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Abstract

A convenient starting point for the chronology of the Tory offensive against trade unionism is the publication by the Economist in 1978 of the final report of the Ridley committee on the nationalised industries. This report was part of the preparations which the Thatcher shadow cabinet were making in anticipation of a return to a parliamentary majority at Westminster. During the previous years Conservative politicians and businessmen in general had become acutely aware of the strengthening of trade union defences in most areas of industrial life, and in particular the two successful miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974 had exercised a powerful and lasting influence. The mass picket of the Saltley Coke Works in February 1972—which closed the gates and effectively determined the outcome of the strike—was never forgotten by the miners, the Conservative Party and the police; and it was followed, two years later, by another miners' strike which persuaded Heath to appeal, unsuccessfully, to the electorate. These events badly scarred Conservative interests in the country, and the development of reactionary ideas, and reactionary organisations, was greatly encouraged; and it was after the fall of the Heath government in 1974 that the extreme Right in the Conservative Party began to develop further organisations and support groups. There were already a number of well-established bodies in the field such as the Economic League, Common Cause, IRIS, with many years of experience, including the services of some right-wing trade unionists, and there were a number of ideological bodies which provided sophisticated materials for what was to become the new Toryism. The most influential of these was probably the Institute of Economic Affairs which went back to the late fifties. The most prominent of the new organisations was the National Association for Freedom (NAFF) an umbrella group for an assortment of Conservative reactionaries. Its initial establishment was a response to the killing of Ross McWhirter by the IRA in December 1975, and its original Council was composed of industrialists and politicians including Norman Tebbit, Rhodes Boyson and Peregrine Worsthorne. The working brains behind NAFF were Robert Moss and Brian Crozier: Cold War warriors who were fanatical supporters of American foreign policy and specialists in Latin American affairs, including Chile. From the time of its establishment until the Tory victory in the summer of 1979 NAFF was involved in a growing number of anti-trade union actions; and it encouraged or started a series of smaller pressure groups with particular limited aims of their own but all with a specific anti-working class content.
The miners strike of 1984-85 will always be remembered in British working class history as the most significant turning point in the power relationship between the working class organisations of the trade unions, and the state representing the interests of the privileged minority in the late twentieth century. The losses endured by the working class and their organisations as a whole with the defeat of the miners are still to this day attempting to be rebuilt, as are the shattered communities of the ex-pit towns. Understanding the struggle and the lessons that can be drawn from it during the m

Striking miners were assaulted by the police at Orgreave in 1984, framed and falsely arrested. The perpetuation of the false narrative implies it was an equal battle. Published: 29 Nov 2017. Published: 29 Nov 2017. Orgreave was no battle but an attack by police. Durham student rugby team forced to cancel event mocking miners' strike. Other lives: Miner who had a cultural vision for the remaining buildings of the Kent coalfield. Published: 25 Sep 2017. Ian Williams obituary. An article about the 1984 miner's strike in Wales, on the BBC Wales History website. The miners' strike. Last updated: 15 August 2008. With coal a nationalised industry, and some British mines unprofitable, coal mining was ripe for repositioning - and even privatisation - by Margaret Thatcher’s right wing Conservative government of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, the National Union of Miners (NUM) was very strong, with high membership and strong links to the Labour Party. In 1981, there was the threat of strike when pit closures were mooted, and the government backed down, not feeling its position was strong enough. In 1983, Thatcher appointed Ian MacGregor head of the National Coal Board, which oversaw the industry.