'Reopen the Coal Mines'? Deindustrialisation and the Labour Party

FLORENCE SUTCLIFFE-BRAITHWAITE

Abstract

Different groups on the left have invested a variety of cultural meanings in the image of the British miner and the mining community. Tracing these over time, this article suggests that mythologised images of the solidaristic miner and the 'traditional' mining community flatten and simplify our understanding of the past, and of change over time in Britain's coalfields in the era of deindustrialisation since the mid-1950s. Oral history interviews conducted in the coalfields suggest that while much has been lost—most importantly, decent jobs, strong local economies and certain community ties—there have also been gains, such as growing egalitarianism in gender roles. Finally, the article suggests that an industrial strategy, but more importantly, a raft of policies such as community wealth building and Foundational Economy strategies are needed to bring back some of what has been lost while also working with the grain of more positive social changes.

Keywords: deindustrialisation, work, gender, community, coalfields, political economy

Corbyn and the coal mines

NEAR THE END OF 2015, Britain's last deep coal mine, Kellingley, in North Yorkshire, saw its last shift of workers come up from underground. In an interview earlier that year, while running to be leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn raised the idea of reopening some of Britain's collieries: 'Where you can re-open pits, yes, and where you can do clean burn coal technology, yes. I think we can develop coal technology. Let's do so because energy prices around the world are going up. Open cast mining is not acceptable, deep mined coal is possible and is an alternative.'[1]

Ian Lavery, a former miner, former president of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), MP for Wansbeck in Northumberland and a Corbyn ally, welcomed the idea. Two years later, however, this plan had vanished; in the 2017 election campaign, Labour pledged to accelerate the move to renewable energy sources.[2] In a period of accelerating anxiety over the growing climate crisis, it was not surprising that the idea of re-opening Britain's deep coal mines was swiftly dropped. In 2021 there has been renewed controversy over the Conservative government's approval of plans for a new deep-coal mine in Cumbria. In the aftermath of the Brexit vote in 2016, the idea that deindustrialisation has created 'left behind' places in Britain's coalfields and other ex-industrial areas has become widespread. Keir Starmer has been clear that his path to power must include winning back voters in Labour's 'rust belt'. In recent years, the mining industry and coalfield communities have thus been powerful cultural symbols weaponised in political debate in a variety of ways. In this article I examine the myths that the left has constructed around the mines, and set out a more complex story of continuity and change over time in Britain's coalfields since 1945. Finally, I suggest what a more complex understanding of economic and social change in

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[1] R. Wearmouth, 'Labour leadership frontrunner Jeremy Corbyn vows to reopen coal mines if he becomes Prime Minister', *Mirror*, 9 August 2015; https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/labour-leadership-frontrunner-jeremy-corbyn-6221443 (accessed 1 March 2021).

[2] *For the Many, Not the Few*, London, Labour Party, 2017, p. 13; https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf (accessed 1 March 2021).

Britain's coalfields suggests for the policies that Labour should pursue in the 2020s.

The miner and the miners' strike in the Labour tradition

Uniquely dense cultural meanings are attached to the figure of the miner in the labour tradition. George Orwell mythologised the miner for subsequent generations in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, offering a famously vivid depiction which tells us a lot about the way that Orwell revered his idea of the 'working man':

… the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron hammered iron statues under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realise what splendid men they are … You can never forget that spectacle once you have seen it—the line of bowed, kneeling figures, sooty black all over, driving their huge shovels under the coal with stupendous force and speed.[3]

By the 1930s, when Orwell was writing, the miners were central to the labour movement, but this was a relatively new development. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of the various local and regional miners' trade unions and leaders were staunchly Liberal and liberal; Keir Hardie himself was an 'enthusiastic' Gladstonian liberal before his 'personal experience of the brutal conditions of the coalmining industry' led him to advocate an independent party for the labour movement.[4] The Miners' Federation of Great Britain was relatively late to affiliate to Labour, in 1908, but by the 1920s it was the 'Praetorian guard of an explicitly socialist Labour Party'.[5] The miners supported the General Strike of 1926 and endured the ensuing lockout imposed by mine owners for a bitter seven months. After the Second World War, the nationalisation of the mines on 'vesting day', 1 January 1947, represented the culmination of one of Labour's most cherished goals—the fulfilment of Clause IV—and the release of the miners from the oppression of private employers. This moment is recalled poignantly at the end of *The Pitmen Painters*, a play by Lee Hall about the Ashington Group in the interwar period, first performed in 2007: in the final scene, the assembled miners gather to salute the hard times of the past and look up towards a better future under nationalisation. In the postwar period, coal miners are also indelibly associated with the trade union militancy of the 1970s and 1980s; they forced Ted Heath's Conservative government into a humiliating retreat in 1972, and brought down his government in 1974 with a second national strike. They stood against Thatcher for a year in the 1984–85 strike, one of the iconic moments of resistance to Thatcherism.

It is not only the miners' masculine strength and skill, nor their history of industrial militancy, however, which has led to the celebration—and sometimes the mythologisation—of the miners in the canon of labour history. Mining is often supposed to have generated uniquely solidaristic work groups and community structures: miners have, thus, often been seen as 'instinctive' or 'natural' socialists of the highest calibre. Though this stereotype is a simplification, it has been an enduring one. In the postwar decades, when the discipline of sociology was expanding rapidly (and when its organising problem was, in Raymond Aron's words, 'to make intellectual sense of the political problems of the Labour Party'), study after study painted a picture of the supposedly distinctive form of mining communities.[6] By the 1950s and 1960s, the 'romantic, heroic community based around union and pit was … received wisdom in conventional accounts'.[7] The 1956 study *Coal is Our Life* was the epitome of this tendency: it depicted a mining

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[3]G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962 [1937], p. 32.

[4]A. J. Reid, 'Class and politics in the work of Henry Pelling', in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam, eds., *Interpreting the Labour Party. Approaches to Labour Politics and History*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 105.

[5]R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics, 1906–1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 178.

[6]A. H. Halsey, 'Provincials, professionals: British post-war sociologists', in M. Bulmer, ed., *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 151.

[7]H. Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 8.

town with strong community ties and traditions of mutual aid—though also with rigid gender roles.[8] From the late 1970s onwards, studies of mining communities have been much more sensitive to variations between and divisions within those communities, but the image of the mining community as the 'classic' working class community has persisted. The dominant narrative on the left is that the destruction of the mining industry destroyed these communities: as the support movement in the miners' strike put it, 'close a pit, kill a community'. Subsequent depictions in popular culture have reinforced this narrative, from *Brassed Off* (1996) to Gary Clarke's dance show *Wasteland* (2019), a study of the arrival of rave culture in postindustrial South Yorkshire: these depictions set up a powerful contrast between an imagined 'traditional' community before the strike and fragmentation afterwards.

The miners' strike was a hotly contested front in the battles ongoing in the 1980s to 'modernise' the Labour Party. Neil Kinnock wanted to shift Labour's image away from scenes of industrial strife and did not visit a picket line until ten months into the conflict (though many Constituency Labour Parties supported the strike at a grassroots level). The loss of the strike cemented Thatcherite victories over the trade union movement; it was a major turning point in contemporary British history. In 1989, Kinnock addressed the Durham Miners' Gala, but he would be the last Labour leader to do so until 2012.

In the interim, the Labour leadership turned further away from the NUM and from close cooperation with the trade union movement in general. Tony Blair was strikingly lacking in nostalgia for the mining industry; in 2004, he recalled a meeting at the local county hall called in the early 1980s over colliery closures in County Durham, where his constituency was located:

I remember this guy getting up who was in his eighties and had been a branch official in the 1926 strike … and saying he'd had enough of all this talk about how they were going to take industrial action here and going to protest there. He said "Mining's finished in this county. What we've got to ask is where are the new jobs going to come from?"[9]

Under Blair, New Labour took very limited steps to protect what remained of Britain's deep-coal mining industry, wary of appearing to cave in to 'old labour' protectionism. New Labour's version of 'modernisation' emphasised 'fairness not favours' for trade unions; the acceptance of globalisation (which Blair famously said in his 2005 conference speech was as inevitable as autumn following summer); the celebration of the expanding service sector—the 'new jobs'—and the belief that there was nothing that could be done about deindustrialisation. *Billy Elliot* (2000) could be read as the expression of the New Labour outlook: the strike was a tragedy; the patriarchal masculinity of the coalfields was on the way out; and Billy got one of the 'new jobs' in the end.

After Labour's defeat in the 2010 general election, Ed Miliband—MP for a mining area, Doncaster North, and the candidate of the major trade unions in the leadership election—revived the tradition of Labour leaders addressing the Durham Miners' Gala, and under his leadership the Blue Labour tradition, rejecting economic liberalism and embracing social conservatism, gained in influence within the party. Maurice Glasman founded Blue Labour in 2009, calling for a 'deeply conservative socialism that places family, faith and work at the heart of a new politics of reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity'.[10] Drawing on Glasman's thinking, Miliband often gave a declinist account of contemporary British society, suggesting that the decline of the high street and rise of a 'mobile and flexible workforce' had led to 'weakening social bonds' and 'squeezed' family time, and arguing that politicians must fight

[8] N. Dennis, F. Henriques and C. Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956.

[9] 'Blair attack on battle to save pits', *Northern Echo*, 4 December 2004; https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/6969358.blair-attack-battle-save-pits/ (accessed 1 March 2021).

[10] A. Stratton, 'Labour: now it's kind of blue', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2009; https://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2009/apr/24/blue-labour-conservative-socialism (accessed 1 March 2021).

when 'traditional ways of life are under threat'.[11] Miliband and Glasman both used the example of the threat to the Billingsgate fish porters' traditional work to illustrate what they meant, but the example was clearly translatable to mining. The Blue Labour tradition suggested that 'traditional' ways of life should be defended, and that this required protecting and promoting the types of work which had sustained 'traditional' communities; thus Miliband's emphasis on 'predistribution' not redistribution, a more active industrial policy, and a better apprenticeship system.[12] Blue Labour thus played on and revived nostalgia for imagined 'traditional' working class communities.

In 2015, while the post-Miliband contest for the leadership was ongoing, Jeremy Corbyn, whose candidacy had been endorsed by the Durham Miners' Association (DMA), addressed the Durham Miners Gala, lamenting that 'the trade union link' had too often been treated as a mark of 'shame' by the labour leadership in recent decades.[13] Corbyn's political image was deeply tied to the Big Meeting, and he significantly shifted the symbolic relationship between the Labour Party and the strand of labour history represented by the miners. Corbyn called for the leader of the Labour Party to attend the gala every year to show 'the importance historically of this event'.[14] For him, the significance of the event lay in its capturing traditions of popular protest and popular politics. By attending the gala each year, Corbyn also signalled a break with 'modernisation', and sought to demonstrate his ties with the 'old labour' of trade unions and of Labour's core voter base, the working classes in northern, deindustrialised areas.

This was not a straightforward move for Corbyn, given that many of his own voters in his Islington North constituency were affluent urbanites, as were many of his supporters in Momentum and in the party. There was always a potential tension between the political culture with which the NUM and DMA have been associated and that of the Corbyn project. The miners' trade unions were always particularly masculine in make-up and ethos, even within a trade union movement that was, in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, male dominated; this was because of the particularly hard and dangerous work miners did underground, and the fact that women were banned from working underground by the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act. The especially arduous labour of the coal miner's wife in the period before pithead baths also tended to reinforce traditional gender roles, and miners tended to live in villages and towns, which tended to be whiter areas that Britain's cities. Finally, the pits and the miners' way of life was based on the extraction of fossil fuels. This history was not likely to seem like a 'useable past' to Corbyn's younger and more metropolitan supporters, who tended to be deeply committed to feminism, gay rights, multiculturalism, anti-racism and environmentalism.

In this context, the recovery and celebration of the ways in which the miners' strike was not just a moment of industrial militancy, but also a fight which brought together the 'old left' with the 'new left' of women's movements, lesbian and gay activists, black activists, and environmental movements has been vital. This view recovers the eurocommunist tendency in the strike itself, which argued—against the Scargillite focus on industrial muscle—for a 'popular front' approach to winning the strike. This side of the story is presented in films like *Pride* (2014), and plays like Maxine Peake's *Queens of the Coal Age*, first staged in Manchester in 2018. It has been emphasised, too, in sessions at the Corbyn-aligned event The World Transformed, which staged a reading of the verbatim play about the strike, *The Enemies*

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[11] D. Aaronovitch, 'Dreaming of merrie Englande won't help Ed: Miliband's new guru is the architect of Blue Labour', *Times*, 23 March 2011; https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/newspapers/dreaming-merrie-englande-wont-help-ed/docview/858126764/se-2?accountid=14511 (accessed 1 March 2021).

[12] E. Goes, *The Labour Party under Ed Miliband: Trying but Failing to Renew Social Democracy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016, p. 73.

[13] R. Wearmouth, 'Durham Miners' Gala: Labour leadership favourite Andy Burnham pledges to return as party boss', ChronicleLive, 11 July 2015; https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/durham-miners-gala-labour-leadership-9636926 (accessed 1 March 2021).

[14] You Tube, 'Jeremy Corbyn—Durham Miners' Gala 2015'; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHFZyYWzl-4 (accessed 1 March 2021).

Within, in 2017. Corbynism thus celebrated the miners' strike not as the apotheosis of the 'old labour' of combative, masculine trade unions, but as the transcendence of that tradition as trade unionists worked with a 'rainbow coalition'. This 'useable past' suggests that there may be a fruitful political alliance to be built between 'identity politics' movements and the communities and political organisations of the coalfields.

However, as it transpired in 2019, Labour under Corbyn proved unable to retain many working class voters in what suddenly became known as the 'red wall'. This was not a distinctively Corbynite problem: it was the culmination of a trend in voting stretching back at least two decades. Support for Labour in ex-mining areas began to ebb away in the New Labour years. Neither Blue Labour nor Corbynism have proven able to reverse this trend, though some Blue Labour advocates today suggest that this is because Ed Miliband was not a convincing enough carrier of the Blue Labour message, and suggest that Starmer should take up the Blue Labour slogan of 'flag, faith and family'.

Are they correct? Many in the labour movement have mythologised the miners and their communities, seeing in this history the version of the labour movement they hope to construct in the present. But nostalgia for 'traditional' mining communities sometimes stereotypes those communities, seeing them as unchanging in fundamentals until the rupture of Thatcherism, and flattening out the complexity of change over time in mining areas. We need a fuller and more complex account of continuity and change in Britain's coalfields. In the second part of this paper, I draw on life-story oral history interviews from English, Welsh and Scottish coalfields in order to construct such an account. These interviews are drawn from 'Women in the Miners' Strike', an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded oral history project I undertook with Natalie Thomlinson and Victoria Dawson from 2018 to 2020, and the 'Deep Place' research project I have undertaken since 2020 with John Tomaney and Lucy Natarajan; together they amount to interviews with just over 100 men and women.

Deindustrialisation and mine closures

From the mid-1950s onwards, long-term, secular trends in technology, the national economy, and globalisation were shifting the British economy towards the service sector.[15] Employment in the pits declined in this period even as output rocketed, owing to productivity gains as technology advanced (see Table 1). As employment was 'rationalised' and concentrated in high-productivity pits, more miners began to travel to work, and many moved with their families to expanding pits, in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and the east of Scotland. Others moved out of the industry and into sectors like assembly manufacturing which were growing until the 1970s. Mining communities were, thus, far from static in the years before 1984.

Nevertheless, the miners' strike figures in many accounts as a moment of rupture, a catastrophe from which families and communities never entirely recovered. Marjorie Simpson (born 1938), who was married to a National Coal Board draughtsman and had a son down the pit in 1984, recalled that in Stainforth, Yorkshire, 'life was pretty good prior to March 1984—we were buying houses and new cars, etc; everybody knew each other, we were happy and content'. The strike, and the closure of 100 out of 169 collieries within five years of its loss, caused immense hardship

Table 1: Long-term decline of coal mining

Year	Collieries	Employment (000s)	Output (million tonnes)
1947	958	704	187
1957	850	699	213
1967	483	456	177
1977	238	242	108
1987	101	115	90
1997	15	8	39

Source: Katy Bennett, Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *Coalfields Regeneration. Dealing with the Consequences of Industrial Decline*, London, Policy Press, 2000, p. 3.

[15]See J. Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization not decline: a new meta-narrative for post-war British history', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2016, pp. 76–99, at p. 78.

for miners and their families. These closures took place in a context of rapidly rising unemployment and the swift contraction of manufacturing industry, as the Thatcher governments rejected the idea that governments should and would direct and support industry, and protect industrial communities.

Miners' fortunes differed substantially: some found relatively good work (sometimes in the public sector, sometimes work in industry, for which ex-miners often had to travel considerable distances), while others suffered years of unemployment and had to take unskilled, low-paid, insecure work. This pattern mirrored the transformations in the male employment structure of the overall economy in the period of acute deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s: polarisation, with a hollowing-out of the middle of the jobs distribution, and the loss of the skilled, relatively well-paid, secure and meaningful work that mining had provided for many.

Women's paid labour followed a different trajectory to men's in the postwar period, however. After the 1950s, with housework becoming easier and families smaller, aspirations for consumer goods and family holidays growing, and attitudes changing, more and more married working class women—even those with children still at home—entered the workforce, often part time. This trend affected mining areas, even in places like the pit villages of South Yorkshire and the South Wales Valleys, where buses were often sent round to collect women for factory shifts. Kay Case exemplified this trend: born in 1948, in South Wales, Kay went out to work when her two children were pre-school age because she wanted to earn more money for their Christmas presents; she intended to give up work in the New Year, but, finding the extra money useful, she remained in the labour force from that moment until she retired. Kay's comments about women's work suggest how powerfully many women felt that the normalisation of working wives had transformed their position:

Women have got more say now, I think, because I remember when I was young, what the men in the family said, went; my uncle said something to my aunty, it was done, and the children were, you know—the men were the boss. I think women have liberated themselves over the years, now we have got our own opinions. I think that's got a lot to do with the fact that we went out and earned our own money, because years ago they didn't work. They had hordes of kids, stayed home, brought the kids up. Had to lean towards their husbands for everything. But I think that as the years have gone, and as women have actually got their own jobs, careers, have children but still go to work, I think they've made their own independence.

This was not an uncritical celebration of women's paid labour, though: in several interviews women drew a distinction between the possibility and the necessity of work. Many women of the baby boom generation regretted the fact that their daughters, under greater financial pressure, felt compelled to work longer hours when their children were younger: choice and balance were the critical factors.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, it was not only individual family finances, but also local economies which were more robust. Carol Willis's (born 1952) discussion of a Facebook page called Ashington Remembered exemplified the collective memory of these strong local economies:

… it's full of people my age going "oh, do you remember – the high street was so full of shops, and there was specialist shops—do you remember the Disc, and do you remember the Landlight club, and Fleetwood Mac playing there!" It's awful nostalgia for a time which has gone forever. We felt the town we lived in was really quite a thriving town, where everyone was in work.

Similarly, Marjorie Simpson recalled that the ladies' clothing boutique, Dolly Mixture, which she set up in Stainforth, was 'doing really well' before the 1984–5 strike: 'at the time we had the girls working at the chicken factory, and the sewing factory, and every Friday they'd come in for something to go out in … we had thirteen pubs and clubs in this village then'. These were strong local economies, with 'rooted' businesses and social, as well as economic ties.

Women's increasing paid labour attenuated certain community ties, however. The network of links women made on a daily and weekly basis as housewives going shopping in counter-service shops in their local area fragmented as women who were more pressed for time made weekly supermarket trips, attracted by cheaper prices, and making use

of the convenience of fridges and freezers. Car ownership, above all, enabled and drove this shift, reconfiguring the spatial patterns of people's lives. The growth in car ownership—made possible by increasing prosperity for working people, and technological advances—enabled people to work, shop, socialise and spend their leisure time further from their homes. The implications of this for 'community' ties have been profound—but the freedom it brings is also valued. As Bernice Smith (born 1952), from Sacriston, in County Durham, recalled:

At one time, I could walk up Sacriston Front Street and speak to everybody … I've grown up with them, y'know, whereas, now, I walk up the street and barely know anybody and because we're so close to Durham, the Arnison Centre, people just get into their cars and drive there, rather than go down the Front Street and do a bit of shopping … yes, it has changed.

Inextricably tied up with changes in women's lives have been changes in men's approach to marriage and family life. From the mid-twentieth century, the ideals of 'companionate marriage' and 'family-centred masculinity' have become more pervasive. From the 1970s onwards, the failure of many marriages to live up to the high expectations invested in them led divorce rates to soar, but the basic belief in the couple relationship as one of mutual affection, support and sexual fulfilment remains remarkably undimmed. From the 1950s and 1960s, many men began to spend more leisure time with their wives and children, and take advantage of car ownership to spend it further from home. This, on the one hand, is seen positively by many interviewees: Hugh Dixon (born 1950), for example, spoke of spending time in the 1980s not going around the local pubs in his home village, Sacriston, in County Durham, with male friends, but instead driving to country pubs which his young family could enjoy together. The corollary is, however, that men had less time for the leisure activities which used to keep them woven into a dense network of community ties: all-male leisure activities, pubs and clubs with strict rules about when and where women could go.

The social infrastructure which knitted mining communities together before the mid-1980s was sharply divided by gender; some miners' welfares were still seeing disputes over allowing women onto their committees into the 1990s and early 2000s. But its loss is, nevertheless, significant. Several interviewees pointed to the possibility of reconstructing community institutions to work with gender roles and lifestyles today. In Sacriston, Hugh Dixon suggested:

we do try to do things for families now, rather than individuals. It's more for family based things that we try to do in the village. The amount of different groups and activities that we have on, y'know, we try to have mixed groups of different things, whether it be art groups, craft clubs, camera clubs, we've got all these activities going on which have actually run from the community centre. We didn't have anything like that when I was growing up, there wasn't anything such as that. People tended to go to work, come home, get showered or get bathed, go to the club, that seemed to be their life.

Community, then, can be reconfigured to work with, rather than against, contemporary family life. And this is important, given that 'traditional', tight-knit communities were not remembered uncritically. Sue (born 1956), evoked the daily and weekly rhythms of life in one of Kent's pit villages: 'the men worked at the pits, the women worked at one factory, or another factory, or on the fields; you communicated every weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, in the club. I worked with the same women as I socialised with'. But looking back, Sue also thought this intense community might have been 'unhealthily tight-knit'. Jeanette McComb (born 1953), who moved to Scotland from Wolverhampton on marrying her husband, a miner, felt it as a culture shock. She recalled of the working men's club in Auchinleck, 'you had to be there by six o'clock—if you weren't there by six you didn't get a seat—and you daren't sit in anybody else's seat'. She found it strange and oppressive how 'everybody knew who you were, where you were going, what you did, if you'd been out the night before, what time you'd got in'. But she could also see that 'the flip side to that was you know, if you were in trouble, or whatever, then they were there'. These 'traditional' communities could be supportive but also, for some, stifling. A measured assessment of what has been lost and what has been gained in the period since

the 1980s suggests that nostalgia for past is far too simplistic.

Starmer and the mines

In 2020, when the Durham Miners' Gala became an online event because of Covid-19, Keir Starmer sent a virtual message of support, in which he said:

> For more than a century the gala was funded by the miners of Durham coalfield and now it is our duty, and my duty as Labour leader, to support the gala and that is why I'm proud to be a Marra. We must never forget the origin of our party. It was founded as the political arm of the trade union movement. This is as important today as it was a century ago.[16]

Some on Labour's left, however, think Starmer is incapable of reconnecting Labour with its 'red wall' seats: too metropolitan, middle class, and Remain. Brexit has now happened (even if its ramifications will continue to be felt for years), and Starmer has been attempting for some time to put the issue to bed. How should he now attempt to appeal to communities in Britain's coalfields?

I have suggested in this article that Labour should not fall into the trap of nostalgia for a mythologised figure of the solidaristic miner and his community. But there is some room for nostalgia. As Alastair Bonnett's work suggests, nostalgia is not necessarily conservative—it can have a radical edge too.[17] We need to appraise the losses and gains that have come with deindustrialisation, hold onto the gains, and work to recreate, in ways appropriate to our contemporary circumstances, what was valued in the past.

The evidence I have presented here illuminates how, in the long period of gradual deindustrialisation from the mid-1950s onwards, and the short period of acute deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s, a series of *inextricably interconnected* shifts—in men's work, women's work, leisure, transport, technology, prosperity, consumerism, marital relationships, parenting and community—brought some things that people value and took away others they feel as a profound loss. Interviewees from across Britain's coalfields pointed to the need to return to an age of plentiful, good jobs, providing security, a decent income, and a sense of meaning; they pointed, too, to the need for strong local economies and high streets, where young people did not have to move away for work, and where local businesses thrived. Many interviewees valued the growth of work for women, but emphasised that both mothers and fathers needed time to spend with their partners and their families, as well as in their communities.

How to achieve all this? While my goal here is not to set out a policy blueprint, a range of policies could clearly play a role here. There is no prospect of Starmer suggesting a re-opening of Britain's pits any time soon. However, an 'industrial strategy' clearly has a part to play here. This should not simply be an 'industrial strategy' in the way that it is currently usually imagined—high-tech manufacturing plus major infrastructure projects. Rather, Starmer's response to the loss of jobs in mining (as well as heavy industry and manufacturing) should have two main arms. First, and directly linked to the end of coal mining in Britain, is the Green New Deal or Green Industrial Revolution. This builds directly on the work of Corbynites and grass-roots campaigners within Labour over the past few years.[18] Labour must not assume that the Green Industrial Revolution is one the left 'owns': Johnson recognises the existential *and electoral* threat the climate crisis poses to the Tories, and his government has made time to promote its green credentials even as it has been overwhelmed by Brexit and Covid. A Green New Deal commensurate with the scale of the crisis, delivering significant numbers of meaningful, skilled new jobs, must be central to Labour's mission.

[16] I. Johnson, 'Sir Keir Starmer slams government at virtual Durham Miners' Gala—as local Tory MP visits butcher', ChronicleLive, 11 July 2020; https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/sir-keir-starmer-slams-government-18581796 (accessed 1 March 2021).

[17] A. Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2010.

[18] Labour Party, *It's Time for Real Change. The Labour Party Manifesto*, 2019. And see A. Buller, 'Where next for the Green New Deal?', *Renewal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2020, pp. 26–36.

Second, Starmer should rethink Labour's approach to globalisation. It would not be reasonable—indeed, it would not be possible—to roll back globalisation in favour of nationalist autarky. But a progressive 're-globalisation' which is more under democratic control, and produces more socially (and environmentally) progressive outcomes is possible, if politicians can work together across national borders to reshape the supranational and international institutions which determine what sort of globalisation we have.[19] This could bring more industry back to Britain.

But bringing back industry and boosting jobs in industry and in renewables falls far short of being enough. Technological change means that industrial production uses far fewer workers than it did even several decades ago. To create strong local economies and thriving high streets, Labour must work to boost pay, job security and productivity in the Foundational Economy; develop community wealth-building strategies, to ensure that local multiplier effects benefit the local area and 'rooted' local firms; and empower workers, most obviously through strengthening the power of trade unions.[20] And Labour must think about *time*, as well as *money*—time to spend with families, and in the local community, including using local shops and other businesses, and shaping new community infrastructure. Policies like universal basic income and universal basic services, and the four-day week, offer ideas for how we might free up more of people's time to do this.[21] Some of these may currently be seen as too utopian, but recognising the issue is the first important step in making this part of Labour's vision for the country. Finally, investments in community infrastructure which can be shaped by communities' needs and desires will be vital: strong communities require institutions as well as taking time. There is radical nostalgia here, but more than that, a radical view of a better future.

Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite is Associate Professor of Twentieth-Century British History at University College, London

[19]M. L. Bishop and A. Payne, 'The left and the case for "progressive reglobalisation"',
Renewal, vol. 27, no. 3, 2019, pp. 79–95.
[20]The Foundational Economy Collective, *Foundational Economy. The Infrastructure of Everyday Life*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018; J. Guinan and M. O'Neill, *The Case for Community Wealth Building*, Oxford, Wiley, 2019.

[21]M. Lawrence and N. Lawson, 'Basic income: a debate', *Renewal*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2016, pp. 69–79; P. Jones, R. Calvert Jump and L. Kikuchi, 'Public sector as pioneer: shorter working weeks as the new gold standard', Autonomy, August 2020, https://autonomy.work/portfolio/publicsectorpioneer/ (accessed 1 March 2021).