

- TEN PENCE -

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 * THE BULLETIN *
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The Bulletin is a journal by and for socialists who live in East Shropshire. There is no censorship or editorial control, but articles must be by socialists who broadly employ a materialist analysis and be less than 1000 words long (except by special arrangement with the editor).

The date for getting things into Aprils edition is 21/3/80 and that is also the last date for entries to the quiz. Our current contact address is C/O 89 Dalford Court, Hollinswood, Telford - this address will change after this edition.

The editor apologises for the missing February edition, some of whose copy is incorporated in this edition resulting in some of it being out of date, but personal circumstances made it impossible to produce the paper as planned. On the subject of production, let me repeat my plea for people to help with typing skins and distribution of this "most officious sheet, totally lacking in moral respectability".

JOHN MORGAN - Editor.

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Don't forget, this is an open journal. If you do not agree with the stuff in this issue write down what you do think, send it to us and we will publish it.

RED NOTESSteel Strike:

The two Telford firms with ISTC members, Lilleshall steel (Priors Lee) and Haybridge Works, are still closed by steadfast picketing. The ISTC pickets, whose action is an outstanding example of what Thatcher cannot break - working class solidarity, welcome friendly visitors, so get down there and say hello and take a flask of tea with you. Bulletin wishes the Telford steel workers the best of luck and praises them in their principled stand in support of their union.

An Alternative Paper:

Word reaches us, indirectly, that the great Mike Keen (Rev) has had another idea. With the demise of Telford Unemployed Workers Committee, local workers Co-operatives, WAR's Education Committee, Alternative Telford, and a few others behind him, and with All Telford Against the Cuts quickly dropped, the "Red Vicar" has moved on to his next project. Apparently dissatisfied with his coverage in the Tory press he now intends to found his own paper. Let there be no mistake about it, Mike Keen knows you cannot sell 3000 copies of an A2 three sheet litho paper for 10p in Telford without incurring a massive financial disaster on issue one. It seems that he has not told the other people involved that this is the case.

Like every other Mike Keen project this one is ill-concieved, over ambitious and will crumble on meeting reality and be quietly buried. The only lasting achievements will be the total disillusionment of several well meaning young people, the possible destruction of now thriving small journals like CRUX and the discrediting of the whole alternative voice idea.

Bulletin appeals to those independant minded people involved to LOOK Again at other ways of doing things - expanding CRUX and Salop WEApound, Wall Newspapers, single issue publications. LOOK again at the finances and go and talk to other people in different parts of the country who are involved in producing community newspapers. AND PUT MIKE KEEN BACK IN HIS CAGE BEFORE HIS PARANOIC EGOMANIA DOES ANY MORE DAMAGE.

Anti-Cuts Demo:

It is most important that we get as many people as possible to attend the anti-cuts demo in Shrewsbury on Saturday. Remember:-

SHIRE HALL 9.15 am ONWARDS ON SATURDAY MARCH 1ST

Bulletin calls for this demonstration to go out to the people of Shrewsbury - i.e to have a march through the town - so that after lobbying the councillors we go to the people and been seen by them as well. If possible this demonstration should be seen as the start of the campaign against the cuts in Telford. We should take the from the "Resistance" movement in Leeds, which has developed a highly effective campaign on the basis of weekly news sheets. "Resistance" has not been afraid to attack Labour councillors who sit on the fence, or standing supports for local election in wards where there is no anti-cuts candidate. We hope, ofcourse, that all Telford Labour candidates will be strongly anti-cuts. Stands made by local labour parties against the cuts must be supported by the broader left.

One little rap on the knuckles for Wrekin Constituency Labour Party - where are the coaches to take us to the shire Hall? At the last we heard Broseley branch LP had booked two, but WCLP had not organised any. Perhaps they are leaving it to the last minute.

Telford Libertarian Communist Group (LCG):

Who??? Telford LCG are providing cheap transport to the LCG Day School on the "Alternative Economic Policy" at Leeds on Saturday 24th May, please contact C/O 24 Chatford, Stirchley, Telford if you want to go.

THE HISTORY OF THE EAST SHROPSHIRE PROLETARIATIntroduction:

In this the second edition of the Bulletin, we launch a series of essays on the history of the proletariat in East Shropshire. Apart from the occasional foot-notes of bourgeois historians, no previous attempt has been made to chronicle and explain the history of one of the world's oldest industrial ~~xxxxx~~ areas - the East Shropshire Coalfield - from the point of view of the working class. Certainly no-one has attempted such a study whilst applying the method of historical materialism that plays such an important part in Socialist thinking. Socialism looks to the future, but it is through the scientific study of history that we learnt the laws of the dialectic of class struggle that lead us (as it did Marx and others) to predict the revolutionary destruction of the bourgeois state by the industrial proletariat and the establishment of the communist society.

Nothing in Socialist theory is more important than the study of the relationships between classes through history. Because the Working Class is the revolutionary class, it is of most critical importance to see and understand history in terms of that class' development and struggles. Because the Bourgeois ^{controls} Class not only the state, but, through its hegemony of culture, all aspects of our lives, the history we learn at school is that from a bourgeois idealist viewpoint. To the young Socialist, fighting to break the hold of bourgeois ideology, nothing can be more exciting than the realisation that all the history of kings and queens he had force fed him at school is inconsequential offal, and that Historical Materialism provides a meaningful alternative, beside which bourgeois historians appear as fools.

Yet despite the acknowledged importance of historical understanding, there exists an almost complete absence of knowledge of the history of the revolutionary class in the very area which saw the birth of industrial capitalism. The Middle Class opportunists of the Iron Bridge Gorge Museum are no more interested in this history than the history teachers who taught us at school. The task of recording and explaining history of the East Shropshire Working Class is one that falls to us, the Socialists who live as part of that class.

The importance of the Working Class in East Shropshire, from a historical view, should not be underestimated by the modern Socialist who looks on Telford as it is now, a small industrial area of no great bearing on the present and not much future either. The existence of an extensive and progressive mining area in the South of the East Shropshire Coalfield from the bourgeois revolution (1642-1660) onwards, means that the proletariat here is one of the oldest in the world. The coal mining industry did, to all intentioned purposes, provide the beginnings of the industrial proletariat (simply defined as those who depend entirely on selling their labour for wages to provide their livelihood).

It was the first major human occupation to retain large concentrations of workers all the year round for wage payment. Other industries like ship-building and iron making were essentially seasonal before the 18th century, and employed only casual labour. Textile industries farmed-out work to cottagers who owned at least part of their equipment. Not until the second half of the 18th century, when large scale coal ~~mining~~ mining in Shropshire was already 100 years old, did the textile mills and engineering works start to appear.*¹ Only a study of the proletariat of North-East England mining districts provides a broader perspective of the development of the proletariat in one area over a similar time period.*²

Many people, ~~am~~ aghast at the extravagant claims that Telford is the "Cradle of the Industrial Revolution", are soon sobered by the Museum's showy representation of 19th century technology, proving that at that time we in Shropshire made some nice bits of china and had a relatively minor iron industry. The great world shattering "first" of Darby smelting iron with coke in 1709 is picked out with typical eclecticism as the great turning point for humanity.*³

It seems that this event occurred more or less spontaneously when one "Entrepreneur" had a good idea, and came to ~~run~~ Shropshire's rural bliss to try it out. In point of fact Industrial Capitalism and the Working Class were already well established in these parts, before Darby arrived - that is why he came.

I repeat - only the North-East of England and East Shropshire have a history of industrial capitalist production that is contiguous and goes back more than 300 years.*⁴

Having therefore, I hope, impressed upon you the importance of this series of essays, let me now say that they will be completely inadequate in providing the depth of analysis that is required. The first contribution ~~is~~ is, as you see, written by myself, and although I am a Socialist and strive to employ the dialectical materialist method in my analysis, I do not claim to be either a trained historian or a great thinker. Other contributors to this series may be more fitted than me, some may even be less capable, but at least we will have started the work.

Finally let me say that I hope that others will draw, as I have done, inspiration and strength from learning of the struggles of their fore-bears. The destiny of the world is in the hands of the workers - let us now complete the work, the inevitable destruction of Capitalism by the class that it itself created.

JOHN MORGAN

Notes:-

*1 A special case must be made of the salt industry, which had a capitalist mode of production very early on, and also, perhaps the Daryshire Lead mines and the Cornish Tin industry. None of these industries, however, were of crucial importance, nor do their histories show the same degree of continuity.

- *2 An organised mining industry was established rather earlier on parts of the continent, notably in Germany and Czechoslovakia and that in Holland an early form of Capitalist production existed in the ship building industry from the end of the 16th century. Britain being the first country to fully industrialise, remains, however, the most important to study.
- *3 This "event" was of little importance as it made no effect on either the general economic climate or the iron industry. Only in 1758 when three large iron works, Horsehay, Ketley and Donnington Wood were opened all committed to smelting with coke and were able to sell their iron for high prices, was the new technology properly accepted and used elsewhere.
- *4 As an aside, if you want to look at an historical analysis that actually puts the importance of these two areas in proper perspective (and be it rather indirectly) see "Early Wooden Railways" by Dr. Micheal Lewis.

The Workers Fight Back - Proletarian Uprisings 1756 - 1842 (Part 1). John Morgan;

Despite the relative decline in the importance of East Shropshire as an industrial area during the period 1750 - 1850, the output of the area continued in absolute terms to increase and its population grew during this period. The local industrial proletariat could at this time, as in other regions, be divided into two distinct groups. The first group were the skilled craftsmen who worked in the iron making and founding industries, as well as some peripheral industries such as Coalport China Works. Generally this group were employed for a weekly wage that remained reasonably consistent and although they suffered some of the discomforts of Capitalism, occasioned by the wild fluctuations in the iron trade, their skills (which provided a very high rate of exploitation for the owners) protected them from the horrors of the Poor Law "Guardians". On the whole this group took a cautious and considered attitude to the class struggle, winning for themselves higher wages with well organised strikes. The intellectual leaders of the working class, such as we know, came mostly from this group. The only permanent Chartist Association was based around the Dale Works, the chairman worked there as warehouse foreman. The Coalport China workers, whose strength and determination in strikes against the owners was a by-word in Shropshire during the 19th century, provided a succession of working class orators and organisers. This section of the proletariat remained strong and apparently well organised (though only on a factory basis) throughout the period of discussion. Only in the second half of the 19th century, when the rate of profit began to decline very seriously in Shropshire, did these groups experience very severe attacks on their living standards. Many of them were then able to respond by moving to newer, larger industrial centres.

The second group were labours who were hired on a casual, usually $\frac{1}{4}$ day, basis. By far the largest section of this group of the proletariat were the miners. It is impossible to tell how many miners were active on the coalfield in the 1750s, probably the majority still worked in Broseley and the Severn Gorge, because the main coal trade was still down the Severn to Bristol for domestic use, and not yet to go for coke in the local iron industry. By 1780 the iron industry had doubled its output three times, and a network of canals and tramways had been built stretching North from the Severn as far as Lilleshall. The concentration of activity continued to move North during the early 19th century, with Dawley and Oakengates becoming the most productive areas. The town of Broseley was left high and dry and, despite a brief flurry of activity around the clay industry in the late 19th century, gradually declined. Today it remains as a strange island of the industrial proletariat amongst the green fields - one of the oldest mining towns in England and still very recognisable as such, without a pit head to be seen.

We know that in 1842 the Lilleshall Company employed 2,300 men in its pits around what is now St. Georges (a company town). Extrapolating these figures together with a few other pieces of information, it can be very tentatively estimated that the number of miners at this time was between 8 and 15 thousand.

The system of exploitation then used seems to have originated in Shropshire in the 17th century and has now (fortunately) ceased to exist, although it survived locally until the First World War. Large Companies like the Madeley Wood Co., the Lilleshall Co. (the shell of which still survives 51% owned by Lord Granville), the Coalbrookdale Co. and the Old Park Co. contracted with the lords of the manors (absentee aristocracy like the Duke of Sutherland and the Earl of Stafford) to exploit the below ground mineral rights. The lord of the manor was then paid a royalty on each ton of coal raised (this part of the system survives, incredibly modern local clay and coal quarries still pay huge sums to the descendants of people granted these manors because they happened to sleep with the right courtier 700 years ago).

The companies raised capital through private share issues or by ploughing back some of the huge profits made in these heady days. Some capital came from local gentry (the Forester family provided much of the capital for John Wilkinson's New Willey Co.); and more merchantile capitalists in Bristol and London. ((Note: much more work needs to be done on the sources and movements of capital in Shropshire during this period)). Having supplied the capital for sinking a shaft, the equipment, transport links etc., the company "sub-let" each pit to a charter-master. Charter-masters, or "Butties" as they were universally known, were sort of super subbies, and were invariably the scum of the earth. ((Note: evidence of a miner to 1843 mines commission enquiry "Butties want ~~hanging~~ hanging by the hundreds; it is the most rascallist thing that ever was in the world".)) Each charter-master would provide the mine's tools and hire and fire men as he sort fit. Charter-masters

were paid purely on a comission basis by the companies, who generally employed "Ground Baliffs" to ~~make~~ make period inspections of the pit heads. It was the ~~practise~~ practise for charter-masters to keep pubs and Tommy Shops and to pay the colliers in their pubs at the end of each week. It was common (indeed probably usual) throughout this period for miners to be part paid in truck (promise notes to the Tommy shops where prices were inflated). Because of the casual nature of the employment miners would often be under- or un-employed and would then be forced on the Poor Law, an experience made much worse after the New Poor Law Act of 1834. ((Note: The New Poor Law Act was a savage attack on working class living standards. The basic principles of the Act were (1) No relief for the able bodied outside the Work House; (2) Such relief to support a life style "less eligible" than that afforded by the worst outside the Work House; (3) Seperation of men and women to prevent child-bearing.)) One large Work House still survives in East Shropshire, the building is now the Beaches hospital. At times of high demand for coal, from 1758 onwards dependant largely on the demands of the iron industry, jobs in the mines were relatively easy to find, providing you were not blacked as a Wilkite or Chartist, and wages were high. When a slump occurred the companies would cut wages and take on less men. It was at these times that the mining communities would respond with strikes, sabotage, food raids on local markets and demonstrations.

Generalisations concerning the housing conditions of these days are difficult to make as few houses built before 1850 survive today. Most families of the skilled workers group lived in cottages which were grouped very closely together in the towns (easily the most representative surviving district is Broseley Wood, though it must be remembered that ~~the~~ number of cottages ~~have been~~ have been knocked into one and many more demolished). Cottages were also dotted very thickly between the small fields and pit mounts that separated the towns. ((note: the squater's cottage preserved at Blists Hill museum is probably typical of ones of this period)). Many miners also lived in "Barrack" houses outside the main towns. "Barrack" houses were long rows of single storey units often arranged in a square with washing facilities in the middle. Each unit had a door, two windows, one chimney and, sometimes, a dividing wall, and housed a family. They were built by the companies and rented to employees. The last remaining "barrack" row in East Shropshire was at Lilleshall (formally a major lime-stone mining area). It has now gone, but I remember my horror at seeing it and wondering how people could live in those tiny hovels with five foot door-ways.

Conditions of work at this time were both extremely hazardous and arduous in both the iron and mining industries.

Given these conditions it is not surprising that revolts and riots occurred quite frequently in East Shropshire during our period. In the main political agitation, such as it was, occurred amongst the skilled section of the proletariat, whilst the miners struggles took the form of spontaneous direct action. Because of the isolation of the East Shropshire proletariat in a hostile agricultural and

deeply Tory county the insurrections were fairly easily dealt with by the bourgeoisie. It is unfortunate that, due to the nature of things, most of the records we have of these times are from bourgeois sources. Despite the prejudices of these sources the story of the fight of the workers during this period, when viewed in the global context of economic changes in East Shropshire, make an inspiring and heroic tale. Although each insurrection resulted inevitably in the armed might of the bourgeoisie reasserting their class's dominance, it must be said that the spirit of working class resistance was not ~~broken~~ broken. The threat of working class insurrectionary violence put pressure on the bourgeois class to change the conditions of employment and to re-examine what could be got away with without endangering their accumulated wealth and power. The events of these years in Shropshire must be seen as part of a movement of the class throughout the country. The pinnacles of class struggle St. Georges Field (1769), Peterloo (1819) and Monmouth (1839), are mirrored in our own experience of the Dawley Revolt (1756), Cinderloo (1821) and miner's riots (1842).

Very little is known of the events of 1756 and my principle source of information, Baxter, is of dubious reliability. Perhaps after reading this account comrades will be inspired to research further into the workers movement before 1800.

Although the late 18th century was generally a period of expanding agricultural production, there were periods when bad harvests and other factors caused sudden rises in food prices. 1756 was such a year, prices seem to have increased steadily throughout the summer and by November had reached unprecedented heights.

Unable to find food at prices they could afford the miners of East Shropshire took to visiting local markets in force and paying for provisions at reasonable prices - that is the price thought fair by a group of miners and not that asked by the stall-holder. By all accounts a price was, at least at first, paid. Matters escalated, building up to a show-down at the area's largest market, Wellington, on the second Thursday in November. Large numbers of Dawley miners visited the market and other shops in the town and bought goods at their price. It seems that the pubs were put under workers control for the day. Towards the end of the day, when most of the miners had left, the Wellington middle class started to resist. They arrested several miners and there was some fighting in the town. When all the workers had left the town the bourgeoisie began to organise its reprisals. It is reported ~~that~~ that they raised a force of 1500 armed farmers and townsmen to arrest the miners.

This small army (even allowing for 1500 being an exaggeration) was led by two prominent Wellington bourgeois, Edward Cludde and Edward Pemberton, were presumably mounted and certainly armed and would have been more than a match for a few hundred colliers returning home up the Dawley Road with their shopping. The miners are said to have been "intercepted" and much of the "stollen goods" were recovered by the vigilantes. It is, of course, much more likely that the bourgeoisie could not have raised such a large force in so short a time and that rather than intercept the miners, they raided homes in the workers districts during the night, seizing goods and making arrests as they pleased. In any event the retribution was of a

violent nature and 37 men were taken into custody.

By the time the "rioters" came up before the Shrewsbury Assizes in April 1757 four of their number had already died in Shrewsbury goal. Ten of the remainder were sentenced to death (though eight later had their sentences reprieved). The penalty for resistance was indeed high in the 18th century.

Riots and revolts amongst the mining communities continued spasmodically. The Wellington bourgeoisie learnt the lesson of 1756 well, forming a permanent class militia known as the "Wellington Fencibles". It is recorded that they went to Madeley to put down a riot (for riot read strike?) in July 1795. The bourgeois militia was later to become official with the formation of the state subsidised "Yeomanry". The "Wellington Fencibles" became the Wellington Troop of the South Shropshire Yeomanry. Raised under the pretext of threatened French Invasion, the part-time Yeomanry remained the principle instrument of state enforcement and class oppression during the first half of the 19th century.

The second part of this essay will appear in March's edition of the Bulletin. A list of sources will be appended to the end of the essay.

ANSWERS TO LAST MONTHS "LEFTIE" QUIZ

No correct answers were received to last months quiz, you are all incredibly ignorant! The very wonderfull prize, V. I. Lenin's "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", will be held over for this month's teaser. Be warned, however, if no-one manages to get this one I intend to donate the volume to the book shelf of the Old Folks Rest Room in Oakengates. I am sure that I do not have to point out to you the consequences that might very well ensue. Anyway, here are last month's answers:-

1. Emiliano Zapata, born August 8th 1879 - Mexico's greatest revolutionist; he was assassinated by federal troops at hacienda Chinameca on April 10th 1919.
2. George Lansbury, Labour leader of the London County Council.
3. The striking miners and furnace men of East Shropshire used lumps of furnace slag (cinder) against the South Shropshire Yeomanry's flint-locks and sabres. The battle took place outside the Old Park iron works (near what is now the Telford Town Centre) in 1819.
4. Gerrard Winstanly was the "leader" of the Diggers movement that organised the radical disposed during the English Commonwealth. The four capital offences he proposed were Murder; Rape; the ownership of property, and buying and selling.
5. James Connolly, the great Irish republican, in at least one reported speech.
6. Canoes. Actually it was not the CND who organised the invasion, but the faction of anti-bomb campaigners around the Direct Action Movement. Sorry Laurens.

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