# The 1984-5 Miners' Strike in fiction : the industrial dispute as social and political myth

[….] *a dominant ideology will give a certain rein to alternative discourses, ultimately appropriating their vitality and containing their oppositional force.* [1]

[...] *the role of the writer as writer is likely to stimulate awareness of the importance of ideological production in the sustaining, negotiating and contesting of power in the state.* [2]

## Introduction

This chapter explores the way in which novels that feature trade unions and trade unionism are used by their authors to dramatise what they see as a paradigm shift in British political and social thinking. In these books the specific details of the trade dispute are not the centre of interest because the real focus of attention is on the wider set of social and political schisms or theatres of ideological conflict that lie behind the headline issues of an industrial dispute.

In this case, three novels (*GB84* , *Born Under Punches* and *Dark Edge*[3]), inspired by the 1984-5 Miners' Strike in the UK, are explored with a view to examining the role fiction has had in helping to establish a dominant discourse about the way the strike was conducted, its effect on the communities directly involved and its wider social and political impact.

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[1] Don E. Wayne, *New Historicism*, in Kelsall_____ et al *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism* (London : Routledge, 1990), p. 795.

[2] Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford : OUP, 2001), p.94.

[3] David Peace, *GB84* (London: Faber & Faber 2004)

Martyn Waites, *Born Under Punches* (London: Schuster & Schuster, 2003)

Roger Granelli, *Dark Edge* (Cardiff: Seren Books, 1997)

These novels, written more than a decade after the events they depict, have widely been praised by journalists, book reviewers and political commentators as reflecting a 'true' history of the Miners' Strike. Marquesee[4], for example, when reviewing *GB84*, refers to it as 'a[n] historically precise, week-by-week account of the strike' and says that 'GB84 presents history as it's lived - fragmentary, inconclusive, an accumulation of details, hunches, missed signposts'. Granelli and Waites also present themselves as providing an historically accurate representation of the strike and use this claim of historical veracity as the fundamental foundation on which they then build their dramatic interpretation of events. However, it will be argued here that whilst explicitly written from a viewpoint that claims sympathy and common cause with the miners and their families these novels are, in fact, instrumental in the reproduction of a number of important social and political *myths* about the conduct and significance of the strike that were created by the Government and its supporters.

It will be further argued that by accepting and endorsing these myths, the novels buttress the political and ideological messages of those within the capitalist class who have a vested interest in ensuring the strike was seen to be both a collective and individual disaster for the miners, their families and for the wider Labour Movement. In this respect they strengthen what is essentially a hegemonic interpretation of the events surrounding the strike and its aftermath. Rather than presenting a challenge to the existing dominant discourses, their status as a 'true' record sustains the popular perception that what happened during and after the strike is largely uncontested.

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[4] Mike Marquesse, [2009] 'No redemption' *Red Pepper* (http://www.redpepper.org.uk/No-redemption/ ) (2011) [accessed 16.5.11]

Background

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike on the collective consciousness of the British Labour Movement. At a mundane level, this was a labour dispute that was triggered by a decision from the Coal Board to close pits before they were exhausted and in contravention of an existing agreement they had struck with the NUM over the issue of commercial viability[5].

However, no industrial dispute has a single and uncontested history and a number of competing and ideologically juxtaposed narratives began to emerge that sought to lay claim to the strike and to interpret it in the context of a particular ideology. There are those analysts and journalists – predominantly of the Left and Centre Left (Young[6]; Milne[7]; Harvey[8]; Klein[9]) - who have interpreted the strike in global political terms as part of a co-ordinated strategy to advance the doctrine of neo-liberalism; whilst others, coming from a more conservative and Right of Centre political position,[10] saw the dispute as a necessary part of a wider 'rebalancing' of society. For them the dispute was not just about the 'modernisation' of an ailing

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[5] Andrew J. Richards, *Miners on strike : class solidarity and division in Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1996)

[6] Hugo Young, *One of Us* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

[7] Seamus Milne, *The enemy within: MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair* ( London: Verso 1994)

[8] David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2009)

[9] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine : the rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London : Allen Lane, 2007)

[10] Norman Tebbitt *Battle for Britain Daily Mail* on-line (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1159851/Battle-Britain-Norman-Tebbit-reveals-believes-defeat-miners-strike-death-democracy.html#ixzz1K9Gmv1eL) (2009) [accessed 5th June 2011]

economy but about the seizing back of democratic power from unrepresentative and over-powerful trade union leaders.

Commentators have also expressed interest in the strike in terms of domestic, personal or individual issues and, more particularly, the way in which the dispute resulted in hardship and despair for the strikers and their families through the pursuit of an unwinnable battle and the hubris of an individual – the NUM President, Arthur Scargill (Crick[11] ; Hencke and Beckett[12]). This view, however, is challenged by writers such as Francis[13], Newton[14] and Hutton[15], who cast the strike in a more positive light, as an essentially noble battle for livelihoods, dignity and a way of life: a battle which also threw into sharper relief issues of personal identity – especially gender – and what it meant to live in communities with shared concerns and values.

Although these alternative narratives have been well researched and documented they have remained largely marginal to the popular perception of what caused the strike, how it was prosecuted and its outcomes. The discourse that has emerged as the most dominant and pervasive, and that has shaped the way in which the significance and importance of this dispute is, or can be, discussed, is the one developed by the State which holds that the strike represented total defeat for the miners, a crucial moment in the decline of the Labour Movement and an important

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[11] Michael Crick, *Scargill and the miners* (London : Penguin, 1985)

[12] Francis Beckett and David Hencke, *Marching to the faultline* ( London: Constable, 2009)

[13] Hwyl Francis, *History on our side; Wales and the 1984-85 miner's strike* (Fernbank: Iconau, 2009)

[14] Gwen Newton, *We are women, we are strong: the stories of the Northumberland miner's wives 1984-85* ( Newcastle: Northumberland NUM, undated)

[15] Guthrie Hutton, *Coal not Dole : memories of the 1984/5 miner's strike* (Glasgow: Stenlake Publishing, 2005)

capitulation to the idea of the importance and power of individualism over collective action.

In this chapter it will be argued that novelists who have used the 1984-5 Miners Strike as their subject have done so in a way that has helped build and perpetuate this representation of the strike and have contributed to the reproduction of what is essentially a hegemonic interpretation of events. It will be further argued that central to the creation of this dominant discourse is the process of myth-making which shapes what can and what cannot be understood about the strike and defines the wider public understanding of the dispute. The novels explored here, despite coming from writers who would see themselves as sympathetic to the miners' cause, do not challenge the primacy of the establishment version of events and indeed actively promote this partisan depiction of reality through their storytelling.

Mythologizing the end of an era

Although Raymond Williams set the final part of his 1985 novel *Loyalties*[16] within the context of the strike and in 1986 Tom Davies published *Black Sunlight*[17] which, like Williams' novel, uses the strike as the setting for the culmination of an historical saga of family and community, there was surprisingly little contemporary interest shown in the dispute by novelists. Neither of these novels generated much critical interest at a time when the focus of attention was much more on cultural, sociological and political, rather than fictional, interpretations of the dispute. It was a further decade before the next novel using this particular strike as a backdrop to the action appeared when William O'Rourke published his political thriller, *Notts.*[18] O'Rourke uses the Miners' Strike only as a backdrop to the action of a thriller with a convoluted plot involving international terrorism and has no real interest in the miners as individuals or the reasons behind their strike. It is not until the appearance of Roger

[16] Raymond Williams, *Loyalties* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1985)

[17] Tom Davies, *Black Sunlight* (London: MacDonald, 1986)

[18] William O'Rourke, *Notts* (New York : Marlow & Co., 1996)

Granelli's *Dark Edge,* Martyn Waites' *Born Under Punches* and David Peace's *GB84* that the strike itself takes centre stage. It is these three books which, it can be argued, have been most significant in reproducing a hegemonic narrative of the strike.

All three books deal with an important moment in social and trade union history. For these authors the central question is not how the strike altered or developed views about the nature and purpose of trade unionism but how the agency of trade unions , and the way in which it was discharged, played a crucial role in crystallising anxieties about the kind of society we would live in.

Critics of the novels, such as Katy Shaw and Sue Owen, are concerned about the way in which these books select a version of this history that reflects a set of outcomes for the strike which cast the miners (and by extension the wider Labour Movement) as utterly defeated. Shaw[19] believes these authors actively embrace an interpretation of the strike that suits their agenda as writers of novels rather than reflecting the complex political, social and economic realities the dispute created:

> […] these novels hijack the strike in an attempt to re-inscribe existing histories of the coal dispute. Through their openly revisionist stance, these professional authors rewrite the strike and authorise their own accounts of contemporary social, economic and political conflict [...] [20]

The view that these novels are 'openly revisionist' is clearly important and central to the case being made against these authors. Shaw argues that a false historical narrative is created which claims to be a rounded and subtle representation of the strike but is in fact a construct that leaves out of the picture the real voices of the miners, their families and supporters who experienced events very differently to the way they are presented in these novels. Adopting an essentially Bakhtinian analysis, she argues that Peace, Granelli and Waites create an

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[19] Katy Shaw, '[Re]Writing Defeat: Poetry and the End of the Miners' Strike 1984/5' *North East History* 37 (2006) 36 - 58

[20] Ibid., p.37

illusion of historical authenticity through the adoption of a form (the novel) and a use of language (polyphonic) which, far from allowing the multiplicity of voices from the strike to emerge as genuinely dialogic, creates a 'faction' – a fiction based on selected fact – which disguises the dominance of the single, authorial voice behind a false facade of hetroglossia. This, she claims 'works to exclude the many and complex voices of those who were actually there.'[21].

Sue Owen[22] is also concerned that the novels claim to present the voices of miners and their families whilst, in fact, retaining control of a discourse which does not represent the very wide range of experiences, positive as well as negative, which emerged from the strike. In her analysis of David Peace's *GB84* she questions the authenticity which is claimed for the voices of the miners. She notes the way in which the story of the rank and file miners is separated from the main plotline and presented in a newspaper column format, with sentences running off the end of the page which are only picked up again several pages later. She claims this results in 'working class voices [which] are incoherent and literally marginalised in densely written columns of small print'[23]. She too is critical of the way the author presents his own interpretation of events whilst passing them off as the authentic voices of the miners themselves:

> [...] the accuracy of the record depends on being able to hear the voices of working class people themselves. Here lies the importance of the workers' own writing during and after the strike.[24]

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[21] Ibid., p56

[22] Sue Owen, '"They may win but God knows, we tried" : Resistance and Resilience in representations of the Miners' Strike in poetry, fiction, film and t.v. drama' (Unpublished paper given at *Digging the Seam* conference Leeds University 25-27, 2010)

[23] Ibid., p10

[24] Ibid., p13

The case set out by Shaw, and reinforced subsequently by Owen, centres on the way in which the novels recreate a very specific version of the history of the strike which fails to engage with the fact that for a significant number of those involved the strike was not destructive and disillusioning but positive and transformative.

Whilst Shaw and Owen raise some significant and telling criticisms of these novels, the claim of 'revisionism', which suggests a deliberate rewriting of history for ideological ends, seems to lack credibility when set alongside the political sympathies of the writers in question. However, the fact that all three novels share certain consistent assumptions about the nature of the strike – that the miners were absolutely defeated; that the defeat was inevitable; that the impact of the strike on individuals was, in most cases, destructive; that the strike was characterised by violence and betrayal; that communities were fractured; and, the defeat of the miners was the 'last stand' of a labour movement unable to prevent the eventual dominance of a neo-liberal, social and economic system that would replace its most cherished values – suggests that other factors are helping to create this seemingly paradoxical situation where authors who see themselves as politically progressive accept and reproduce a version of events that can be characterised as fundamentally conservative.

It has already been noted that a number of competing and conflicting discourses have been created around the strike and that it has been the one crafted by the Government that has emerged as dominant. Indeed, it can be argued that it is not only dominant but hegemonic and that these novels are effectively trapped inside this discourse. In all three novels the authors' interpretation of events is shaped by a history written by the the most powerful participant – in this case the State. The ability of hegemonic discourse to close down discussion or alternative interpretation is evidenced by the fact that there has been no substantial additional fiction attempting to deal with the issues of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike since Peace's novel was published and that gives credence to the assertion made by Katy Shaw that:

> These texts entomb the strike as a finished and finalised portion of a distant historical past, effectively sealing history from further analysis, novelistic or otherwise.[25]

It is necessary, therefore, to turn our attention to the way in which this powerful discourse has been created. Given the way in which these novels of the strike use the lexicon and imagery of war and conflict, it is, perhaps, instructive as a starting point to look at the way in which dominant ideas relating to the conduct and outcome of the First World War have developed. Dan Todman[26] writing about the public, cultural and political perceptions of the First World War, argues that alternative narratives about that conflict have become almost impossible to contemplate seriously because of the power of myth-making. We have, he argues, become accustomed to talk about that war in terms of unprecedented death, squalor, incompetent leadership and futile outcomes and any attempt to question these myths has to struggle against a legacy of literary and historical output that uses mythology as its starting point:

> The myth of mud and horror clearly changed its status over time. Some cultural analysts would talk about this in terms of a shift from emergence, through dominance, to universality and hegemony. What they would mean is that the myth developed from something that some people thought, to something that most people thought, to the point where it was what everyone knew. That change was important because it meant that ideas were no longer challenged. Indeed [...] a challenge to such received opinions only resulted in a strengthening of their beliefs.[27]

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[25] Shaw, p55

[26] Dan Todman, *The Great War ; myth and memory* (London : Hambledon Continuum, 2005)

[27] Ibid., p40

It is clear from Todman's comments that myth can create, through the control of discourse, a 'common sense' or universally received version of events that is hard to challenge.

The creation of myth as a way of defending and promoting the interests of the establishment is identified by Margaret Gonzalez-Perez in her article on myth and literature as political ideology:

> Myth helps create the fundamental self-image and purpose of the state and provides a sense of past as well as a direction for the future. Traditional myth operates not only as a construct in which to view one's environment, but as a driving and motivating force for action. Successful myth must unify and create a national entity greater than the sum of its political parts.[28]

Using Gonzalez-Perez's argument in the context of the Miners' Strike, it is clear that the State sees the creation of a dominant or hegemonic myth relating to the absolute defeat of the miners as necessary for the continued stability of the dominant political ideology. The three novels under consideration here reinforce and reproduce the myth because they have been created by authors who did not experience the strike themselves and are therefore writing from a position where they are effectively enveloped by that myth, accepting the language and the reality it has created.

The work of Roland Barthes lends support to this argument. In *Mythologies*[29] Barthes seeks to explain the way in which myths are created and their function in modern society. In much the same way that Todman articulates the functioning of myths about the First World War, Barthes also accepts that myth-making is a process built around discourse development and the creation of hegemonic ideas. Barthes describes a process in which myth 'transforms history into nature'– images of the past are given new identity and significance through the power of hegemonic

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[28] I Margaret Gonzales-Parez, 'Myth and literature as political ideology' *Quarterly Journal of Ideology* 3, 24 (2001) , p1.

discourse and made to seem as if they describe 'reality'. [30] Barthes, like Gonzalez-Perez, believes that myth-making is essentially a tool which provides a crucial ideological underpinning for the bourgeois view of the world:

> It is through their rhetoric that bourgeois myths outline the general prospect of this *pseudo-physis [false nature]* which defines the dream of the contemporary bourgeois world. [31]

It can be argued, therefore, that the three novels explored in this section whilst they have not created the myth, have been central to its reproduction. The characteristics of that myth – that the Miners' Strike was an unmitigated disaster, that everyone suffered for nothing, that this represented absolute defeat at a personal level for miners and a collective level for the Labour Movement and that this launched the country into a new political epoch under the leadership of a single-minded and immovable leader – has taken on a hegemonic authority that cannot easily be challenged and has led to other authors seeing the subject as both politically and imaginatively exhausted.

It is clear from interviews, web entries and personal blogs that all three authors under consideration here believe that they are writing from a 'progressive' ideological position but they have, in fact, absorbed, reflected and then strengthened the dominant bourgeois myth of absolute defeat. Todman writing about contemporary novelists such as Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker who use settings based on the First World War says:

> What these novels shared was a set of recurrent themes and images which summed up the First World War [...]. Since they were seeking a setting in the past that was easily understandable to their readers, rather than to educate or inform them, these books unsurprisingly reflected the dominant myths of the

[30] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* ( London: Paladin, 1989), p. 129.

[31] Ibid. p150

> culture that produced them. In repeating them, of course, they reinforce their power. [32]

He could easily be talking here about the novels of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike. In a desire to make a complex story of the dispute accessible to an audience that is not necessarily engaged with those complexities these novels themselves 'reflect the dominant myths of the culture that produced them' and, in doing so, embed those myths still deeper into the collective consciousness.

Reproducing the myth of absolute defeat

The idea that novels relating to the Miners' Strike are effectively trapped inside a hegemonic discourse that relies for its power on the effectiveness of myth can best be explored through a more detailed look at David Peace's *GB84*. Peace, in conversation with Marquesse,[33]acknowledges that there are 'positive things that happened in the strike that are missing from the book'[34] and that he omits them because their inclusion would represent 'a kind of socialist revisionism'[35]. He concludes his interview with the categorical assertion that:

> The strike ended with the defeat of organised labour and the defeat of socialism […]. I don't want the book to offer a sense of redemption because as a country we haven't got it. And we don't deserve it[36].

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[32] Todman, p160

[33] Mike Marquesse, [2009] 'No redemption' Red Pepper (http://www.redpepper.org.uk/No-redemption/ ) (2011) [accessed 16.5.11]

[34] Ibid., p1

[35] Ibid., p1

[36] Ibid., p2

Peace subscribes to what might be called the 'end of history' argument advanced by economic philosophers such as Francis Fukuyama and he holds this position despite substantive evidence to the contrary – neither organised labour nor socialism were 'defeated' by the outcome of the Miners' Strike. [37] The strike clearly was an important moment in British social history but not just because of the impact the dispute had on a powerful industrial trade union but also because of the lessons learned from the positive aspects of the strike that Peace refuses to engage with.

Peace describes his novel as an 'occult' fiction[38], an attribution that encourages the reader to see the events of the strike as both fundamentally murky and obscure and at the same time driven by malign or even demonic forces. The ambiguity of the word 'occult' – suggestive simultaneously of secrecy and the supernatural – is in many ways the key to this novel. For whilst it is ostensibly a '"fiction based on [the] fact" of the Miner's Strike', [39] it is important to note that this is not a novel about trade unionism, industrial strife or the future of the coal industry and the jobs associated with it. Using the miners' dispute as a vehicle, Peace is more concerned with the idea of critical moments in history, events that change our way of seeing the world.

Peace's desire to locate the strike at a pivotal moment of history is reflected in the title, *GB84,* which suggests it is part of his larger project to re-imagine aspects of modern British history and seems to invite a link to his so-called *Red Riding Quartet* (*Nineteen Seventy-Four, Nineteen Seventy-Seven, Nineteen Eighty*, *Nineteen Eighty-*

[37] Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man* (London : Penguin, 1993)

[38] Matthew Hart, 'The Third English Civil War: David Peace's "Occult History" of Thatcherism' *Contemporary Literature* 4, 49 (2008) 573 – 596 p573

[39] Ibid., p573

*Three* )[40]. Peace himself acknowledges the lineage in an interview with the Socialist Worker Online in 2009:

> By the end of the strike, to my shame, I remember wishing it would just go away. But later when I was writing the four books that form the Red Riding Quartet and remembering the time and place I grew up in, I knew the strike was a big part of that.[41]

It can be argued that Peace's guilt about his wish to see the strike just 'go away' begins to account for why he finds it so hard to engage with the positive aspects of the strike. Although he wants, at one level, to acknowledge the complexity of the dispute as it affects individuals and communities he finds it easier to look for the big picture and to ascribe the blame for what happened to forces beyond our control. If organized labour was defeated, he seems to say, it is because there were forces, perhaps even supernatural, mythological or malign forces, pushing towards some kind of inevitable outcome. The final words of the novel echo this sense impending catastrophe : "Awake! Awake! This is England, Your England – and the Year is Zero." [42]

The historical and literary allusions embedded in this final sentence underscore Peace's belief that the country can expect no redemption. He evokes Orwell's essay 'The Lion and the Unicorn : Socialism and the English Genius Part 1 :

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[40] David Peace 'The Red Riding Quartet' *Crime Time* (http://www.crimetime.co.uk/features/davidpeace.php) (undated) [accessed 25th June 2011]

[41] No author, 'David Peace Interview : GB84's shadowy forces ranged against the miners' Socialist Worker on-line (http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=17311) (2010) [accessed 20.9.10]

[42] Peace(2004), p462

England Your England' [43], which explores the threat of fascism to 'English civilisation' [44]and this Orwellian reference reinforces the connection made by the title of the work, *GB84*, which is clearly meant to echo George Orwell's dystopian vision of a future Britain caught in a totalitarian nightmare (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*[45]). There is also an echo of Blake's poem 'Jerusalem' (1804-1820), a mythological reworking of the fall and redemption of Albion, which contains an entreaty to the English that they should awake from their slumbers – both temporal and spiritual:" Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!" [46]

By conjuring up the voices of these two great English authors who, from their different historical perspectives, embody a kind of progressive nationalism, Peace seeks to alert the reader to the danger he believes is inherent in this latest attack on the values of the British people. It can only end badly, he seems to suggest when he yokes them to the totalitarian brutality of the 'Year Zero' policy of the Pol Pot regime which slaughtered millions in the killing fields of Cambodia.

Although *GB84* is primarily concerned with the state of the nation, Peace's presentation of trade unionism and of individual trade union members shapes the novel. The National Union of Mineworkers [NUM] is represented as an organisation operating at two different but related levels – the activist and the political. The structure of the book itself reflects these different aspects of the NUM with the 'diaries' of two of the striking miners – Martin and Peter – always set away from the main

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[43] George Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn' in *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell Volume 2* ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London : Secker & Warburg, 1968)

[44] Ibid., p57

[45] George Orwell, *Nineteen-Eighty Four* ( London: Secker and Warburg, 1949)

[46] William Blake, *Complete Prose and Poetry of William Blake,* ed. by Geoffrey Keynes ( London : Nonsuch Press, 1989) p434

narrative, in double columns on the verso page, punctuating the main plot and starting each new chapter. Newspaper interviews at the time of publication suggest that Peace did this as a form of tribute to the individual miners who he wanted to separate from the chaotic and unpleasant world depicted in the main plot. Mike Marquesee in *The Independent* reports his conversation with Peace in these terms:

> Peace anchors this main narrative – with its ellipses and ambiguities – to a concrete, day-by-day chronicle of the strike as seen through the eyes and told in the language of two Yorkshire miners. Each chapter begins with a solid block of unbroken prose in which their experiences are re-created with blunt immediacy. 'The miners' narratives are not fictionalised,' Peace says. 'They are actually the truth.' [...] For all its horror, the book is infused with a sense of dignity of the strike and the strikers. 'I hadn't appreciated the degree of their sacrifice and selflessness'.[47]

However, despite Peace's claim that the miners are speaking in their own words, the lives of Martin and Peter remain essentially two dimensional – they exist only within the confines of their identity as striking miners rather than as human beings. The claim that the daily diaries of Peter and Martin have authenticity does not, of course, mean that they should be read as the thoughts and actions of unique individuals – it is clear that Peace wants them, in some sense, to stand for a certain type of miner: one committed to the values of family and community as much as they are to their friends and workmates in the union. Theirs is a world of honour and adherence to the values of loyalty and solidarity. However, from the outset of the novel they are embroiled in friction and emotional violence. Martin's wife, Cath, captures the sense of foreboding that surrounds the start of the strike: 'Cath wipes

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[47] Mike Marquesee, 'David Peace : State of the Union Rights' Independent newspaper online (2010) ( http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/david-peace-state-of-the-union-rights-572067.html) [accessed 1.6.10], p2

her face. Cath dries her eyes. Cath looks at television. Cath says, She hates us.'[48] Her understanding that, for the Prime Minister and the Government, this is a personal fight helps to build an atmosphere of tetchiness and mistrust between Martin and Cath and makes tangible the overweening atmosphere of gloom that permeates both Martin and Peter's diaries for most of the time.

To reinforce the sense of inevitability that pervades the opening of the novel, Peace introduces, from the outset, the 'voices' of the dead from past civil wars which have a ghostly or spectral commentary of their own and seem to be an augury of troubles ahead: '*The dead brood under Britain. We whisper. We echo. The emanation of Giant Albion* – '[49] The clear reference again to the prophetic poetry of Blake and the later images of warfare, and civil war in particular, thrust themselves into the text of the striking miners' diaries. The sense that this is another English Civil War being fought between the State and the miners is constantly emphasised:

> Telephone wakes me up about two. Day 205. Incoming calls only [...] It's Keith. *Click click.* He says, There's thousands of police at pit. Fucking thousands. *Krk-krk.* Thousands? I say. Joking with us. I wish I were, he says. Know what it fucking means and all don't you? Means fucking war, that's what it means.[50]

Throughout the miners' diaries Peace provides the ominous sound-effects of the 'click click' of the phone tap and the 'Krk-krk' of the marching boots, batons and riot shields of the police. In this way he emphasizes the paramilitary credentials of the police, their equipment and their ability to call on a degree of sophisticated technological back-up in support of their tactics. This is not an fair fight – practically or morally. The miners not only face a civil police force acting as an army but a whole range of agents provocateur, by and large invisible to the striking miners and willing to do literally anything to undermine and destabilize the strike.

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[48] Peace (2004) p10

[49] Ibid., p2

[50] Ibid., p256

Peace's portrait of the NUM as a political force focuses on the activities of The President and the senior officers of the union. In contrast to the very fractured, chaotic, action-led story of the strike presented through the picketing miners' diaries, the story of the senior negotiating officials is claustrophobic and riddled with paranoia, displays of seemingly arbitrary power and constantly shifting political allegiances. If Martin and Peter are the foot-soldiers of the war, the NUM Headquarters is the command centre. As the novel progresses and it is clear that victory in the strike is getting more and more remote, the atmosphere in the Headquarters building becomes increasingly oppressive and airless. In a further echo of wartime imagery, there is an undeniable sense that the union headquarters has become the President's equivalent of Hitler's bunker:

> The President caught between the rocks of the Right and the hard places of the Left. Cornered and trapped, he lived behind locked doors. He spoke in secret and talked on tape. Taped all transmissions, recorded all reports. Joan cooked his food. Len tested it. The President ate only small amounts, staggered in stages. He drank only boiled water. The president left the locked doors of his office only for rallies. [51]

At the end of the novel Peace presents us with a world in transition. But it is a transition into a dark and terrifying future. On both sides of this war there are losses: for the trade union movement and for the forces of the status quo. The Secret Services, who are mobilised against the miners, have their values and *modus operandi* fundamentally challenged and ultimately swept away as absolutely as the values of trade unionism and collective action. This is a world that will be inherited by a Government that is peopled by a new set of ideologues that have no truck with old expressions of honour or loyalty:

> Until that Day of Judgement – There will be no spring. There can be no morning – There will only be winter. There can only be night....The Armies of the Right – we are here because of you they say.....Here where she

[51] Ibid., p352

stands at the gates at the head of her tribe and waits – Triumphant on the mountains of our skulls. Up to her hems in the rivers of our blood. [52]

Peace portrays the 1984/5 Miners' Strike as an event that transcends the everyday politics of industrial relations and becomes an almost visionary glimpse into a future dominated by fear and loathing. He presents the strike as a mythological battleground on which the forces of good and evil are engaged in a struggle for our collective future. The fact that, for Peace, evil is triumphant leaves the reader bereft of hope. However, even given the context of the dominant discourse within which his interpretation is located, Peace's history of the Miners' Strike is a personal, even idiosyncratic, interpretation of events and not, as he and many critics have sought to claim, the definitive one. His deterministic and apocalyptic reading of the strike is one which willingly embraces the idea of absolute defeat – not just for the miners and socialism but, he seems to be saying, those values of 'Britishness' that have been fought for down the ages.

Although Peace believes that the outcome of the strike has bequeathed him a present and future with, as he sees it, no hope of redemption, Granelli and Waites provide a very different perspective on the same discourse. For them, the clash of ideologies they see played out in the strike has the same result – ultimate defeat, not just for the trade union but for the striking miners as individuals. However, for these authors interest focuses on how individual stories of redemption play out against this background of collective defeat and the rest of this chapter will go on to look in more detail at how these novels accept the neo-liberal emphasis on the primacy of the individual over the re-imagining of ideas of collectivity and community.

[52] Ibid., p426

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