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Lewis H. Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-File Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016, pp. xiv + 311, h/b, £75, ISBN 9780719090684

At the outbreak of the First World War the Durham Miners' Association had over a hundred thousand members and was one of the largest and most powerful affiliates of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, itself one of the largest trade unions in the world.. John Wilson, a founder of the DMA and its General Secretary from 1896 till his death in 1915 was a Liberal in the mould of Gladstone. After a false start in 1885-6, he sat in Parliament continuously from 1890 until his death in 1915. Yet only a few years later, in 1921, the DMA resolved to include among its objectives, 'the Abolition of Capitalism'. Perhaps less dramatically but more significantly, 1922 saw the beginning of the Labour Party's enduring domination of the county when it won all but one of the eleven county parliamentary seats.

The early years of this transformation took place during the Great Unrest of the pre-war years. Mates ignores Ireland and women, focusing on the labour unrest and, within the national picture, re-focuses again to limit his attention to the coal mining industry in the county between 1910 and 1914; steel, shipbuilding, engineering and the railways are ignored. In the coal industry the two major conflicts of this period were over the legislative eight-hour day, secured in 1908 but not implemented in Durham until 1910; and the individual minimum wage, won after the first national coal mining strike in 1912 led to legislative intervention.

The period studied by Mates is therefore of interest for two linked reasons: for what it might tell us about 'the rise of the Labour Party' and for what it might tell us about 'the Great Labour Unrest'. The key virtue of this book is its demonstration

that, at least during this time and in this place, these two processes were linked. The linkage, assuming that it was typical, has had enduring effects for both the Labour Party and the trade union movement.

Mates proposes four arguments. First, as a preliminary, he argues that the Liberals of the DMA leadership were challenged by the left and that the ranks of the Liberals were significantly depleted by this attack. Second, as highlighted above, that industrial developments and political developments were intertwined. Third, an argument more specific to this time and place, that the most effective challenge to the Liberal establishment came from those campaigning for the individual minimum wage. And fourth, again a specific point, that ILP activists took some cues from contemporary syndicalists but forestalled any serious advance from that quarter. The book opens with an impressive survey of the historiography which makes clear how far basic questions about the Unrest have been ignored in favour of methodological disputes and the extent to which mainstream politics have been ignored in favour of what Lenin later called 'left-wing communism'. There then follows a chapter setting the economic and political context in the coalfield which emphasizes the 'agency' of political actors or, as we used to say, the 'relative autonomy' of the political from the economic. Mates then gives a narrative in four chapters capped by a conclusion.

The challenge from the left is depicted largely as a product of individuals and organizations of the rank-and-file. Of the former, the two to receive most attention are Jack Lawson, the author of *A Man's Life*, his autobiography, and later a member of Atlee's first cabinet but at this time a member of the ILP; and George Harvey, later known as the 'Wardley Lenin' after the Tyneside colliery village where he worked and the Russian revolutionary but whose views before the war were broadly

syndicalist. The most important of the rank-and-file organizations was the Durham Forward Movement, a campaign for the reform of the DMA and for a more militant stance in the union's collective bargaining, in which Lawson was involved. This movement, previously almost unknown to history, Mates shows to be of some importance. Its leading lights were members of the ILP but their campaigning emphasized men's 'knife and fork' issues like the minimum wage. Other issues were largely ignored. A delegate who suggested the DMA should consider a demand for maternity benefits was laughed out of court; of Keir Hardie's pursuit of peace, love and mutual understanding in international politics we hear only the briefest of comments; and ethical socialism, it seems, was of no interest in the coalfield.

Assessing the strength and success of the Durham Forward Movement is difficult given the surviving sources and it has to be said the Mates makes heavy weather of it: the reader is offered many lengthy discussions of sometimes minor events which fail to reach a firm conclusion. The reasoning on these occasions is without undue optimism, but when Mates turns to syndicalism one finds an almost heroic effort to look only on the bright side of the syndicalist's life. Nevertheless, Mates is finally forced to admit that 'the revolutionaries remained on the periphery' (p. 231; similarly p. 235 but cf. p. 246). That syndicalism was a part of a maelstrom of new ideas in which the younger activist members of the DMA lived is, however, well established. So, too, is his argument that the militants of the ILP were able to steal some of the syndicalists' thunder, limiting their attractiveness and monopolizing miners' discontents. Well-established, also, is the unwillingness or inability of John Wilson to adapt his Liberalism and the assistance this rigidity gave to the ILP activists.

Mates claims to offer a case study which gives a new perspective on the nature and significance of the turmoil in Edwardian Britain. It is a claim that is well justified. Like every good case study it demonstrates the complexity of events and the role of the personal and the idiosyncratic. But it also demonstrates convincingly the intertwining of the political and the industrial struggles in the early years of the twentieth century, with the consequences that are with us still.

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