Cuffay was born in 1788 on a ship *en route* from St. Kitts to Chatham. Cuffay, an executive member of the National Charter Association, was prosecuted under the new Crown and Government Security Act and sentenced to deportation for life to Australia in the resulting show trial.

In Cuffay's speech from the dock, he found common cause with John Mitchell, a revolutionary arrested in Ireland in May 1848 during preparations for a peasant uprising, and transported within days:

"This new Act of Parliament is disgraceful, and I am proud to be the first victim of it, after the glorious Mitchell."

Ernst Jones fell victim to a new Gagging Act, brought in to suppress 'seditious' speeches, when he was arrested in June 1848 and sentenced to two years imprisonment. Forty years after the events, Harney wrote that, compared with the events of the Chartist Convention in 1838-39, when the masses were energized and insurrection was 'in the air', Kennington in 1848 had been a 'fiasco'.

Both Jones and Harney highlighted the movement's lack of effectiveness in two key areas: organisation and 'social propaganda'. The growth of the new railway and telegraph systems had, as Jones pointed out, strengthened the governments ability to crush insurrection, but it had 'aided democracy' by enabling its principles to spread.

Indeed, the communications revolution, along with hard developments in printing technology had brought about a 'national' mass media in its truly modern form; and despite the 1848 defeat, the boom in print and publishing gave the Chartists the opportunity to get in on the act. Harney, breaking with

O'Connor, launched, in 1849, the monthly *Democratic Review* as the voice of the Fraternal Democrats, and in 1850, the weekly *Red Republican*.

Harney's efforts to restart Chartism as an avowed socialist working class movement involved Marx and Engels as well as the remarkable feminist writer, Helen Macfarlane, who translated the *Communist Manifesto* for serialisation in the *Red Republican*. But the revival was not to be. In the industrial boom-time of the 1850s, bourgeoisie rule was consolidated. The opportunity for Revolution had been missed and would not come again for 70 years.

Christopher Ford and David Black
editors of Hobgoblin magazine:

address: BM 3514,

London WC1N 3XX;

email: thehobgobl@aol.com

Suffrage... A Struggle for Equal Rights

Although you would never have known from the newspapers and media the year 2003 marked the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of **Women's Social and Political Union**, or the Suffragettes as they are more commonly known. In the following article, Carol Farmer takes a look at the conditions which led to their establishment, their many achievements and their legacy. It was in the supercharged political atmosphere of revolution and debate that Tom Paine first published his book, 'The Rights of Man', in 1791, in which he attacked hereditary government and argued for equal political rights. The following year, Mary Wollstonecraft published her book 'Vindication of the Rights of Women', a corner stone for the feminist and suffragist movements which were to follow.

The issue of voting rights was on the parliamentary agenda many times in subsequent years. **The Reform Act** of 1832 had begun the process of increasing the number of those allowed to vote in elections. Still, only one in seven males now had the vote, though significant in the passing of the bill was the abolition of the rotten boroughs in which the total number of electors could be counted on one hand.

There followed, in fairly slow succession, a series of Acts which increased the rights of the common man to partake in the decision making process of Government. The **2nd Reform Act** (1867), extended the right to vote to more working class males; **The Ballot Act** (1872), introduced the secret ballot; **The Corrupt Practices Act** (1883), specified how much money each candidate was allowed to spend during an election; **The 3rd Reform Act**, (1884) extended voting rights to include men in rural areas; and the **Redistribution Act** (1885) specified the ratio of seats to the population.

It was not however until some 85 years after the passing of the 1st Reform Act, that legislation was finally passed allowing women, for the first time, to take an active role in the selection of their Government (**The Qualification of Women Act**, 1917).

With the introduction of the **Representation of the People Act** the following year, limited voting rights for women were introduced onto the statute books: the battle was hard fought, the war not yet won, but suffrage had finally achieved the first step on the ladder toward political equality.

(**The Sex Disqualification Removal Act**, which made it illegal to exclude women from jobs on account of their sex, was introduced in 1919, and the **Equal Franchise Act**, giving women the vote on the same terms as men, was finally passed in 1928. It was not to be until almost 50 years later that legislation

was introduced making it illegal to discriminate against a woman because of her sex, (**Sex Discrimination Act** 1976) and later still, the **Equal Pay Act** made it law that women working in the same or similar job to a man should be paid an equal wage.

Suffrage, the campaign for the right to vote, was born out of the social, industrial and political upheaval of the latter part of the 19th century. The need for contraception and contraceptive advice for working class women, the appalling working conditions endured by young girls and women in all fields of work, the existence and effects of the Poor Laws and the Workhouse, the slow but relentless march toward social reform and the rise of the burgeoning trade union movement and the formation of the Labour Party all added fuel to the fire of the movement to gain the right for women to vote on equal terms with men.

Millicent Fawcett founded the **National Union of Women's Suffrage Society** in 1897, bringing together under one umbrella the various suffrage groups throughout the country. The aim of the NUWSS was the pursuance of the right to vote by peaceful means (**the Suffragists**), with logical and cohesive argument. It was argued that women could hold positions of responsibility, could be employers and managers, could pay taxes, and were subject to laws they had no part in making, but they were still not allowed to vote.

Progress was slow, however, and on October 10th 1903, the **Women's Social and Political Union** was founded, with an exclusively female membership. Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughters Christabel and Sylvia together with others of similar mind, were not prepared to wait for the advances that logical argument alone might bring. They wanted change, and they were not afraid to use aggression to achieve their aims.

Two years after the founding of the **Suffragettes**, as the Union became known, two leading members of the group were forcibly ejected from a political meeting in Manchester, at which Winston Churchill and Sir Edward Grey were speakers, after they interrupted the meeting with calls for votes for women, constant heckling and finally by assaulting the speakers. Both women were arrested, but refused to pay the fines imposed, preferring a prison sentence, drawing attention to the injustices of the time.

This was the start of a long campaign during which many more meetings were disrupted, and a good many Suffragettes hurt. The Suffragettes refused to bow to violence, but were unafraid to employ it. The Church of England voiced it's opposition to the concept of suffrage, so the Suffragettes burned down churches; they attacked the heart of the city [of London] by breaking windows in Oxford street; politicians were subject to physical attack, and their homes fire bombed and vandalized;

Suffragettes chained themselves to Buckingham Palace because the Royal

Family spoke out against the movement; golf courses were vandalised, and the business life of the capital city disrupted when telephone lines were severed and letters destroyed when chemicals were poured inside post boxes. The campaign sought to hurt influential men where it would do the most damage, and the cost to both business and private individuals mounted steadily.

The official answer was to arrest and imprison the perpetrators in an attempt to divide and weaken the movement. Women were given sentences ranging from a few days to many months, depending on the severity of the 'crime'.

In July, 1909, an imprisoned suffragette, Marion Dunlop, refused to eat. The Government took fright at the idea of possibly creating a martyr to the cause, and she was released. Other imprisoned suffragettes adopted the same strategy, but rather than be seen to be capitulating, the decision was taken to force-feed those on hunger strike. Many suffragettes died following a period of incarceration, probably as a result of the horrific process of enforced nourishment that took place daily in the prisons.

By 1913, the campaign of violence and the destruction of both private and public property had escalated to new heights. Suffragettes were still being arrested, still being imprisoned, still going on hunger strike and still being force fed by the authorities. But despite the public condemnation of the acts of destruction perpetrated, public opinion was rising against the barbarism of forced feeding. The Government were determined that none of these women should be allowed to become martyrs, but were forced to rethink their strategy.

The **Prisoners Temporary Discharge of Ill Health Act** allowed for prisoners, weakened and made ill by self imposed starvation, to be released from prison for just long enough for them to be nursed back to health. The ones who had been released were in no fit state to join the struggle again, and once they were deemed fit, they were rearrested, imprisoned to complete their sentences and the whole process began again. If the prisoner died after being released this saved the Government any embarrassment.

From the point of view of the Government of the day, this was an effective way to combat the problems of a hunger strike without causing a national outrage, or capitulating to the demands of the suffragette movement. Because of the way in which it was operated, the legislation became known as the **Cat and Mouse Act**.

The effect of the Act and its consequences only served to make the Suffragettes all the more determined and all the more extreme. In June of 1913, Emily Wilding Davison, a staunch campaigner and activist in the WSPU, threw herself beneath the King's horse, as it took part in the Derby of that year. She was killed, giving the movement its first martyr. Unfortunately, those campaigning against the right for women to vote, notably the **National Anti-Suffrage League**, used the incident against the movement, citing it as

an example of the hysteria to which women were subject, and suggesting that women were too irrational to be allowed the vote

The arson campaign continued to gain momentum. The house of David Lloyd George was partly blown up in early 1913, and despite the punitive measures of the Cat & Mouse Act, there was no let up in the violence and disruption. But in August 1914, Britain was plunged into World War One. The immediate effect on the WSPU was for Emmeline Pankhurst to instruct Suffragettes to end all hostilities and offer their full support to the war effort. She successfully negotiated the release of all Suffragettes from prison at this time.

The NUWSS announced it's intention to suspend all political activity until the war was over, but the **Women's Freedom League**, formed by those suffragists who had left the WSPU when the campaign of violence had begun, disagreed with the notion of a suspension of political campaigning, and continued their campaign to secure votes for women throughout the term of the war.

The war itself was to have a profound effect on the lot of women. Men were leaving in droves to fight at the front. They left behind jobs which needed to be done. Women, whose chief employment prior to the onset of war had been in service, were now enlisted into all manner of profession, in order to keep the country running smoothly. They became bus-conductor's, ticket-collector's, post-women, bank clerk's, driver's, farm-labourer's and munitions maker. Industries that had previously excluded women now welcomed them.

As the War progressed, the vital part that women were playing was grudgingly acknowledged. It became more and more obvious that the notion that women were hysterical beings, subject to flights of fancy was a total misrepresentation. Women not only held down what had been seen to be 'men's' jobs, but continued to run homes and bring up children as well.

The dissenters were swept aside, and in 1918, after so many years of struggle, violence and debate, the **Representation of the People Act** was passed, granting voting rights to women over the age of 30. It was not to be until 10 years later, that women were given voting rights from 21 on the same terms as men, with the passing of the **Equal Franchise Act**. The struggle was at last over... women had finally won equal rights in the political arena. The Suffragettes and Suffragists were victorious.

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The 1914 - 1939 Burston School Strike



Annie and Tom Higdon

Burston is a small and scattered hamlet in south Norfolk, yet it was here that two of the most remarkable people of the last century waged a struggle, lasting over 25 years, against injustice.

Tom and Kitty Higdon arrived in the village in January 1911 to begin teaching at the local school, after being dismissed from their previous post at another Norfolk village, Wood Dalling. This had been the result of a vicious victimisation campaign against the pair, waged against them by the local rector, school managers, landowners and farmers.

The causes of this consisted of Tom Higdon's work over nearly a decade in organising the farm workers of the county into union branches, the result of which was improved wages and conditions, not to mention much greater self-respect amongst farm workers. This resulted in the farm workers seeking political representation and they captured, for the first time, the local Parish Council, where they proceeded to spend money on improving and carrying out long overdue repairs on local tenants' cottages. Tom Higdon was the chair of the Parish Council.

At the same time Mrs Higdon, the Headmistress, waged a highly successful campaign to force the Norfolk Education Committee into improving conditions at the school, and it was virtually re-built at a cost of £400 to £500. This made the school a much better place for local children to be educated in. It prospered and Government inspectors approved it.

The Higdon's had refused to conform to the expected norms of behaviour for teachers in rural areas at that time, which was to be respectful to the point of subservience. They stood in awe of no one and considered no one their 'better' by reason merely of birth and station.

All of this was too much and there were regular conflicts between the Higdon's and the managers of Wood Dalling School. In 1910 the farmer-chairman of the school managers complained to the Norfolk Education Committee that Mrs Higdon had called him and another farmer-manager 'liars' at managers' meeting. There were a number of witnesses to prove otherwise, but an enquiry was held and the Higdon's were sacked. As it subsequently transpired there was uproar amongst local villagers and a petition signed by nearly every adult was duly drawn up. It was probably this which led to the Education Committee deciding to transfer them to the Council School at Burston, where they hoped no doubt not to hear about them again. The Education Committee were to be disappointed.

When he arrived in Burston there was no local Agricultural Labourers' Union branch. Tom Higdon quickly rectified this. His urging for workers to take matters into their own hands by capturing political power on Parish, District and County Councils again bore fruit when he led the labourers in a takeover of the Parish Council. They improved footpaths and bridges.

Mrs Higdon went on speaking her mind at managers' meetings. The local vicar, who served on the committee of school managers, was a fierce opponent. He expected deference from his parishioners. The Higdon's would not attend his Chapel.

Early in 1914, the vicar, by now chairman of the managers, accused Mrs Higdon of unjustly caning two Barnardo's children at the school. This was vigorously denied and easily proved to be untrue. However, another inquiry by Norfolk education committee was organised. Whilst the charges remained unproven other matters were introduced and the Higdon's were, once again, dismissed.

This time neither the parents nor the children would accept the situation. A Mr George Durbridge, an avowed Tory, helped organise a meeting on Burston Common on March 31st 1914. He was convinced a great injustice had occurred. The mass meeting unanimously agreed that 'parents not to send their children to school before justice was done'. This was just as well, because the children themselves had already organised their own meeting and without seeking their parents' approval had agreed not to go in to the school on April 1st. No fools them!

The following morning, the children gathered together and marched up to the school gates. Some of the school managers and the police were standing there and threw open the gates. The children marched past them singing:-

*"Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer
The prize more than all to an Englishman dear:
'Tis to honour we call you, not press you like slaves
For who are so free as the sons of the waves?"*

The Higdons were evicted from the school, but continued teaching in the open air on the village green, in the flowery lanes, and in a tiny vacant cottage, in coalsheds and anywhere space could be found to do so. 'A Strike School' had now been set up, in direct competition with the council school, the latter having replaced the Higdons with two new members of staff.

Meanwhile, in order to force the parents into making sure their children returned to the council school, fines were imposed on them. At first these were relatively small, totalling £2 and 5 shillings [£2.25 in today's currency] on April 7th, but rose to £8 later the same month. Some parents had wanted to refuse to pay, and to go to jail. However, collections amongst supporters at rallies on the village green raised the money, and fearing they would inflame the situation further the council stopped issuing summonses. In the early days of the dispute up to 1,500 people are reported to have assembled on the village green.

This was not the end of the matter though, schoolboys were to be assaulted by the local policeman and the parson, and these were brutal attacks in which sticks were used. The policeman did not charge or prosecute himself! Others also faced victimisation; the caretaker at the council school was threatened with dismissal for refusing to send his children there. Fortunately, the threat was not carried out. The vicar attempted to evict some of his tenants who were supporting the strike.

Official Inspectors were sent to visit the strike school, which by this time was more 'permanently based' in the Old Carpenter's Shop. In general, they approved of the conditions in which the children were being taught and the quality of education being received. It is probably just as well, because the parents and children were determined to support the strike. Demands for re-instatement, and the re-establishment of the Principles of Freedom and Justice continued to be proclaimed.

Desperate attempts by opponents to get soldiers, recruiting locally, into harassing the Higdons turned into a farce when the soldiers met them and refused to engage in any campaign against them.

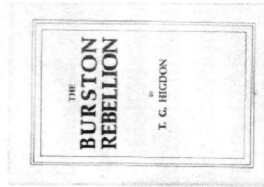
The Agricultural Labourers' Union and the National Union of Railwaymen rallied to the Higdons' cause and so too, eventually, did the National Union of Teachers, who provided financial support, back-dated to the time of their dismissal. Meetings were held over a wide area of Norfolk by the Labourers' Union and in London by the NUR. Teachers and children appeared at all of them. Funds were raised from all over country. Money even came from abroad,

a remarkable achievement considering there was a World War going on. In 1917 a new school was built on the edge of Burston Green and opened with great enthusiasm. There were 50 pupils; the council school had less than half the number. The Strike School prospered over the next ten years. In addition to the normal subjects, the Higdons brought new and invigorating ideas to the children, teaching them about Christian Socialism, Internationalism and the meaning of trade unionism. Children were taken to trade union meetings as part of their education.

The Strike School was also used to host meetings on a whole range of political issues of the day, including Land Reform. The School only closed when Tom Higdon died in 1939, his wife lived on until 1946 and the two are buried side by side in the churchyard of the village they served so well.

Meanwhile, the Strike School still stands on Burston village school. It remains a symbol of working class people's struggles against authority and injustice and, it must also be said, for the rights of children to be properly educated by teachers they respect and love.

*By John Breen (GPMU member, sacked Wapping Striker)
and Mark Metcalf*



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FASCISTS AND POLICE ROUTED

Cable Street, October 4th 1936 – an eye witness account told for the first time

'I was at the Battle of Cable Street. In my early twenties, I was then secretary of the recently formed Southgate branch of the Communist Party in North London.

On that warm October Sunday afternoon, October 4 1936, we had organised a party of (now over sixty years later, I put it at) about forty, (probably it was fewer) people. They were members and sympathisers who we had mobilised in the three or four days before.

We had set out by bus and tube to oppose the proposed march of Sir Oswald Mosley and his several thousand Blackshirts through the East End of London. As we arrived at the tube station in Aldgate we had no idea of what had been happening in the surrounding streets during the hours before.

We came to the tube entrance, together with hundreds of people who had been on the same train. There we stopped.

The pavements were packed, the whole street – Aldgate High Street – was packed solid. Crowds were everywhere as far as we could see. It was impossible to make any progress. Parked in the middle of the street, towering over the crowds was a line of tramcars – marooned and empty. They could not have moved, even if anyone had wanted to move them.

The rumour went that the first tram in the line had been deliberately driven to the point by an anti-fascist tram driver, placed there to form a barricade against the fascists.

As we stood blocked from moving on there came the sound of shattering glass. One of the big plate glass windows of the store at Gardiners Corner was smashed in. Rumour said that a policeman had been thrown through it, but it was probably just a victim to the sheer pressure of the crowds. There was not a single policeman in sight. We did not see one for hours.

The thousands of police, 10,000 according to reports, were busy down the road where they had been battling to force a way through for the Mosleyites.

As I said, I was at the Battle of Cable Street. But that was not literally true. My comrades and I never had a chance to get within a mile of Cable Street on that afternoon. In between us and Cable Street was a solid mass of people. Estimates afterwards said there was anything up to half a million people out on the streets of the East End that day. But no one could possibly have counted them.

So we stood there, packed like sardines, for an hour or so while all sorts of rumours and tales floated through the crowds. No one could say exactly what was happening. But we gathered that the first protesters had been up early in the day and had been preparing a reception for both the police and the fascists long before either had arrived.

The fascists were assembling by the Royal Mint and police started to make baton charges, both foot and mounted, to try to clear a way for them to escort a march. They did not succeed. A barricade started to go up. A lorry was overturned, furniture was piled up, paving stones and a builders yard helped to complete the barrier. The police managed to clear the first, but found a second behind it and then a third. Marbles were thrown under the hooves of the police horses; volleys of bricks met every baton charge.

At last the Metropolitan Police chief, who had been directing operations, told Sir Oswald it would be impossible for him to have his march through the East End to his proposed rally in Victoria Park. The uniformed Blackshirts formed up and marched. But they marched west not east. They went through the deserted City of London and ended up on the Embankment, where they just dispersed – defeated.

Back in Stepney and the East End there was almost unbelievable delight. We had won. The fascists had been defeated and humiliated. The police too and the authorities had been proved unable to protect them.

Hastily a victory march had been organised to follow the route from Cable Street to Victoria Park where Mosley had planned to address his army. Hundreds joined in. Thousands stood on the pavements and in the roads, clapping and cheering as we marched on. In those days we marched, often in ranks of fours, under the leadership of the ex-servicemen of the not so far away World War I. We marched and we sang.

We sang the traditional working class marching songs and anthems: the Internationale ("Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers"); the Italian revolutionary *Bandar Rossa* ("Avanti popoli, alla riscossa", "Forward ye workers, into the struggle", "Fling to the breezes the scarlet banner"); the Berlin workers' song *Rote Wedding* ("Left, left .. the workers are marching again"); the Polish *Varshavianka*, and the old Wobbly song "Solidarity forever", with the appropriate words: "We'll hang Oswald Mosley on a sour apple tree ... when the red revolution comes".

Not all the bystanders clapped and cheered. At a few of the street corners in Bethnal Green and Hackney on the way – a very few – there were knots of those who jeered and spat and stretched out their right arms in salute to their leader. Mosley had his roots in the East End, not so much in the working class but in those intermediate groups, the lower, lower, middle class of costermongers, street traders, market stallmen, small shopkeepers, bookies'

runners and those living by their wits – the people one sees today pictured on EastEnders – those who Marx described as the lumpen proletariat. They jeered us and, strangely enough, no one retaliated – except with words.

Things moved too fast. We were marching to a victory assembly in – appropriately – Victoria Park. We listened to the speeches, listened to the stories of those who had been in the front line, at the barricades, and then went home.

I was at the Battle of Cable Street but not in the front line – that was to come later in North Africa and in Italy.

Two myths have grown up around the event, which of course was a milestone in the long history of working class struggle. One is that the opposition to the Mosley fascists was almost entirely Jewish. The other is that the “battle” was between the protesters and the Blackshirts. It was not – it was a battle with the police.

There was a quarter to half a million people in the East End streets that Sunday. Many of them were Jews because, as Mosley knew and had campaigned for some years and so designed his provocative action on anti-Semitic propaganda, Stepney and Whitechapel had at that time the largest Jewish community in Britain. But it was numbered in tens, not hundreds, of thousands. The packed crowds that day consisted of many thousands of non-Jewish Londoners.

As far as the religious leaders of the Jewish community were concerned, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, their top authority, made special calls the previous week opposing any physical confrontation with the Mosleyites, urging their congregation to stay indoors. They pursued the same fatal policy that the Jewish leaders in Germany had pursued only four or five years before when faced with the brownshirts of Hitler. We know where that led.

But their followers had more sense. They came out in their thousands. The opposition in the East End itself was organised largely by the grass roots Jewish organisations, the workers’ circles, the furniture and garment workers’ trades unions, by the shops and the workshops.

It was also organised, on almost a military scale, in the last few days by the Communists who had a great deal of influence and a vigorous membership in the area. At that time the Communist Party in Britain was a party with strong roots in the trade unions, in many workplaces and among the unemployed. A significant section of the cultural and intellectual classes also were members or sympathisers of the Party. Writers, artists, actors, musicians and scientists contributed.

Only a month before, the London District of the Party had organised a pageant march from the Embankment to Hyde Park in celebration of English radical and working class history. It was choreographed by leading actors and stage

producers, with floats depicting the Peasants’ Revolt and on to the Chartists and the General Strike. At the rally in the park a thousand new members were recruited to the party.

The protest at Cable Street was not just an East End event. Anti-fascists came from all over London and nearby. It should be remembered this was a time when few people had cars, or the money to travel long distances by rail or by coach. Cable Street was an all-London event. No coach parties or hired trains came from Aberdeen, Plymouth, Manchester or Birmingham.

The Mosleyites had announced their provocative rally on the Saturday so that there was almost less than a week to mobilise. There had been no details of assembly times or routes. This was also a time when few people had telephones or access to them, except by public call boxes. There was no TV. Radio was still almost a novelty.

So our communications were through knocks on doors, notes through letter boxes, the post, meetings in the street, or at work, and by word of mouth. That is what we did. That is what people did all over the capital. In those days our main source of information was the newspapers. There was not only the Daily Worker, with a circulation of some 40,000 and a readership of many more. There was also the Daily Herald, the organ of the TUC and the mouthpiece of the Labour Party, which went into a million homes, plus the radical Liberal News Chronicle with several hundreds of thousands. On Sunday there was the left wing Reynold’s News, run by the Co-operative Party.

In London itself there were three evening papers, each producing four or five editions a day from early morning on. The Evening News was the stablemate of the right wing, fascist-supporting Daily Mail; the Evening Standard was linked with the chauvinist Tory Daily Express and there was also the radical Star. Each had circulations of hundreds of thousands.

The Daily Worker acted as the main organiser for the protests centrally. By midweek we were getting plenty of information and so were its thousands of readers, especially in the factories and workplaces such as the bus garages and the rail depots. This paper told us of the approaches to the Home Office by mayors of the East London boroughs, of petitions, one of around 100,000, seeking for a ban on the march or a change of route.

It also told of the ostrich-like attitude of the Jewish authorities and the same stance of the Labour Party, locally and nationally. “Keep away” had been the theme of a leading article in the Daily Herald, echoing the words of Mr George Lansbury, recently leader of the Labour Party and himself an MP for an East End constituency. The Daily Worker printed a special supplement calling for “the biggest rally against fascism that has yet been seen in Britain”.

On the Sunday morning we took this round the streets of the small, council

estates in Southgate. We sold them at almost every other house. Whether we had leaflets I do not recall. I doubt it. The local branch would not have had enough cash to produce them. Our main propaganda medium then was by chalking slogans on walls and in the roads. There was much less traffic in those days. I do remember we chalked thoroughly all the entrances to the great Standard Telephones cable factory in New Southgate where 10,000 went to work everyday.

Southgate, Palmers Green, Winchmore Hill was a very middle class suburb which its council aimed to rival Ealing as the "Queen of the London Suburbs". It even had its 'millionaires' row'. There were small areas of working class homes in Bowes Park and New Southgate but Toryism was dominant. For many years the borough shared the distinction, with Canterbury, of being the only town in England without a single Labour councillor on their council. There was a Labour Party with a few left-wingers and a 50 strong Labour League of Youth which had its own premises and with which we in the Communist Party had good relations. A bunch of them came with us to Cable Street. So did busmen from the garages at Palmers Green, Muswell Hill and Potters Bar, where we had influence and small groups. In all we managed to mobilise a respectable contingent. That kind of mobilisation was going on all over London in the handful of days before the event.

1936 had already been a year of pregnant events. The possibility, the probability, of a second world war was gathering momentum every day. Mussolini had conquered and occupied Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Hitler, with Germany firmly under his thumb, and socialists and communists and trade unionists executed or in concentration camps, had marched into the Rhineland (occupied by the British and French after the First World War) and was threatening Czechoslovakia and Poland. General Franco had begun his rebellion against the Spanish republican government. Japan was spreading its invasion and conquest of Manchuria into the rest of China. Almost the only bright spot on the horizon was, in our minds, the coming to power of the Popular Front government of socialists and liberals, supported by communists, in France.

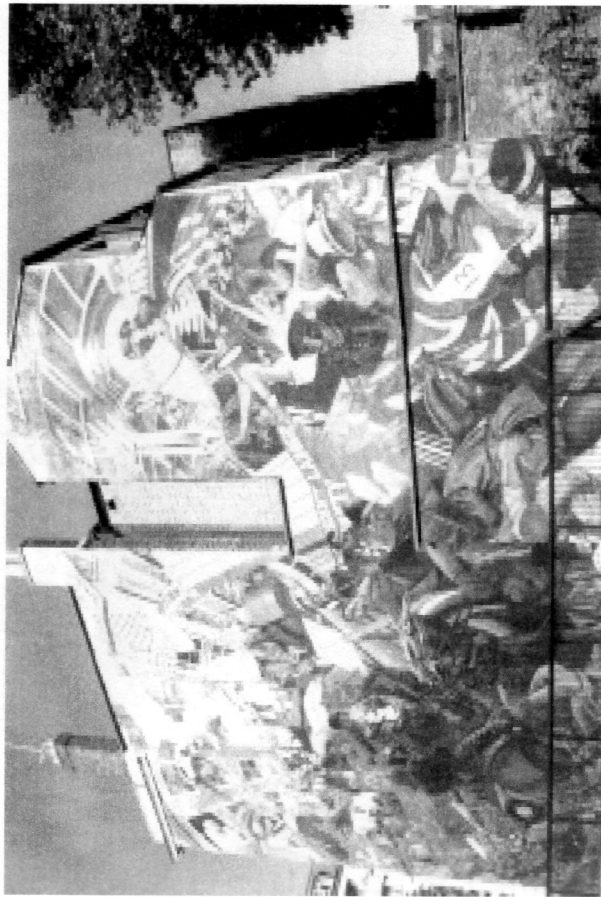
In Britain the working class movement was still convalescing from the effects of the General Strike of 1926, and of the great economic crisis of 1929 and the thirties, which had led to the split in the Labour Party and the 'treachery' of Ramsay MacDonald and the last Labour government. Non-unionism was rife and the anti-working class actions of the National Tory government were vicious against the unemployed and their families. That was the world in which we lived, a very different one from that which faces us today. There was a feeling in the air that change was coming and some of us were arrogant enough, or naïve enough, to believe we could influence that movement toward change.

So the victory at Cable Street was a great lift up. It was certainly an important signpost along the road of declining Mosleyite influence in the East End and in Britain.

The Jews in 1936 were one of the ethnic minorities in the country. Black or brown faces were hardly ever to be seen. Apart from the Irish, and the Greek Cypriots in North London, there were no large communities for the fascists to target to stir up racism.

We were given positive proof that it was possible to rouse the masses, despite the opposition and wet blanketing of the Labour Party, the 'respectable' 'liberal', authorities and organisations. It showed what organisation could do even in the most difficult of circumstances. The do-nothings, the stay-at-homes, the heads-in-the sand were quite clearly shown up to be empty windbags. 'Twas a famous history."

Reg Weston – Higham resident and life-time NUJ member



A Community Mural in Cable Street stands as a commemoration of a victory over fascism in 1936

The 1984-85 Coal Miners Strike

From first entering office in 1979 the avowed intention of the Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was to break the power of the Trade Unions. A carefully prepared strategy targeted steel workers, civil servants and miners. The miners were public enemy number one having contributed to the downfall of the Tory government in 1974 led by Edward Heath. The Tories had long memories.

At the end of 1983, having sorted out the steel workers and civil servants, Thatcher turned her attention to the miners. She had made her plans with great care. Ian MacGregor, the Coal Board chairman specially brought over from America, was a notorious 'union buster' and political ally of Thatcher. He announced a series of pit closures that left the miner's union leader, Arthur Scargill, no alternative but to call for strike action.

Scargill was among the first to support miners at Cortonwood in Yorkshire in March 1984 when the rank and file struck to defend their pit from closure, and those who struck in support of their Cortonwood comrades followed this up by sending flying pickets to collieries across South Yorkshire and Nottingham.



Arthur Scargill

Within days most miners were on strike and Thatcher's battle with 'The enemy within' had begun. The conditions for a strike were not ideal. Coal had been stockpiled in vast quantities. The union was divided. Miners in areas such as Yorkshire and Durham affected by the closures saw strike action as the only means of saving their jobs and communities. In Nottinghamshire the moderate union leadership convinced members that their jobs were safe and it wasn't their battle. This had echoes of the 1926 General Strike when Notts Miners defied the rest of their colleagues and worked throughout.

A national Police Force was quickly organised and began to prevent miners from one area going to another to talk to their colleagues and persuade them to support the strike. The police mounted roadblocks and any miner suspected of going picketing faced the threat of arrest for a 'Possible breach of the Peace'. Hard won civil liberties were quickly dispersed with as the ruling class in the form of the Thatcher Government set out to destroy the best organised and most militant section of the working class; the Miners and their union, the National Union of Mineworkers. [NUM]

Both sides knew the stakes were high. The future of the National Union of Mineworkers, the future of the coal industry, the future of mining communities would be decided by the outcome of this epic struggle. The miners had massive support in communities and countries all over the world that identified with the effect of unemployment in their own communities. Ranged against the miners were the state, the judiciary and the Tory controlled media.

There have been millions of words and acres of newsprint devoted to the events that followed. These are my very personal recollections of that period and what it meant to me.

In 1984 I was secretary of a large civil service trade union branch in Newcastle. Coincidentally our computer workers were out on strike at the same time as the miners. A bit like being involved in a border skirmish during World War 2!



Mining communities were invaded by police officers sent from all parts of the country

It may have rained during that summer of 1984 but I don't remember it. Just long hot days spent picketing. The miners from Bates Colliery decided to come and help out on our picket line. It was a real culture shock for them to meet a woman union official. They thought I was there to do the typing and filing but once we got over those small differences our education began. No more polite civil service tactics. Soon we were scrambling up on lorries demanding that drivers turn away.

During that summer when I was in London for negotiations it seemed that there was a miner rattling a collection bucket outside every tube station. There was a desperate need for money. All over the country working people opened their homes and their wallets to the miners. No pointless arguments about ballots – just solidarity. It was a great feeling. Lads from Ashington who'd never been further than Newcastle were staying with lecturers in Islington, addressing meetings, spreading the word and collecting money.

It was no different back home. Turning up to speak at a support group meeting I came across long lost relatives I'd always suspected of being Tory voters. Then, finding to my delight that they were solidly behind the strike. The generosity of comrades at home and abroad was truly amazing. The black South African miners who had so little themselves sent donations and forged links with local miners that lasted well beyond the strike.

Mining villages resembled occupation zones. In my area pickets scattered by a police charge were pursued into houses and up back lanes. Just like the film Billy Elliot except we didn't have a soundtrack by The Jam or Clash. The local lollipop lady who got caught up in all of this was made to kneel in the gutter and was handcuffed by the forces of law and order! This spectacle reduced the local's already low opinion of the police to zero.

By the time September 1984 came around the need for support from the rest of the trade union movement was the crucial issue. All eyes turned to the Trades Union Congress, meeting in Brighton. As a delegate I turned up to find the conference centre ringed by police in riot gear intent on keeping the miners out. Some of us took the opportunity to engage the coppers in discussion about which side they were on. One of them confessed that he was from Wales and his brother was on strike. By the sick look on his face we guessed a career change might be due.

The rest is history. The Labour Party disliked Thatcher but not as much as Scargill. The miners did not get the support they needed despite fighting on heroically until March 1985, when exhaustion and depleted funds finally brought miners in some areas to recognise they were simply prolonging the agony for themselves and their families. *Even after a year on strike some, however, had wanted to continue the strike and there were various guerrilla actions and walkouts in some areas once miners had gone back to work.*

The trade union leadership let them down. Scargill's predictions came true and mining in the North East has all but disappeared. The Nottinghamshire strikebreakers found out the hard way what happens to those who put their trust in the bosses. Their pits closed and they ended up working in Robin Hood Theme parks.

However the lessons have remained with us never to be forgotten. My political and trade union life, along with thousands of other men and women, was changed irrevocably.

*Doreen Purvis – PCS Trade Union and
delegate to South Tyneside Trades Union Council*



Return to Work — March 5th 1985

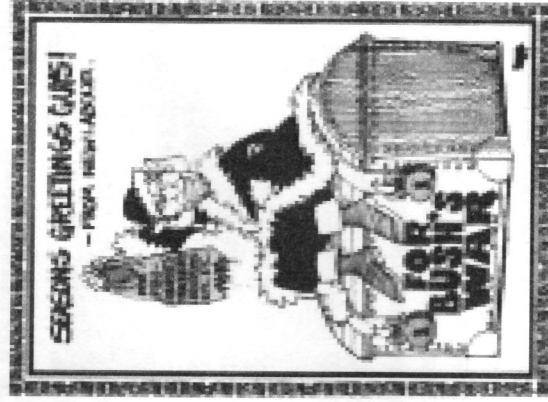
The working class in England marches to oppose war in Iraq – February 2003

On February 15th 2003, well over one, and perhaps as many as two million people marched in London to try and stop American and British forces invading Iraq. The numbers made it easily the biggest demonstration ever held so far in England. What was also remarkable was the unity between people of many different colours and creeds. This unity will be needed in the struggles to come. Alan Walsh was one of those marching and he recalls his impressions of the day.

'We are veterans of many marches and demonstrations, our children see them as part of everyday life and wonder why they don't see more of their school friends marching. This one we knew and expected to be big, almost all our friends from all over the country were coming and our house was full for the weekend.

With a one year old in his pushchair and even with our six and seven year olds' enthusiasm and desire to blow whistles loudly, we knew our involvement would have to be measured. Parking up at the tube station I was conscious of a pre football match atmosphere in the air but with many people unsure of where they were going. "What station for...." voices trailed off. "Going to the demo?" "How do we get there?" "Come with us then". We led a gang of about twelve enthusiastic lost souls on to the Victoria Line, some who'd travelled from the midlands, some who'd never marched for or against anything before, and all surprised we should be taking three children with us.

The previous September there'd been a massive anti war march at which we'd enjoyed the huge Muslim involvement as it managed to transform the usual monochrome crew into something reflecting the real world, but in February, as we emerged into the light at Green Park, the numbers, the noise, the colours, the pensioners, the kids, the huge ethnic mix, the homemade banners, the contrasts and variety were awe-inspiring. Orthodox Jews and anarchists beside Islamists, trade union banners, green groups and eco warriors, sound systems blasting, hugely funny



posters and models, graphic pictures of the blood and gore of war, all the usual suspects were there. But so were so many more.

People were frightened and exhilarated by the numbers and the noise. Tenants groups, collections of friends planning picnics in the park later, mobiles going off all over as numbers were compared, meeting places planned. All of this was increasingly done in the knowledge that this was probably the largest demonstration Britain had ever seen.

The accents were from all over the country, all over the world. There was a sense of disbelief that in the face of such overwhelming opposition, and within it recognition of so much difference, there would inevitably be war anyway. As darkness drew in and we headed home, this certainty of war was for the moment softened by the experience of unity across community and class.

But, as the kids said, "Why do we do this if it doesn't change anything?" Because, comes the reply; it is all that is left.

Alan Walsh



'New' Labour ignore the masses - one and a half million marched in London on February 15th to try and prevent war in Iraq. Blair and his supporters have been revealed as war criminals and, as such, should be prosecuted. Unlikely, though!

Revolutions Per Minute, BCM Box 3328, London WC1N 3XX

RPM is a radical publishing project that aims to help liberate the working class internationally. This requires a revolution and the replacement of a system based on profit with one based on people's needs. RPM feels it can best contribute towards its aims by producing pamphlets and sponsoring websites such as Red-Star-Research [see below], so as to aid discussion, debate and the distribution of ideas and information. Where appropriate RPM will also help other publishers to distribute their works.

Alongside this RPM will aim to produce a range of quality merchandise such as enamel badges of well-known and loved class struggle heroes, t-shirts, poetry and music.

In time it is also hoped that RPM will be able to help fund struggles and aid those who have suffered from taking part in them.

RPM is funded by sales, donations and from supporter's standing orders. If you can help in any way with distribution and sales of any publications or merchandise please make contact.

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A Guide to Small Press and Alternative Publishing is a review and listings magazine which features independent, self-published and small press journals. Published in August and February.

Three-issue subscription is £7.50 — cheques and postal orders to: Hobnail Press, PO Box 44122, London SW6 7XL.

Issue 13 - 'Who killed Patrick Quinn? Malcolm Kennedy is Innocent'

Thirteen years on and the controversy won't go away. Patrick Quinn was killed in Hammersmith Police Station. After 3 trials Kennedy was found guilty of manslaughter. Released from prison and with his appeal process exhausted, Kennedy has continued to be harassed by agents of the state. Now new evidence has come to light that Patrick Quinn's best friend also died in Hammersmith Police Station three years earlier.

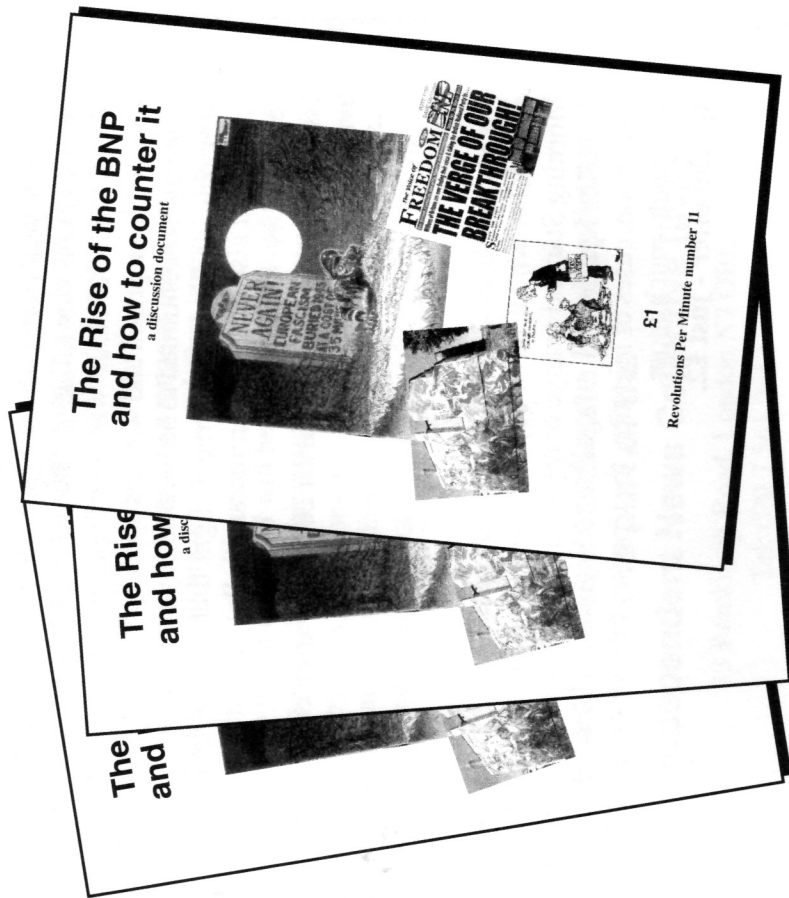
Issue 13 will be out in March 2004, advance copies are available at £3.

Also out in April 2004 — A special issue featuring a range of articles which have appeared on the web-site, in the Morning Star and a range of regional newspapers. Covering Gulf War syndrome, refugees and asylum seekers, police corruption, cases of injustice, the Countryside Alliance, Mi6 and much, much more.

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Not since the 1970s has been there such a large growth in support for fascism in Britain. With nearly 20 local councillors, increased membership and positive media publicity the BNP are set to win seats at the 2004 European Elections. Amongst some people there is a real fear that they can do little to stop the BNP growing. This short pamphlet tries to set out a strategy for countering the BNP and its anti-working class politics.

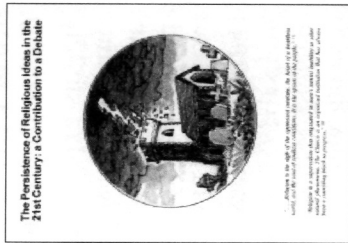
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The Rich at Play



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Revolutions Per Minute 8 – 'Rank and File or Broad Left? A short history of the Building Worker Group' by Brian Higgins

Higgins exposes the brutality of the employers, demolishes the arguments that the building industry can't be made safe for those working in it and tears apart the trade union officials and their backers who are unwilling to fight the bosses.

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RPM 7 also uses two articles from the newspaper of the most successful Rank and File group in Britain, the Building Worker Group' to give some ideas for organising at work.



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FIGHTING TO WIN



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Red Star Research

www.red-star-research.org.uk

Red Star Research is an investigative research group that has turned the microscope on Tony Blair's "New" Labour Government. We have uncovered the details of the rich individuals who provide a rapidly increasing proportion of the Labour Party's funding and we have tracked the creation of a vast unelected framework of businessmen who have been brought into the heart of Government.

The site has been praised by visitors as diverse as Red Pepper ("highly recommended"), the Guardian politics website ("superb site") and Class War ("Excellent research") The About Labour website have given us their "Best on the Net" award.

For the last four years we have been carrying out extensive research into the nature of New Labour's links with big business and the rich: millionaire donors, corporate sponsors, Task Force members, PFI contractors. We have been following the networks of wealth and power that encircle Tony Blair's Labour Party.

What we've come up with is like a Who's Who? of the New Labour 'Project'. We have the most comprehensive information about Labour's links with business on the Net — including the only complete and up-to-date listings of Labour Party donors and sponsors on-line. We also have the most complete list of Government Special Advisers on the Net.

Our aim is to provide a complete list of all Task Force members (with photos and backgrounds). There are currently more than 1100 business representatives (and only 73 Trade Unionists!) on Labour-appointed Task Forces. The networks of influence are huge, wide-ranging, and constantly changing, and we hope to track all of them on-line.