

Miners' Engagement Session – notes (25 January 2022)

Participants A and B - West Lothian

Participant A worked with NCB. and participant B has been Involved in Coalfields Regeneration over the years. A was employed for 16 years not a miner, a motor mechanic then went to monktonhall in 1983. A wasn't involved in picketing but did strike. Found it very difficult. Trying to make it. Made us sign on in Edinburgh to make it awkward. Women had it the hardest living on a pittance. During the strike all got £16 was very hard. Support pardon as although wasn't involved heard the stories and guys had been targeted by the coal board and was a way of getting rid of them. Have a lot of sympathy for them.

Participant C - Fife

Striking miner in 84/85 worked in west fife. Youngest of the 206 strikers, sacked when I was 19. I was able to get back in December 1985 in Comrie pit. Then in other pits. Am currently a driving instructor. I was victimised and criminalised

Participant D - Fife

Good to be involved. From Fife started in 1978 at 16. Dad was in mines and brother also joined. Started in Clackmannanshire. Worked in mines for 20 years. Dad, me and brother arrested and fined. A lot of people taken off the picket line to reduce the numbers. When you went to court it was laughable weren't given privilege to answer. Bill is long long overdue and should be taken as far as it can. Hopefully any hurdles can be overtaken. Mum worked and there were soup kitchens. The women kept us fed and kept our chin up. The bill is a great thing.

Participant E

Worked in Comrie colliery and in castlebridge. 26 years total. I had 4 young kids, the women kept us going. My wife was a miner's daughter. I came from Arniston and moved to fife. We had 200 arrests from Oakley alone. Many have passed away hadn't been arrested in their lives. Some ended up in court. Some were fined £300.

Participant F - Ayrshire

Son of a miner, worked in Clackmannanshire , 3 generations of my wife's family worked in the mines. I was 16 during the strike and have seen the "utter devastation" of the community which has never really recovered. Women had to provide. Demeaning for some of the men. The division between the men who didn't strike and those who did is still palpable. Some still don't speak today. Opinions still persist. I have never burst a picket line and never will. The bill is long overdue.

Question

Maggie Chapman MSP to Participant C – Victimisation and criminalisation?

1984 Cartmore picketing. Lorries were driving at 50/60 miles an hour. I joined the picket, there were 130 arrests by police. I became a regular picketer £2 and 5 cigarettes. Sometimes we went to Bilston Glen and others. I was sacked after an incident with a friend. Pardons should be for everyone no matter where they were arrested so long as their offences were not serious enough to be jailed. Two of my community were enticed in strike breaking. The incident started at 5am left home in Lahore to join picket in seafield. A miner who had broken the strike had had his window broken guarded by police. I became aware of a convoy coming towards me – 2 police cars and a van and then 2 more cars. Gave them the v sign and was slung into the car. The officer who grabbed me spoke to the

other officer. I heard the strike breaker say he saw nothing. I was taken to police station and then to the court at Cowdenbeath. Friend was found not guilty of breaking the window – he hadn't done it he was charged with breach of the peace and sent on remand to Saughton. I was 19 and told I would get the same unless I pleaded guilty I was terrified. I pleaded guilty to avoid Saughton. Fined £150 less than 6 hours after my arrest. 3 days later I received a letter from colliery saying I was sacked for gross industrial misconduct. Friend was also sacked, he never got his job back.

Maggie Chapman MSP to Participant A – do you want to add?

I was not active in picketing but a lot of active people are dead now. I was employed by NCB for 16 years but a lot of the guys relayed the stories and heard similar stories. Many were victimised as the coal board had been waiting years to get them and this was their chance. Some of these areas have never recovered.

Alexander Stewart MSP to Participant D – courts and judicial process and policing of the strike/police coming from other areas

Like [Participant C] I was involved in picket lines with my dad and brother. I was arrested at Cartmore there were 100s and 100s of police at Cartmore from every corner of UK. Drafted in and maybe not all police. When you were standing on picket line there was pushing and shoving but weren't doing anything and all of a sudden grabbed and taken away. Once you were arrested you were taken to court it was a total farce. One of the guys I was with recently passed away. You got asked your name and they were making you say yes and no. I wasn't going to plead guilty for something I didn't do. Were you throwing missiles – I wasn't going to say I was when I wasn't. I pleaded not guilty I was fined £50 so was my brother. My dad was fined £200. One of my friends I told him to tell the truth and he was forced into a position. He was a nervous wreck. He was under pressure to say yes to get it finished with and ended up with a criminal record. Guys without a criminal record in their lives.

Q - The role of the sheriff? Were they part of the process?

I think the sheriff actually spoke twice once to say to answer the question and then to fine me £50 that was it. The wanted to get through as many cases as possible. Didn't intervene with the prosecutors. There was no due process.

Pam Gosal MSP – What would a pardon mean? And those who are not here what would that mean?

To Mike and Bobby, Murray, Andrew

Participant D - A huge sigh of relief for some families. A lot of people have never got over this. This is the first time I have heard [Participant C] speak about this, we are good friends. There are a lot of areas of high deprivation which have never recovered and still trying to get over it. It would be long overdue for these families. Seems to have been happening for generations not just miners. Lots of things taking years but I would really love it for all these people to be pardoned. Clean slate and huge sigh of relief.

Participant C – Looking forward to the 40th anniversary in a couple of years' time and the 50th and the 60th. I would receive a pardon under the bill as was on the picket. My friend wouldn't and that would be unfair as he was unfairly punished and took the blame for another's action in encouraging the strike breaking. The pardon should be for all but it's no good to me.

Participant F – I know of miners who struggled to find work after having a criminal record. I think the pardon should be for all unless the offence was extremely serious. Like bricks getting thrown over flyovers etc. Something that not been touched on is that I think the role of the police should be looked at in this. A lot of the police were brought in. It's about state sponsored thuggery. They were there to break the will of the miners. The role of the police should be looked at they seem to have a free pass in this

Participant E – should be for all miners. Was your luck if you got lifted or prosecuted and sacked. Important that they all get a pardon. Should not be segregated. Was a period of intense conflict and people's characters changed. One lad was 19 and was sacked and got divorced. He got charged with breaking a police officer's leg and he didn't do it, was a crash of push, lots of incidences where falsely or wrongly accused and sacked and had to deal with the consequences. I am a local councillor and have seen the effects. Got convicted for the first time. Should be for ALL not just for some of them.

Participant A – most of these guys were active in the picket but I wasn't but was suffering. I had wife and 4 kids, all was getting was social security. Was really hard for the women. I believe they should be pardoned and posthumously too.

Convener, Joe FitzPatrick MSP – pardon easy to administer so can be swift. A few areas we could look at pardon is restricted to miners. My question is whether there were people who should also be pardoned

Participant E – I know my wife was lifted up in Perth. Convicted. Another guy in our village Jan/Feb in Comrie and there was a young lad apprentice plumber and was a skirmish he got lifted and charged totally innocent. Other wives were lifted things happened during that strike. If they are serious about giving a pardon should be everyone.

Participant F – Must be a way the committee can speak to people in the local area to see if there were other people at the picket line. I stood with my uncle and luckily wasn't arrested. You didn't know everyone at the picket line. Had other unionists to put bodies there.

Participant C – A whole school walked in a mile towards cartmore to support one of the fathers. None got arrested but had friends fellow trade unionists on the picket line. Should cover them.

Paul O'Kane MSP – how important is it that people are directly pardoned? Have a piece of paper? Rather than blanket pardon? Is that important?

Participant C - Very important, my friend's daughter and son would love a piece of paper he has passed away. We had 6 miners sacked all from pits/workshops. They were two of them of the 6 who are not with us anymore. That would be very important.

Participant E – agree very important. Tullibody Davy was an old guy from Comrie he was sacked. His wife would really cherish a piece of paper.

Participant F – For families getting something after 40 years is better than nothing and if we can give letters with a pardon. Rather than a blanket.

Fulton MacGregor MSP - Issue of compensation. The Bill doesn't have proposals for compensation how do people feel? Is a pardon enough?

Participant C – This should be considered some for the sacked men lost tens of thousands in redundancy should be rectified. I lost my pension benefits significant sums and that loss has

accumulated over time. Like others that were sacked there has been trauma and hardship for my whole adult life.

Participant F – people who lost their pensions and redundancy should be looked at. Not sure it will make any difference. Pension rights and redundancy should be recompensed.

Participant E – am trustee for Scottish miners pension scheme. Realise how much they've lost so they have lost out in pension rights.

Karen Adam MSP – does the bill go far enough? What do you want people to know about this – an apology? What if you could have something what would it be and how far reaching?

Participant F – I would like the committee and the parliament not to forget mining communities. We are essentially forgotten about from election time to election time. Every party is guilty for ignoring this area and other areas. I was 16 when the pit strike and started shutting. We didn't have the benefits of other mines in the area we were shut after 84 and in the same year the local council stopped their apprenticeships. I don't want the parliament to forget the communities after this bill is passed. It's not about getting a hand out it's about getting a hand up. We are a proud community and proud people. Don't take us for granted.

Participant E – what can we learn. Want to maintain our communities and our heritage. Lost our dignity. Lost the intergenerational connection and want to reclaim that and reclaim and establish the community spirit. Retain and rebuild communities like we did in the past with community spirit.

Participant C – Been lucky 4 jobs and 7 companies. I walked out of school and into pit in 1982 and was in coal industry for 20 years sacked for a year. This pardon keeps it in the public domain and heritage kid and grandkids and wife are fine. Pardon comes fair enough but the fight goes on for me. Am 56 year old I thought my story was horrendous but central belt was heartbreaking got to keep this alive. Got to look after my fellow miners and fought for their communities.

Paul O'Kane MSP - how much do you feel truth and reconciliation was done through John Scott work or do we need an inquiry at UK level but to what extent there is a need for these stories to be retold publicly and what else would help – apology/to heal the wounds of the past

Participant E – only concern is the timespan. If bill included all that great it should happen but we are losing so many but concerned about the timescale

Participant C – Should be an inquiry for role of the police at UK level but losing time so need to move quickly. Thought it would be quicker but glad we are in the position now and hope it continues to go the correct way.

Participant F – Most miners are retired so quicker the better but don't need to wait for UK we could just look at Scotland. The police were deliberately brought in as a tool of the state rather than to control law and order. Their behaviour in many instances should be called into question. Some of the worst were from non mining areas and had no affinity about what the men and communities were going through.

Alexander Stewart MSP – a view on communities now but has the healing taken place or is there still a stigma around the process and do people feel let down?

Participant F – there are still people who don't speak to scabs. That may seem an emotive term. Talking with friends seen guys walk out of the pub not drinking with a scab and walk out of the pub. Still see that man and can't speak to him. I would never step over a picket line in my life. It affected

people. Found it reprehensible and can't forgive it. I don't know about the others but can't forgive it and my village is still trying to recover 40 years later – having to go to the soup kitchen. There has been no investment. There are been bits, but communities have been neglected they have just papered over the cracks. They need a hand up not a hand out.

Participant C – managed to get 28 people to interview about the mining strikes for a project. It is still in the communities and the community still has a healthy spirit about 84/85 and still feel affected to this day. Keep things in the past going am getting involved in keeping the history going and is going strong in our community.

Participant E – the community spirit is great but as [Participant F] says we don't need a hand out. Should have invested. If closing the miners jobs they should have invested in other jobs instead of spending billions fighting the miners. Jobs is the important things. Have appreciated SG investing in coal regeneration trust that is a hand out but has been appreciated.

Participant B – weekly tiny parcel of goods during the strikes they were surviving on that and £16. Was not an easy time. Even a year later was difficult. We stick together and do get help off the coalfields and do have a spirit about us. Might not have that same closeness in the city. When coronavirus hit the miners club got together and funding for people who were isolating and those who didn't have help. The Coalfields Regeneration Trust are helping. We will never forget the strikes and how people were treated. People were hungry but people were also losing their marriages because of the stress of the strike. Unions will never be the same as the biggest unions were broken and lots of people lost trust with the union. They haven't got the same power or recognition as they had once. As for people being compensated they did lose money – pensions. As for compensation about that I think we are too late for that.

Participant F – investment in the mines in Ayrshire at the time. Still enough coal in Ayrshire. It was a political decision to close the mines and couldn't be bothered getting the coal out. They wasted so much money. Would be nice to have money to invest in these communities.

Participant C – this was just the start for me. The slogan was always coal not dole. The support we got after the miners went back local miners clubs, galas, stalls, games and effort and determination of people I eventually got my job back in November 85. When I got sacked the coal board kept sending me letters. I was asked to go to a tribunal three months after I got my job back. The secretarial side of the NCB was horrendous. They kicked men when they were down. 653 days until I went on strike til I went back. 13 months sacked. 206 miners sacked. Was more in NCB self interest to have men back. This morning has been a very good effort by everyone.

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