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Contested spaces: London and the 1984/5 miners' strike

The Onllwyn Miners' Welfare Hall in the Dulais Valley played an important role in sustaining the local community during the 1984/5 miners' strike. It was a distribution point for food parcels that arguably constituted an alternative welfare system during a year without income. It hosted social evenings that helped maintain morale. A strike committee of local National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) lodges met in the hall to organise picketing and other activities. Meetings of local women were also held there, part of the wider mobilisation of women that was such a notable feature of the strike.¹ It was one of many such hubs in the coalfields. Raphael Samuel argued in the aftermath of the strike that 'the real nerve centre' of that year 'was not the National Union of Mineworkers headquarters in Sheffield ... but the Miners' Welfare in the villages'.²

The dispute can be understood as fundamentally a defence of place, with resistance to widespread pit closures and job losses intimately connected to protecting mining communities. Such a conception encourages us to foreground the local in accounts of the strike.³ Yet there is a risk of conceptualising the local in an excessively bounded way. The Onllwyn Miners' Welfare also hosted visitors from across Britain and beyond who were part of the large solidarity movement for the miners. These included London-based groups that twinned with the area to provide support, such as Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and a number of trade union branches. People from the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham, north London, where Dulais miners had received significant support collecting, went to the welfare

¹ The Richard Burton Archives (RBA), University of Swansea, MND/25 Box 4, Dulais Valley Neath and District Miners' Strike Support Fund Minutes Book, 6 May to 16 September 1984; RBA/MND/25 Box 4, Minutes of Dulais Valley Joint Lodges Strike Committee, 14 October 1984 to 3 March 1985.

² Raphael Samuel, 'Preface', in Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas (eds), *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5* (London, 1986), xii.

³ Daryl Leeworthy, 'The Secret Life of Us: 1984, the Miners' Strike and the Place of Biography in Writing History "from Below"', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire*, 19 (2012), 826.

during and after the strike.⁴ As well as attesting to the centrality of local experiences, the Onllwyn welfare hall highlights how strike activists relied upon and developed networks of solidarity that extended significantly beyond their immediate locality.

This article builds on recent research emphasising the importance of space and place for understanding the history of protest, social movements and trade unionism.⁵ It is particularly influenced by geographical work on translocality and the relational construction of place.⁶ Such approaches emphasise how ‘places, in fact, are always constructed out of articulations of social relations’, including the connections of political parties, trade unions and social movements, ‘which are not only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere’.⁷ The concept of ‘translocality’ similarly suggests both an emphasis on the importance of the local, but also the multiple ways in which places relate to each other. This avoids versions of cosmopolitanism that lack an interest in localities, while also challenging parochial definitions of place.⁸

Relationships between localities of course vary over time, and accounts of the construction of translocal solidarities can help historicise our understanding of the development and form of connections between places. This article focuses on the 1984/5 miners’ strike as an exceptional event that allowed for the emergence of new relationships between London and the

⁴ South Wales Miners’ Library (SWML), ‘From Soweto to Tottenham’, *Valleys Star*, March 1986; Dulais Support Fund Minutes.

⁵ Lucy Delap, ‘Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women’s Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000’, *History Workshop Journal*, 81 (2016), 171–96; David Featherstone and Paul Griffin, ‘Spatial Relations, Histories from below and the Makings of Agency: Reflections on *The Making of the English Working Class at 50*’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 40 (2016), 375–93; Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016); Ruth Percy, ‘Picket Lines and Parades: Labour and Urban Space in Early Twentieth-Century London and Chicago’, *Urban History*, 41 (2014), 456–77.

⁶ David Featherstone, ‘Towards the Relational Construction of Militant Particularisms: Or Why the Geographies of Past Struggles Matter for Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation’, *Antipode* 37 (2005), 250–271; Clemens Greiner and Patrick Saktapolrak, ‘Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives’, *Geography Compass* 7 (2013), 373–84.

⁷ Doreen Massey, ‘Places and Their Pasts’, *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995), 183.

⁸ John Tomaney, ‘Parochialism – a Defence’, *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2013).

coalfields. Nevertheless, crucial to the solidarity campaign in 1984/5 were the networks constructed across Britain particularly since the late 1960s by the women's movement, trade union organisations, the Labour Party and other left groups.⁹ In the first section of this article I develop an account of the multitude of spaces in which these solidarity relationships between activists in London and the coalfields were practised. I then consider 'twinning' as a distinct spatial tactic used by supporters of the strike to bridge geographical distance and encourage the development of personal relationships. In the final part of the article, I discuss the contradictory role played by the local and central state. This history highlights the competing attempts to control space by the Thatcher government and those on the left who attempted to sustain a progressive opposition and alternative vision. As Katrina Navickas' work has shown, historicising the development of oppositional political spaces means considering both their opening up and closing down.¹⁰ The construction of spaces of solidarity in the 1980s was a contested process.

Constructing spaces of solidarity

Stephen Brooke has observed that black, women's, and gay liberation movements sought to establish a physical presence in London in the 1980s, particularly through the establishment of centres. 'If there were enterprise zones', he argues, 'there were also social democracy zones'.¹¹ This introduces a spatial understanding to the conflict in London between two competing visions for moving beyond the post-war settlement. The geographer Doreen Massey argued that neoliberalism was in one sense a victory for London and the South East over the rest of Britain. Nevertheless, she emphasised that some of the strongest opposition to that project also

⁹ Diarmaid Kelliher, 'Constructing a Culture of Solidarity: London and the British Coalfields in the Long 1970s', *Antipode*, 49 (2017), 106–24.

¹⁰ Navickas, *Protest*.

¹¹ Stephen Brooke, 'Living in "New Times": Historicizing 1980s Britain', *History Compass*, 12 (2014), 28.

came from the capital.¹² Thatcherism was manifested in east London's docklands, part of which was reconstituted as a low regulation, low tax enterprise zone.¹³ At the same time, a range of overlapping left concerns, from the liberation movements that had developed since the 1960s to Ken Livingstone's administration of the Greater London Council (GLC), sought to offer a different vision. In contrast to the enterprise zones, women's centres, radical bookshops and other sites were developed to provide spaces for progressive alternatives.

Such spaces provided a physical presence in the city and helped embed politics in particular localities. Yet if we think about these spaces in the context of the miners' strike, we can see how such physical rootedness also enabled political activists and others to develop more geographically expansive networks of solidarity. Women's centres played an important role in the connections developed between feminist activists in London and women in the coalfields during 1984/5. The Kings Cross Women's Centre hosted a benefit for the strike, showing films and holding a discussion that was led by Nottinghamshire miners' wives.¹⁴ Similarly, a women-only meeting and social about the dispute was held in the Women's Centre in Waltham Forest.¹⁵

The South London Women's Centre hosted weekly meetings of a feminist miners' support group that linked with miners' wives from Ammanford. There were reciprocal visits between the two groups, and this personal contact was understood to be politically important. The London activists asked 'what else would have brought together women from mining villages

¹² Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹³ Sam Wetherell, 'Freedom Planned: Enterprise Zones and Urban Non-Planning in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27 (2016), 266–89.

¹⁴ 'Agit Prop', *Time Out*, 27 September–3 October 1984, 37.

¹⁵ TUC Library Collections (TUCLC), London Metropolitan University, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, Waltham Forest Miners Support Group, 'Week of Action 15-22 December 1984' leaflet.

and London feminists, giving us access to each other's different ways of life?'¹⁶ The women's movement produced perhaps the most extensive network of centres in the capital, but there were others that played a role in the solidarity campaign for the miners and highlight the diversity of activism in the city. A Lesbian and Gay Centre was established during the strike, helped by a £750,000 grant from the GLC. Among the events held there in 1985 were a fundraiser and a conference organised by miners' support groups LGSM and Lesbians Against Pit Closures (LAPC).¹⁷

Within the trade union and labour movement there were attempts to develop comparable resources. The West London Trades Union Club opened in May 1984, again partially funded by the GLC, and Kent NUM members made it their base in that part of the city.¹⁸ A perhaps more novel development was the establishment of a number of Union Resource Centres in London in the early 1980s, usually with support from local Labour councils. There were forty such organisations providing support for the labour movement across the country, growing out of a handful of independent projects in London, Coventry, Leeds and Newcastle in the mid-1970s. One centre in South London alone supported four groups of miners based in the capital during the strike, producing thousands of leaflets and badges, and reportedly raising more than a quarter of a million pounds.¹⁹

The economic situation of the early 1980s encouraged the creation of new spaces. In the midst of the highest unemployment since the 1930s, the TUC supported the establishment of

¹⁶ 'Striking New Connections', *Spare Rib*, April 1985, 32–33; see also 'Action', *City Limits*, 4–10 January 1985, 20.

¹⁷ Paul Charman, 'Gay Grant', *Time Out*, 19–25 April 1984, 7; 'Dulais Wears Our Badge on its Van', *Capital Gay*, 5 April 1985, 13; Hall-Carpenter Archives, London School of Economics, HCA/EPHEMERA/684, 'LGSM Presents The Drift', n.d., leaflet.

¹⁸ 'Magnificent Base for West London Trade Unionists', *UCATT Viewpoint*, January 1985, 2.

¹⁹ David Thomas, 'Union Resource Centres Threatened by the Cuts', *Tribune*, 16 March 1984, 7; Hackney Archives (HA), D/S/52/6/1/44, Trade Union Resource Centre Trust, 'New Resources for the Trade Union Movement Under Threat', n.d.

Unemployed Workers Centres. By 1984 there were over 200.²⁰ There was no settled opinion on their function, with some trade unionists inclined to see the centres as relatively a-political providers of services to people out of work. In some places, however, they developed a broader role and during the strike became the base for many London miners' support groups.²¹ Support for the strike amongst the unemployed was frequently commented upon.²² While London could be perceived as relatively prosperous compared to coal mining areas, there was nevertheless significant deindustrialisation and jobs losses in the capital. The most obvious example was in the docklands, where the registered dock workforce collapsed from 29,250 in 1960 to 2,315 by 1982.²³ A docklands miners' support group twinned with Durham using the slogan 'Don't let the mines go the same way as the docks.'²⁴ These shared experiences of deindustrialisation and unemployment could help solidify relationships of solidarity. Activists in the Brent Miners Support Campaign noted that 'we too have seen workplaces closed down, jobs destroyed (about 15,000 in the past five years) and our Borough turned into an industrial graveyard. We are all in Thatcher's sinking ship and a victory for the miners will be a victory and an inspiration for us all.'²⁵

Radical and alternative bookshops can be understood as another element of the attempt to create more permanent politicised spaces. Lucy Delap has argued that a history of feminist bookshops challenges assumptions about the fluid and ephemeral nature of the Women's

²⁰ Keith Forrester and Kevin Ward, 'Trade Union Services for the Unemployed: The Unemployed Workers' Centres', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28 (1990), 387–95.

²¹ Brent Archives (BA), 19885/PUB/3, 'List of London Miners Support Committees', 30 October 1984.

²² Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright, 'Beyond the Coalfields: The Work of the Miners' Support Groups', in Huw Beynon (ed.), *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike* (London, 1985), 153; HA/D/S/52/6/1/39, Len Tipple, 'Support the Miners UNITY IS STRENGTH', *Signing on Times*, n.d.; John La Rose, 'The Miners' Experience of the Police, the Magistrates, the Judges and the Courts', *Race Today*, June 1985, 6.

²³ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London, 2008), 206.

²⁴ Massey and Wainwright, 'Beyond the Coalfields', 153.

²⁵ BA/19885/BTC/2, Brent Miners Support Campaign, 'All Behind the Miners' Fight for Jobs!' leaflet, 1984.

Liberation Movement.²⁶ The relatively fixed space of the bookshop was again a resource for supporting the miners, providing room for solidarity meetings and collection points for food and money. Jane Cholmeley, founder of the feminist bookshop Silver Moon in 1984, recalled recently how they controlled a small amount of space in front of the shop in which they allowed men and women from the coalfields to fundraise, providing some protection from police harassment.²⁷ Housmans bookshop near King's Cross provided accommodation for visiting miners.²⁸ In his strike diary, Yorkshire miner Arthur Wakefield wrote about drinking tea with the staff of Collet's bookshop on Charing Cross and collecting outside.²⁹

Such shops were part of the broader political milieu in which support for the miners was rooted, and reflected the diversity of the movement. New Beacon, an independent radical bookshop in Finsbury Park specialising in Caribbean, African, Afro-American and Black British material, donated to fundraisers for the miners.³⁰ Gay's the Word, which opened in 1979 in central London, was used as a collection point for the strike by LGSM, who also held meetings there and organised regular collections outside.³¹ Bookshops were of course both commercial and political, and refusing to delineate strictly between the two opens up our conception of what can constitute a political space.³²

²⁶ Delap, 'Feminist Bookshops', 172.

²⁷ Jane Cholmeley, 'Silver Moon Women's Bookshop: A Feminist Business in a Capitalist World, Contradictions and Challenges', talk given at Radical histories/Histories of Radicalism, Queen Mary, University of London, July 2016.

²⁸ Nik Gorecki, co-manager of Housmans, discussed the shop's history at a meeting of the Applied History Network: 'Sites of Resistance: Radical Bookselling', University College London, 9 February 2016.

²⁹ Arthur Wakefield, *The Miners' Strike Day by Day: The Illustrated 1984-85 Diary of Yorkshire Miner Arthur Wakefield* (Barnsley, 2002), 160–61.

³⁰ George Padmore Institute, NCM/1/3/3/3, Sarah White, letter to NUM HQ, 22 May 1984.

³¹ Diarmaid Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984–5', *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), 245.

³² Delap, 'Feminist Bookshops', 171.

Bookshops and centres were often explicitly intended to provide a resource for political activism and were crucial in the solidarity campaign for the miners. In other instances, spaces could be temporarily politicised. For example, the bars, theatres, student unions and labour clubs of London were sites for numerous fundraisers for the miners. London listings magazines *Time Out* and *City Limits* were full of cabaret, comedy, music, and poetry events supporting the strike, reflecting the development of a wider politicised cultural milieu in this period.³³ Towards the end of the dispute there was an attempt to coordinate this cultural politics with the creation of a group called Pit Dragon. The *NME* described how ‘Pit Dragon has managed to harness the talents of almost every worthwhile artist on the seamier side of the London cabaret circuit and the potential exists to develop into the most dynamic political/cultural organisation since Rock Against Racism’.³⁴ Pit Dragon brought the strike into venues across the capital, but they also took ‘art and entertainment onto the picket line—where it belongs!’³⁵ At a mass picket of Neasden Power Station in February 1985, a stage was set up for ‘a seemingly endless stream of comics, non-poets and bands ... Scab lorries turned back by a variety show? Surely a first in the annals of industrial struggle’.³⁶

Cultural politics was of course also performed in the coalfields during the strike. Such events could be occasions for mutual learning and exchange. Billy Bragg, for example, who toured the coalfields in support of the strike, was greatly influenced by the music he discovered in the north east of England in particular, not least ‘the miners’ poet’ Jock Purdon.³⁷ Purdon in turn played in London, on one occasion at Goldsmith’s College with the Betteshanger Colliery Band

³³ Gavin Schaffer, ‘Fighting Thatcher with Comedy: What to Do When There Is No Alternative’, *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016), 374–97.

³⁴ S. Williams, ‘Dragon on Picket Line!’, *New Musical Express*, 23 February 1985, 12.

³⁵ SWML, ‘London Commitment - Neasden Picket: Magic!’, *Valleys Star*, 27 February 1985.

³⁶ Williams, ‘Dragon on Picket Line!’

³⁷ Jock Purdon, *The Miners’ Poet*, BBC Radio 4, 2 March 2015.

from Kent.³⁸ Coalfield musicians visiting London could be useful advocates for the cause. David Donovan described the South Wales Striking Miners' Choir performing in London and winning hundreds of friends. He believed that they embodied people's idea of the South Wales miners.³⁹ There were of course long standing associations between subcultures and the left in London and elsewhere. The support campaign produced comparatively new intersections of art and politics however, with a distinctive interaction between the heterogeneous cultures of the capital and the coalfields.

Such a politicising of cultural spaces was not always welcome. An accountant for Price Waterhouse, which was involved in seizing NUM funds during the strike, complained about a collection for miners at the Half Moon Theatre in East London: 'I don't feel the stage is the place for this sort of thing, especially when the majority of the audience is children. Even the programme had a great tirade about the abolition of the GLC'.⁴⁰ Sometimes, however, the sceptical could be won over. One miner described appealing for support at a

kind of night club, a weird place in London, there was a lot of what the older generation called weirdos, pink hair and all sorts, whites and blacks ... I went on stage and some-one booed "bloody miner, communist" straightaway, and I started to describe what happened on the picket line and all of a sudden they're all cheering. It was the best experience for me personally throughout the strike.⁴¹

³⁸ *Time Out*, 19-25 July 1984, 24.

³⁹ SWML/AUD/547, David Donovan, interview by Hywel Francis, 10 March 1986.

⁴⁰ Steve Absalom, 'Xmas Show Spoilt by Half Moon's Collection for Miners', *The Stage and Television Today*, 13 December 1984, 3.

⁴¹ Max Farrar, 'From Orgreave to Broadwater Farm', *Emergency*, no. 4 (n.d.), 53.

The miners and the NUM were accused during and after the strike of having little interest in public opinion, and failing to engage in ‘the battle of ideas’.⁴² At least at a local level, such accounts make it clear that miners were not simply appealing to those that were already convinced.

While there were rallies of supporters, the strike was also taken onto the streets of the capital, into workplaces, student unions, housing estates and community centres where debates could be had in person about the merits of the dispute. Representatives from mining communities were invited to speak at student union meetings to encourage support where they did not always receive a universal welcome.⁴³ Similarly, Durham miner Norman Strike describes in his diary talking to a workplace meeting in the Central Middlesex Hospital in London. He was invited by a shop steward to speak to

a group of female office workers who I was warned were very hostile towards the strike. They stopped work and listened to me for about ten minutes as I told them about my own experiences of the strike ... They fired all the usual questions at me, i.e. why should taxpayers keep uneconomic pits open ... I felt really good when we’d finished, with them agreeing to pay a weekly levy to the Westoe kitchen. Not only that but a woman who had asked the hardest questions gave me a fiver from her purse. This has shown me yet again that even the most hardened of critics can have their views changed by hearing our side of the story.⁴⁴

⁴² Nicholas Blomley, *Law, Space, and the Geographies of Power* (New York, 1994), 188; Keith Harper and Patrick Wintour, ‘The Pit Strike: The Bitter Battle That Ended an Era’, *The Guardian*, 5 March 1985, 15.

⁴³ RBA/MND/25 Box 4, Neath and District Miners’ Support Group minutes, 9 December 1984; Norman Strike, *Strike by Name: One Man’s Part in the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike* (London, 2009), 16–17.

⁴⁴ Strike, *Strike by Name*, 132–33.

Networks of shop stewards, especially the more politically orientated, were important in organising such meetings and could help build support for the strike more broadly. TGWU officials noted the contrast between hostility to the strike among workers at Tilbury Power Station and how ‘a militant and well organised Shop Stewards’ Committee at West Thurrock Power Station, a few miles down the road, kept up solid support for the dispute all the way through’.⁴⁵ Shop stewards often played a crucial role in developing cultures of workplace solidarity.⁴⁶ In contrast to those who have understood the labour movement of the 1970s and 1980s as riven by sectionalism however, they could also be important in constructing wider networks of working-class support.⁴⁷

The tensions were of course not just between supporters and opponents of the strike. Early in the dispute, for instance, activists marching behind a London Lesbian and Gay Centre banner at a demonstration in the capital protesting the imminent abolition of the GLC reported being harassed by a group of miners. Islington NALGO branch secretary, Dave Burn, wrote to Kent NUM President Malcolm Pitt that ‘the behaviour of some of the Kent NUM members is contrary to the aims of the trade union movement and can only diminish support for the miners’ struggle’.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that homophobic abuse was also reported from NALGO members on the march; such views were of course not peculiar to miners within the labour movement

⁴⁵ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.126/TG/1395/5/2/2, TGWU, ‘Miners’ Dispute Report to the General Executive Council’, September 1985.

⁴⁶ Jack Saunders, ‘The Untraditional Worker: Class Re-Formation in Britain 1945–65’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 (2015), 225–48; Ralph Darlington, ‘Shop Stewards’ Leadership, Left-Wing Activism and Collective Workplace Union Organisation’, *Capital & Class*, 26 (2002), 95–126.

⁴⁷ For example, see Eric Hobsbawm, Martin Jacques, and Francis Mulhern, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981); John Foster, ‘Eric Hobsbawm, Marxism and Social History’, *Social History*, 39 (2014), 160–71.

⁴⁸ Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC), Uncat/ACC/F1987-13/NUM/85, Dave Burn, letter to Malcolm Pitt, 28 June 1984.

and left in the 1980s.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, an activist from Hackney attending a march in Mansfield recalled arguing with Northumberland miners about singing sexist songs.⁵⁰ Evidently networked forms of solidarity can ‘produce markedly exclusionary spaces of politics’.⁵¹

Nicholas Blomley has argued that the miners’ strike can be understood as a conflict over space and movement through space, both materially in the clashes between picketers and police, and representationally as a struggle over ideas.⁵² As the workplace meetings discussed above suggest, however, there was a material nature to the arguments that framed the miners’ strike and it was necessary to develop spaces in which the NUM’s case could be made. Supporters of the strike attempted to promote the message of the miners by developing alternative media networks. Across the range of the left-wing press, magazines and newspapers like the *Morning Star* and *London Labour Briefing* made the case for the miners throughout the year. Similarly, the non-aligned independent local press often provided considerably more sympathetic coverage than the national newspapers.⁵³

Video was also used to get the miners’ case across, most notably through the Miners’ Campaign Tapes, which brought together a number of video workshops across Britain.⁵⁴ Chris Reeves, who was part of the London-based Platform Films, the group that initiated the

⁴⁹ Richard Coles, letter to *Socialist Worker*, 28 April 1984, 7; see also Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester, 2007); Daisy Payling, ‘City Limits: Sexual Politics and the New Urban Left in 1980s Sheffield’, *Contemporary British History* (2017), published online 20 April, doi:10.1080/13619462.2017.1306194.

⁵⁰ Nina Gosling, letter to *Socialist Worker*, 9 June 1984, 7.

⁵¹ Featherstone, ‘Relational Construction’, 260.

⁵² Blomley, *Law, Space*, 150–88.

⁵³ Tony Harcup, ‘Reporting the Voices of the Voiceless during the Miners’ Strike: An Early Form of “Citizen Journalism”’, *Journal of Media Practice*, 12 (2011), 27–39.

⁵⁴ David James, ‘For a Working-Class Television: The Miners’ Campaign Tape Project’, in David James and Rick Berg (eds), *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis, 1996), 193–216.

campaign tapes, explained that they knew the majority of media coverage would be against the miners. The filmmakers aimed to help redress ‘this imbalance by producing partisan material in support of the strike.’⁵⁵ The videos made the miners’ case in a direct and polemical way, and were used for meetings and fundraisers. Perhaps 4,000 copies of the tapes circulated throughout Britain, but were also distributed more widely in Europe, Japan, the USA and Australia as part of the transnational networks mobilised through the strike.⁵⁶

At the same time, printworkers on London’s Fleet Street, among the most active and generous of the miners’ supporters, attempted to carve out space in the mainstream press to make the NUM’s case. As well as producing two issues of their own *Right of Reply Special* newspaper to support the miners, printworkers tried to mitigate the worst excesses of the national media. Most famously, this included refusing to print one front page of the *Sun* that compared Scargill to Hitler.⁵⁷ In a number of newspapers, workers threatened industrial action and successfully secured space for Scargill and the NUM to respond to articles critical of the strike.⁵⁸ Such activity was part of a broader campaign in which print and other media unions worked alongside the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom with the aim of securing a statutory ‘right of reply’.

This approach could be contentious, opposed by the journalists’ union at the *Daily Express* as ‘crude blackmail’.⁵⁹ Conservative MP Peter Bruinvels told the House of Commons in May 1984 that ‘the unions must realise that the blacking of certain articles is censorship of the worst

⁵⁵ Chris Reeves, ‘Redressing the Balance: Making the Miners’ Campaign Tapes’, in *The Miners’ Campaign Tapes* DVD booklet (London, 2009), 5.

⁵⁶ James, ‘Miners’ Campaign Tape Project’; Jonathan Saunders, *Across Frontiers: International Support for the Miners’ Strike* (London, 1989).

⁵⁷ Davy Jones, ‘Miners Take on the Media’, *Labour Briefing National Supplement*, July 1984, 6.

⁵⁸ David Jones, David Petley, Mike Power and Lesley Wood, *Media Hits the Pits: The Media and the Coal Dispute* (London, 1985).

⁵⁹ John Street, ‘Diary’, *Tribune*, 18 May 1984, 4.

kind. Have they never heard of Voltaire?'⁶⁰ However, it was a clear recognition among trade unionists of the importance of press coverage of industrial disputes, and an attempt to use the power that they had to balance the space given to opposing points of view. This power was severely limited and only marginally impacted coverage of the strike, but it probably contributed to an atmosphere in which print unions were considered too powerful. The Fleet Street printworkers would be the next major unionised workforce to be confronted just a year after the defeat of the miners.

Twinning and encounter

The physical spaces in which the solidarity movement was sustained were important in allowing personal interactions between people from the capital and the coalfields. Direct relationships were established between activists in local groups, largely bypassing a mediating or coordinating national organisation. Perhaps the most distinctive tactic employed to build networks of solidarity was the 'twinning' of support groups with particular coalfield areas. A survey of over 300 organisations involved in supporting the miners found that nearly half had such an arrangement.⁶¹ Massey and Wainwright warned against thinking of twinning in too strict a way, as the reality was looser and more varied than the label may suggest.⁶² There was also resistance to the tactic from the NUM nationally, at least for distributing money, as it was felt it could lead to an uneven allocation of funds. As a result, some supporters avoided it.⁶³

Nevertheless, many defended twinning, arguing that it increased commitment to the strike among supporters, improved morale in mining communities, and created closer personal

⁶⁰ Hansard, HC Deb Vol 59 cc709-16, 4 May 1984.

⁶¹ Labour Research Department, *Solidarity with the Miners: Actions and Lessons from the Labour Research Department's Survey of over 300 Miners' Solidarity Groups* (London, 1985), 37.

⁶² Massey and Wainwright, 'Beyond the Coalfields', 163.

⁶³ BA/19885/SC/2, Peter Heathfield, letter to Tony Gould, 21 November 1984; Jess Rouffiniac (ed.), *Haringey Supporting the Miners 1984-1985* (London, 1985), 35, 39.

relationships.⁶⁴ Twinning is most often associated with formal connections between towns or cities, usually in different countries, in a comparatively de-politicised way. It has also been used by trade unionists, however, to develop transnational networks of mutual support and aid.⁶⁵ There also emerged, or re-emerged, a form of twinning in Britain in the late 1970s and 1980s that sought to connect the global north and south, rooted in a desire to show solidarity with politically progressive movements. There were, for example, ten twinning arrangements between towns and cities in Britain and Nicaragua in the wake of the 1979 Sandinista Revolution.⁶⁶ This politicised form of twinning is most likely the context for its prevalence during the miners' strike. The tactic attempted to reduce the space separating London and the coalfields, bringing these places into closer proximity and personalising the relationships of solidarity.

Some trade unionists felt that the personal contact enabled by twinning allowed people from the coalfields to explain their situation directly to union members in London, counteracting media distortions.⁶⁷ Twinning could deepen the commitment of those already involved in supporting the miners. One Camden National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) member explained that she was 'not very political, but I've always had sympathy with the miners. Now after our visit to Bentley in Yorkshire, which is twinned with our branch, I feel much more strongly. It was very uplifting to see a whole community as one and to be treated with kindness and care by people who are suffering a lot of hardship.' She experienced policing on a picket line, commenting that 'I felt proud to be there, and in the light of real, personal experience I would urge others to rethink their attitudes. I've asked my friends to

⁶⁴ Donovan, interview.

⁶⁵ Paul Routledge and Andrew Cumbers, *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity* (Manchester, 2009), 169.

⁶⁶ Nick Clarke, 'Globalising Care? Town Twinning in Britain since 1945', *Geoforum*, 42 (2011), 115–25.

⁶⁷ LHASC/WAIN/1/10, Phil Elliot, 'APEX Staff Double Money', *Right of Reply Special*, March 1985, 30.

ignore the media and find out for themselves.’⁶⁸ Visitors to the coalfields, therefore, could speak from experience about the reality of the strike.⁶⁹ Through these relationships the anger at the role of the police could circulate and accumulate.⁷⁰

The direct contact was also potentially a morale boost for people in the coalfields. ‘Just the news of two twinings from Greenwich NALGO and the London Hospital has raised spirits’, observed Leena Nixon from Ollerton in Nottinghamshire. ‘Seeing cash and food and, best of all, bodies up there can rehearten the demoralised.’⁷¹ The strike gave people the opportunity to travel across Britain and sometimes further.⁷² Ann Harris from Nottinghamshire Central Women’s Support Group wrote about how ‘as many people as possible have gone to where the twinning has taken place. A lot of these folk have never been outside Nottinghamshire – it’s done people good to go to other parts of the country and mix and meet, and I think their horizons are going to be permanently widened.’⁷³ While it was frequently observed that many people from the mining areas visited London for the first time during the strike, the converse was also true.

Supporters visiting the coalfields commented on the kindness with which they were received. One LGSM activist visiting Dulais, the area they had twinned with, commented that

⁶⁸ TUCLC, Miners’ Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, Support Groups folder, NALGO Miners Support Campaign, ‘Why You Should Support the Miners’, n.d.

⁶⁹ Similarly, see Sheffield Archives (SA), SY689/V8/5, Graham Dean, letter to J. Crane, 9 November 1984.

⁷⁰ This is to borrow terminology from Sarah Ahmed, although Ahmed argues that it is the objects of emotions that circulate rather than the emotions as such. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, second edition (Edinburgh, 2015), 11, 45.

⁷¹ SWML, 1984-85 Miners’ Strike Leaflets and flyers Dr Hywel Francis Box 1, Greenwich NALGO, ‘Meantime’, newsletter of Greenwich NALGO no. 15, 1984.

⁷² Chrys Salt and Jim Layzell (eds), *Here We Go! Women’s Memories of the 1984/85 Miners Strike* (London, 1985), 53–55.

⁷³ ‘What Did You Do in the Strike, Mum?’, *Spare Rib*, February 1985, 7.

they had ‘been welcomed, really, so warmly’.⁷⁴ This feeling of warmth was reinforced not just on the picket lines but also in the miners’ welfares. LGSM’s Robert Kincaid, who wrote about the ‘tremendous’ welcome and hospitality they had received, described how ‘an evening of entertainment was laid on at the miners’ welfare hall and a riotous time was had by all. Lesbians dancing and kissing each other (and sometimes with women from the local community). The same applied for men.’⁷⁵ Women from LGSM and LAPC wrote that this ‘was one of the most moving experiences of all of our lives’.⁷⁶ Such experiences created powerful emotions and relationships. The development of friendships between supporters and people in the coalfields was perceived as a significant result of these interactions.⁷⁷ David Donovan was one of a group from the Dulais area that built significant connections with supporters in London.⁷⁸ In the aftermath of the strike he explained that ‘you built family ties, links with people in London, and it became a bond that was, I think, unshakeable in the end’.⁷⁹

As Gavin Brown and Helen Yaffe have argued in their work on the anti-apartheid movement in 1980s London, ‘relations of solidarity can travel in more than one direction simultaneously, building complex webs of reciprocity’.⁸⁰ Twinning encouraged the development of more mutual relationships of solidarity. Hilary Britten, a supporter in Camden NALGO, described a twinning arrangement that they developed with the Bentley Women’s Action Group. Once this

⁷⁴ LGSM, *All Out! Dancing in Dulais*, 1986, <http://www.coolcave.co.uk/blog/video/all-out-dancing-in-dulais-1986.html>, accessed 6 Sep 2016.

⁷⁵ Robert Kincaid, ‘Collections and Connections: Getting Our Message across’, *Square Peg*, 1984, 12–13.

⁷⁶ Polly Vittorini, Nicola Field, and Caron Methol, ‘Lesbians Against Pit Closures’, in Vicky Seddon (ed.), *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike* (London, 1986), 144.

⁷⁷ D Jagger, ‘SOGAT Sponsors Miners’ Football Presentation’, *SOGAT Journal*, September 1984, 8; LHASC/WAIN/1/10, Bill French, ‘The Time to Fight Is Now’, *Right of Reply Special*, March 1985, 23; TUCLC, Miners’ Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, John Brown, ‘Union Solidarity Will Defeat Tory Attacks’, *Right of Reply Special*, September 1984, 8.

⁷⁸ John Rose, ‘Sister, Brother and Twin’, *New Statesman*, 30 November 1984, 12.

⁷⁹ Donovan, interview.

⁸⁰ Brown and Yaffe, ‘Practices of Solidarity’, 35.

relationship was established, women from Bentley began ‘coming down regularly to speak at meetings, especially shop meetings, and to raise money in others.’ Britten explained that ‘both groups have supported each other and learnt from each other. We have stood on picket lines together not only at mines, docks, power stations and steelworks, but also in Camden during a fourteen week strike in our homeless persons unit, and in an occupation of our town hall by homeless families’. She wrote that she had personally learned a great deal from the relationship ‘about sharing, solidarity, determination, collective creativity, giving and receiving and supporting other people in struggle’.⁸¹ These links in some cases lasted beyond the strike itself.⁸² The importance of twinning in encouraging mutual support was emphasised by LGSM as well, with people from Dulais attending the 1985 Lesbian and Gay Pride march in London.⁸³

Despite these clear positives, criticisms of twinning were not simply bureaucratic attempts to control the flow of money. There appeared to be a genuine concern that without centralised co-ordination some mining communities would receive more than others. There was also a risk that mining areas would compete with each other to raise funds, generating divisions and hostility.⁸⁴ Perhaps more interesting, however, was how twinning relied upon and reinforced a particular notion of what a mining community was supposed to be. Ann Suddick of Durham and Northumberland Women Against Pit Closures felt that ‘one of our major problems ... is that people like to twin with the sort of village where there is a pit and everyone lives in the area, but often it’s not like that. We have a lot of places where there are perhaps 100 miners,

⁸¹ Hilary Britten, ‘Looking Back – and Forward on the Miners’ Strike’, *Spare Rib*, April 1985, 9–10.

⁸² LHASC/WAIN/1/5, ‘Camden Connection’, *Fightback: The Voice of the Bentley Mineworkers*, no. 1, 28 October 1985.

⁸³ LHASC/LGSM/3/6, Mike Jackson, Solidarity with the Miners – Labour Research Department Survey London LGSM Return, n.d.; Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality’.

⁸⁴ KHL/C/Ucat/ACC/F1987-13/NUM/85, Jack Collins, letter to Dennis Skinner, 21 June 1984.

but no pit and they travel a long way to work – those are the areas where we need more support.’⁸⁵

The importance of the pit village in the rhetoric of the strike elided the increasing separation between workplace and residency in the industry.⁸⁶ The idea of the ‘mining community’ was powerful in mobilising support for the strike, not least as supporters could often frame their solidarity in terms of one community supporting another.⁸⁷ However, such a conceptualisation meant that a somewhat romanticised image of the coalfields could be projected by strikers and their supporters. Twinning as a tactic was not always suited to the geographically dispersed workforce that existed in much of the mining industry. The scale of the problem should not be exaggerated, however, and it would be misleading to suggest that there was no awareness of this issue. The left press placed an important role in trying to mitigate the geographical unevenness of the support. The *Tribune* for example developed a service to put Labour Party and trade union branches in contact with areas requiring the most aid, *Socialist Worker* carried a list of strike kitchens in need, and *Labour Briefing* listed pits that had not twinned.⁸⁸ This is an example of how the left media did not simply articulate support and contest mainstream press accounts of the strike, but also served an organisational function in developing networks of solidarity.

While twinning was usually a relatively informal arrangement, notable among those groups that used the tactic were a number of Labour local authorities in London. Lambeth Council had twinning arrangements with Ayelsham and Eythorne in Kent, Lewisham Council linked with Shirebrook in Derbyshire, and Haringey Council twinned with Cannock Chase in

⁸⁵ Mark Crail, ‘The Miners Need YOU’, *Tribune*, 23 November 1984, 1.

⁸⁶ Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, “‘Side by Side With Our Men?’ Women’s Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984–1985 British Miners’ Strike’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75 (2009), 74; Jim Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners’ Strike in Scotland, 1984-85* (Manchester, 2012), 11.

⁸⁷ LGSM, *Dancing in Dulais*; Richard Anthony (director), *Here We Go*, Banner Film & TV, 1985.

⁸⁸ Crail, ‘The Miners’, 1; Massey and Wainwright, ‘Beyond the Coalfields’, 164.

Staffordshire.⁸⁹ On 8 September 1984, the councils of Greenwich and Easington twinned. A public ceremony in the main square in Woolwich was reportedly attended by 1,000 people, including over a hundred miners from Durham and Kent, and a colliery band. As part of the arrangement, the council seconded a full-time trade union appointee to its campaigns unit, and established a regular liaison committee to co-ordinate the various support activities in the borough.⁹⁰ Throughout the strike, councils in mining areas employed various measures to support striking miners, including providing free school meals and allowing those in council housing to fall into arrears.⁹¹ Councils in London clearly had a different relationship to the strike, but thinking about their role points to the contradictory nature of state involvement in the dispute.

The state

In the context of aggressive co-ordinated policing, punitive bail conditions set by courts, the cutting of benefits to strikers, and a government that seemed determined to defeat the NUM, it is hardly surprising that the state was largely perceived as antagonistic by miners and their supporters. The experience of the miners' strike, together with the banning of trade unions at GCHQ and the seizing of union funds during the Stockport Messenger strike, led supporters to claim that 'a clear picture begins to emerge of the State pursuing a class-based war against the working class and their trade unions'.⁹² However, the strike also coincided with the development of a number of left Labour councils loosely grouped together under the banner of

⁸⁹ 'London Supports the Miners', *London Labour Briefing*, June 1984, 2–5; TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, Support Groups Folder, 'Concert for Heroes' programme, 2 March 1986.

⁹⁰ Greenwich NALGO, 'Meantime'.

⁹¹ 'Meals for Strike Kids', *Morning Star*, 19 March 1984, 3; Phillips, *Miners' Strike*, 12.

⁹² BA/19885/SC/3/1/2, 'Protect Your Rights', *SERTUC-NUM Broadsheet*, May 1984.

‘municipal socialism’.⁹³ This project was predicated on a pluralist conception of the state, which suggested that local authorities offered opportunities for socialist intervention.⁹⁴ While Labour councils from across the ideological spectrum supported the miners throughout Britain, within London it was notably this new urban left that sought to provide practical solidarity. The contradictory roles of the state during the strike could manifest in a struggle over space.

Despite the support campaign, London’s presence in the strike was partly felt as the site of central state power used against the miners. The primary experience for some mining communities of Londoners visiting was the arrival of the Metropolitan police. Steven Murphy, a striking miner and Labour councillor in Wigan, described the policing of the coalfields: ‘The ones from the Met are the worst. They roll up in their van and you see them putting on their shin pads, their chest pads and so on. They look like bloody American football players. Then they look at the lads on the picket line and say: “right, now we can get stuck into this”.’ He claimed that they were distinguished by the colour of their uniform, becoming known in the coalfields as the ‘whiteshirts’. They also stood out for the colour of their language: verbally abusing miners’ wives, boasting about holidays, waving £5 and £10 notes at those on strike, and beating people in vans.⁹⁵ Dianne Hogg, a member of Askern Women’s Support Group in

⁹³ Daisy Payling, “‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’: Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield”, *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 (2014), 602–271; Diane Frost and Peter North, *Militant Liverpool: A City on the Edge* (Liverpool, 2013).

⁹⁴ Paul Thompson and Mike Allen, ‘Labour and the Local State in Liverpool’, *Capital & Class*, 10 (1986), 7–11; Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour*, second edition (London, 2001).

⁹⁵ Duncan Campbell, ‘Leon’s “Whiteshirts” Meet the Miners’, *City Limits*, 25-31 January 1985, 8–9. On the policing of the strike see Penny Green, *The Enemy Without: Policing and Class Consciousness in the Miners’ Strike* (Milton Keynes, 1990).

South Yorkshire, described police as ‘just bully boys dressed up in a uniform, they’re thugs’. She believed that ‘those from down south were worse than anybody’.⁹⁶

The police and the courts sought to restrict the movement of miners, developing an extensive network of roadblocks across the country and imposing strict bail conditions on those that were arrested. According to one survey, 11 per cent of roadblock arrests during the dispute were made by the Metropolitan police, and essential to this operation was the disciplined coordination enabled by the National Reporting Centre based in London.⁹⁷ As well as road blocks and picket line arrests, some mining communities had curfews enforced by a mass police presence.⁹⁸ A central concern on the part of the government and the police was to challenge the type of picketing that had developed in the late 1960s and 1970s. A document produced by the Conservative’s Nationalised Industries Policy Group in 1977, which became known as the ‘Ridley Plan’, argued that a mobile squad of police was needed to counteract ‘the likes of the Saltley Coke-works mob’.⁹⁹ This reference to an iconic moment of the successful 1972 miners’ strike, when thousands of Birmingham engineering and car workers joined picketing miners to shut the Saltley coke depot, made clear the threat of mass and solidarity picketing.¹⁰⁰ In part this was to be dealt with through legislation, and the more forceful implementation of existing laws, that sought to limit the numbers on picket lines and to ban secondary action. The road

⁹⁶ SA/SY689/V9/1, Dianne Hogg interview, 14 January 1986. However, there seems to have been more complaints against other forces, notably South Yorkshire Police, than against London officers. Brenda Kirsch and Christian Wolmar, ‘Miners Pickets - The Tally’, *New Statesman*, 22 March 1985, 6.

⁹⁷ Blomley, *Law, Space*, 150–88.

⁹⁸ Paul Gordon, “‘If They Come in the Morning ...’ The Police, the Miners and Black People”, in Bob Fine and Robert Millar (eds), *Policing the Miners’ Strike* (London, 1985), 161–76.

⁹⁹ ‘Final Report of the Nationalised Industries Policy Group’, 30 June 1977, <http://www.margarethatcher.org/archive/displaydocument.asp?docid=110795>, accessed 6 Sep 2016. On the Ridley Plan, see Alexander Gallas, *The Thatcherite Offensive: A Neo-Poulantzian Analysis* (Leiden, 2016), 101–107, and *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ On Saltley, see Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London, 2001), 56–64.

blocks, however, dealt with the specific tactic of the ‘flying picket’, which Yorkshire miners have been credited with pioneering in unofficial disputes in the late 1960s.¹⁰¹ The miners’ strike was a crucial moment in this struggle over the space of the picket line, which the government intended to reduce to a token and static presence.

The policing of the solidarity movement in London was on nothing like the same scale as in the coalfields, although there was an echo of it during a large march in support of the miners in February 1985. One hundred and thirty one arrests apparently followed what one demonstrator called a ‘police riot’.¹⁰² A trade union journal carrying an eyewitness account of mounted police charges, police snatching people from crowds, and claims of police deliberately breaking a demonstrator’s leg was titled ‘Orgreave comes to Whitehall’, invoking the most famous clash of the strike.¹⁰³ There was a less dramatic but more persistent attempt by police to deny space to the support movement in the capital by harassing people attempting to raise funds. Across many parts of London, street collectors for the miners reported being moved by the police, having their money confiscated, being taken to police stations and released without charge, being threatened with arrest or actually being charged for obstruction or begging under the 1824 Vagrancy Act.¹⁰⁴ The coincidence of the clampdown on collectors in different parts of London suggests it was coordinated. These disputes were of course comparatively minor, but add to a broader picture of politicised policing that sought to constrict the space in which the strike and the solidarity movement could operate.

¹⁰¹ Walter Pond, ‘Last Stand or Orderly Retreat’, *New Statesman*, 23 March 1984, 8–10; Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went out: Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009), 70.

¹⁰² BA/19885/SC/3/1-2, Calum MacIntosh, ‘SERTUC/NUM Circular’, 27 February 1985.

¹⁰³ ‘Orgreave Comes to Whitehall’, *Commentator*, March 1985.

¹⁰⁴ John McGhie, ‘Cop-in-Hand’, *Time Out*, 27 September-3 October 1984, 8; ‘Police Attack Street Collections’, *London Labour Briefing*, October 1984, 4–5; BA/19885/SC/4/1, GLC Police Committee, ‘Policing of the Miners’ Strike: Implications for Londoners’, 3 July 1984. This folder in the Brent Archives is full of material on the harassment of street collectors during the strike.

On occasion, there seems to have been direct conflict between the police and Labour councils in London that supported the strike. Members of Lambeth Trades Council were apparently arrested and charged under the 1916 Police, Factories etc. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act after being invited to collect in local estates and factories by Lambeth Council.¹⁰⁵ The GLC's Police Committee expressed concern that police were intervening to prevent collections on local authority property even when express permission had been given. The committee recommended taking control of street collection permits from the Metropolitan Police and giving the power to local authorities.¹⁰⁶ Haringey Council allowed collections on the forecourt of Wood Green library in an attempt to counteract this problem and minimise arrests.¹⁰⁷

Away from the streets, however, it was easier for councils to use their resources to support the strike. The GLC's Royal Festival Hall hosted a '5 nights for the miners' series of fundraising concerts, and County Hall was frequently used for support events.¹⁰⁸ GLC leader Ken Livingstone noted that 'whenever we've had a major rally or concert we've provided platforms for the miners to speak, to collect money, we've given over the use of County Hall for them when they've been based in London undertaking activities here, we've done everything we possibly can'.¹⁰⁹ In some instances, spaces usually considered relatively neutral was politicised in support of a highly contentious strike. In at least Lambeth, Southwark and Haringey, council buildings were used as collections points for the miners, with collection bins

¹⁰⁵ Paul Charman, 'Miners and the Met', *Time Out*, 19-25 July 1984, 7.

¹⁰⁶ GLC Police Committee, 'Policing of the Miners' Strike'.

¹⁰⁷ Rouffiniac, *Haringey Supporting the Miners*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ BA/19885/SC/3/3, 'London Miners Gala's 5 Nights for the Miners', poster, 3 September 1984; LHASC/CP/LON/IND/2/16, Southwark Trade Union Support Unit, 'Kent Miners March Through London', 1984; Barnsley Women Against Pit Closures, *Women Against Pit Closures* (Barnsley, 1984), 37-38; 'London Supports the Miners', *London Labour Briefing*, 2-5.

¹⁰⁹ Fred Carpenter, 'Ken Livingstone Interview', *London Labour Briefing*, Special Issue, 20 September 1984.

distributed to sites including libraries, schools and community centres.¹¹⁰ Rather than the solidarity movement simply networking pre-existing political spaces, this history highlights how relationships between different localities can refigure the nature of particular places.¹¹¹

London councils found other ways to give practical and symbolic support despite being far from the coalfields. Some provided office space and facilities for miners who were based in London fundraising.¹¹² Southwark became the first local authority to announce they would not award council contracts to any firms involved in strikebreaking.¹¹³ Some local authorities also encouraged council workers to support the strike, for instance by allowing donations to be deducted at source from wages.¹¹⁴ Labour authorities in London, and the GLC in particular, also helped sustain the strike in more indirect ways, providing funding for many of the spaces and organisations in which support activity for the miners took place. They played an important, if not uncontroversial, role in nurturing London's 'social democracy zones'.¹¹⁵

As Hilary Wainwright, who worked for the GLC at the time, recently argued, the intention was to strengthen the power of movements and initiatives in society independent of the state, which in turn would enable a more radical electoral project. Wainwright believes it was a view that was both more radical than classical social democracy, in that they wanted to surpass the market, but also considerably more modest about the ability of the state to do this on its own.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Ibid.; TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, Support Groups folder, Southwark Trades Council, 'Southwark Support the Miners', 1984; BA/19885/SC/1/1, SERTUC-NUM Co-ordination Committee minutes, 22 May 1984.

¹¹¹ David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London, 2012), 31.

¹¹² Rob Smith, 'Anger at Council's Help for Miners', *South London Press*, 25 September 1984, 3; Kim Howells, 'Stopping Out: The Birth of a New Kind of Politics', in Beynon (ed.), *Digging Deeper*, 139–40.

¹¹³ 'Councils Urged to Boycott Strike Breakers', *Tribune*, 22 June 1984, 12.

¹¹⁴ TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only 1, Support Groups folder, Camden NALGO Miners Support Group bulletin no. 3, n.d.

¹¹⁵ Brooke, "New Times", 28.

¹¹⁶ Hilary Wainwright, 'Place Beyond Place and the Politics of "Empowerment"', in David Featherstone and Joe Painter (eds), *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey* (Malden, 2013), 242, 247.

Many of the spaces already discussed—the Trade Union Resource Centres, feminist bookshops, women’s centres, the Lesbian and Gay Centre—received funding from the Labour GLC or London borough councils. The municipal socialists in London therefore used state resources to help create the environment in which solidarity for the miners was made possible.

The use of these spaces to support a strike in a traditional, almost entirely male industry, demonstrates that it was possible, though not easy, to combine the politics of coal and class with feminism, sexual liberation and anti-racism. London local authorities in this sense contrast with accounts of other left Labour councils in the 1980s.¹¹⁷ As Massey and Wainwright argued at the time, the alliances created during the miners’ strike suggested a productive relationship between trade unions and new social movements, and a new direction for class politics rather than its abandonment.¹¹⁸ Jerry White has argued that the GLC in particular alienated working-class Londoners by ‘spending endless time and bottomless resources in pursuit of ideological purity on gender, sexuality and race’.¹¹⁹ While the creation of a heterogenous left was an important aspect of their political project, it would be caricature to ignore the centrality of class and the economy in the politics of the London Labour left.¹²⁰

The strength of the radical local authorities in London and elsewhere was undermined by a number of developments but two, and the failure of the left to prevent them, were key: rate capping, and the abolition of the GLC and other metropolitan authorities. The Conservative government aimed to reduce the resources available to offer an alternative at a local level, and abolish or remove from democratic control elements of the local state.¹²¹ The GLC’s funding for community groups was an important part of the rationale for its abolition. Among the most

¹¹⁷ Payling, “‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’”, 625; Frost and North, *Militant Liverpool*.

¹¹⁸ Massey and Wainwright, ‘Beyond the Coalfields’, 168.

¹¹⁹ White, *London*, 397.

¹²⁰ For example, see Ken Livingstone, ‘Monetarism in London’, *New Left Review*, no. 137 (1983), 68–77.

¹²¹ For example, see William Whitelaw, ‘The Greater London Council (GLC) and the Metropolitan Councils’, 3 October 1982, <http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/140982>, accessed 6 Sep 1984.

offensive to the right were the lesbian and gay organisations that received 0.8 per cent of GLC expenditure.¹²² The defeat of the miners' strike and the local authorities were central and connected events in the consolidation of Thatcherism. The potential for resistance to rate-capping to open up a 'second front' against the Thatcher government evaporated with the return to work of the miners in March 1985, with deadlines for setting rates approaching.¹²³

Writing in *Black Dragon* in February 1985, the magazine of the Miners Defence Committee that he had helped establish to coordinate solidarity efforts, Ken Livingstone argued that those leading local authorities threatened with abolition or rate capping faced a choice: 'Either we are prepared to combine with the miners in taking action which could be branded "illegal" by the Tory Courts, or we collude in devastating the communities we're supposed to represent.'¹²⁴ By the end of May 1985 only Liverpool, Lambeth, Camden and Southwark had refused to set legal rates, and the latter two settled in June.¹²⁵ The end of the strike was significantly demoralising for many on the left, and contributed to the collapse of Labour councils' resistance.¹²⁶ With the failure of both the miners' strike and the municipal socialists, the space for a progressive alternative to Thatcherism had overwhelmingly narrowed.

Conclusion

¹²² Ann Tobin, 'Lesbianism and the Labour Party: The GLC Experience', *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (1990), 56–66; Bob Cant, 'Not yet Ready?', *New Statesman*, 30 March 1984, 12.

¹²³ Hilda Kean, 'Opening up the Second Front - Strike Together on March 6th!', *London Labour Briefing*, March 1985, 1. A desire to prevent such an alliance may explain government concessions to Liverpool Council. Frost and North, *Militant Liverpool*, 84.

¹²⁴ Ken Livingstone, 'Editorial', *Black Dragon*, No. 7, February 1985, 5.

¹²⁵ Frost and North, *Militant Liverpool*, 104.

¹²⁶ Nigel Fountain, 'Notes and Quotes on a Week in 1985', *City Limits*, 15-21 March 1985, 5; Samuel, 'Preface', x.

Jeffrey Weeks has noted ‘a distinct closing of social space’ in the mid-1980s, exemplified by police raiding the bookshop Gay’s The Word in May 1984.¹²⁷ Gay’s the Word still exists, but many of the other spaces in which support for the miners’ strike in London were based have disappeared. There are of course many varied reasons for this. Bookshops of all types, for instance, have suffered, not only the explicitly political ones. Nevertheless, both directly and indirectly, the conflict between Thatcherism and its opponents manifested in struggles over space. The defeat of the NUM was part of a broader attempt to restrict the power of trade unions to use picketing effectively. The failure of the miners, dockers, printworkers and seafarers, amongst others, helped reshape the economic geography of Britain, concentrating power in the financial services industry based in the City of London.¹²⁸ Opposition to Thatcherism did not only come from trade unions, however, but also from the Labour left in local authorities and autonomous political and community organisations. The spaces in which they could operate was also restricted severely by government policy.

While many campaigning groups initially benefitted from the support of left-wing elements within the state, budget cuts and abolition threatened their existence. This had a deleterious effect on the spaces available in London for oppositional politics like that practised in support of the miners. Discussions within such organisations over whether they should take state funding became very bitter, and the lesson of the period for some was the importance of organising independently from the state.¹²⁹ Rahila Gupta of Southall Black Sisters, who were active in supporting the miners during the strike, commented that funding from progressive councils had been divisive and made paid service providers out of political activists.¹³⁰ The

¹²⁷ Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, revised edition (London, 1990), 75.

¹²⁸ Massey, *World City*, 74–75.

¹²⁹ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements* (London, 2013), 172, 208.

¹³⁰ Rahila Gupta, ‘Autonomy and Alliances’, in *Against the Grain: A Celebration of Survival and Struggle*. (Southall, 1990), 55.

limitations of attempting to initiate radical politics at a local level in the face of overwhelming hostility from the central state was made clear. Nevertheless, the experience of the miners' strike highlights how the resources of the local state were directly and indirectly used to create the spaces that helped sustain one of the most significant extra-parliamentary challenges to the Thatcher government.

A history of the miners' support movement allows us to consider the heterogeneous movements on the left in the 1980s together, and challenge overly simplified distinctions between identity politics and the politics of class. Supporters used the spaces they had control over to provide practical solidarity for the miners, but simultaneously attempted to politicise other spaces through the campaign. The solidarity movement constructed relationships across social boundaries but also geographical ones. The activists of the coalfields based around the miners' welfares, the feminists running women's centres, and the local socialism of left Labour authorities, attempted to root their politics in place. Yet, as Paul Routledge and Andrew Cumbers have argued in the context of transnational solidarity relationships, political movements can be 'place-based' without being 'place-restricted'.¹³¹ Thinking about the networks of support created during the 1984/5 miners' strike suggests that it was those political activists that were locally rooted that were also able to develop geographically expansive connections. In contrast to relatively abstract national or international links developed between trade union bureaucracies, tactics like twinning allowed direct personal contact and relationships to be forged. These were relational and networked forms of local activism. These activists, however, faced opposition from a government that had its own agenda for reshaping Britain.

Words: 9998

¹³¹ Routledge and Cumbers, *Global Justice Networks*, 197.

