

## Coal Miners Revisited

Richard Fry

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## REVIEW ESSAY / NOTE CRITIQUE

### Coal Miners Revisited

**Richard Fry**

Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920* (New York: Berghahn Books 2006)

Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2005)

John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, and Keith Gildart, eds., *The Struggle for Dignity: Industrial Politics and the 1926 Lockout* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2004)

Andrew Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics: Volume 2, 1969–1995* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing 2005)

Stefan Berger, Andy Croll, and Norman LaPorte, eds., *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing 2005)

THE BODY OF LITERATURE on coal mining history has significantly expanded in the past decade. The studies listed above differ not only in their consideration of coal miners across time and space, but also in their depiction of how coal miners and mining unions interacted with capital and the state. Equally, however, the books also share a number of similarities, not least their portrayal of organized labour in the coalfields in decline, or at least struggling to survive. All five monographs also refer to national or central governments that were largely indifferent to the fate of the coal industry and its workers.

In *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920*, Donald Quataert examines the relationship between coal miners and the state in a single coalfield of the Ottoman Empire. As he outlines in

chapter one, his intention is to diverge from the path taken by previous studies of coal mining in the Ottoman empire, by de-emphasizing the role of the state and examining the relationship from the perspective of the miners. He argues that while the state exerted a great deal of pressure on coal miners, for instance by enforcing compulsory labour and closely monitoring health and safety policy, it ultimately failed in its objective of increasing coal production during World War I, and in turn cast doubt on the legitimacy of its own power. The state's failure was largely attributable to the fact that, despite its use of coercion, it was unable to exert total control over the mining industry. Miners actively resisted work by fleeing mine sites, and the state's reliance on village elders for the appointment of miners was detrimental to its interests. Moreover, the state did not provide adequate funding or support for the mines during World War I. Quataert adeptly supports his argument, incorporating a broad range of documentary evidence and insightful analysis to his study.

In a brief historiographical essay, Quataert examines four historical accounts of coal mining in the Turkish republic. He notes that all four accounts emphasize the role of Uzun Mehmed, a discharged soldier who, motivated by promises of financial reward, discovered coal reserves near his home in 1829. Quataert is skeptical that coal was not discovered until that date, especially given the exposed nature of Turkish coal seams and the earlier discovery of coal in other countries. He also questions the accounts' emphasis on a single heroic individual. In considering how the accounts describe the early development of the coal industry, Quataert argues that they have created a distorted understanding of the relationship between the state and miners, by using periodization to place the state at the centre of the narrative, and by neglecting key aspects of workers' lives such as wages and working conditions. In particular, he draws attention to the account produced by the Zonguldak People's House, an institution that Turkey's ruling Republican Party established in June 1932 as a means of creating ideological and national cohesion. Quataert argues that the emphases in this particular account demonstrate the state's effort to control the historical narrative of the coal mining industry. The historiographical essay firmly supports Quataert's objective of reducing the emphasis on the state and giving a more central role to the coal workers. Moreover, it demonstrates his firm command of the limited printed resources on mining in the Ottoman state.

Although the book's title cites 1822 as the starting date for the study, Quataert's discussion of the first two decades after that year is rather sparse. Aside from his consideration of Mehmed's story in the historiographical essay, the book contains very little information on events prior to 1840. However, Quataert more than compensates for this omission with his sustained analysis of the events that curtailed the state's power in the coal industry from the mid-nineteenth century. In chapter two, he reveals that the Istanbul government's control over mines diminished after 1867, when it relinquished its coal extraction rights to private interests. The Eregli Company, ostensibly a state

organization but in reality a joint venture between French investors and the Ottoman bank, emerged in 1891 and was indicative of the shift toward private control. The new company began to develop the transport infrastructure in the coalfields, constructing aerial tramways and expanding ports in order to increase profitability. Given the prominence of the Eregli Company throughout the book, Quataert could have provided more detail on its origins, but this is a minor omission in an otherwise informative chapter of how the state began to lose its grip on the coal industry.

In chapter three, Quataert demonstrates that, despite the ascension of private interests in the coal industry, the state still maintained its power over the miners. In the early 1840s, a free labour force composed mostly of unskilled workers toiled in the mines, but in 1867, when it became clear that free labourers were providing insufficient manpower, the state introduced regulations that mandated compulsory labour. Under the new regulations, it instructed village councils to appoint males between the ages of 13 and 50 to work in the mines. The councils decided who worked in the mines and who engaged in military service, granting exemptions to those who were sick or in poor health. In its early years, the compulsory labour program mostly targeted unskilled workers, but as the depth of the mines in the Zonguldak coalfield increased, operators came to rely on skilled workers who had the expertise to bring the coal to the surface. The issue of compulsory labour is one that Quataert returns to frequently throughout the book.

Quataert is mindful of the primary sources' limitations, and at frequent points in the chapter he explains why he was unable to elaborate on certain points or provide more information on a particular subject. For example, his discussion of company wage ledgers (66–76) highlights the limitations inherent in that type of document, including a lack of detail beyond the wages that companies paid to different types of worker. Other issues are simply left dangling. He argues that compulsory workers often had trouble getting paid, but fails to mention if they engaged in any form of protest or resistance to resolve their grievances. Furthermore, he mentions that compulsory workers failed to develop class consciousness because they were more loyal to their villages than their fellow miners, but he does not expand on this point anywhere in the book.

The author's discussion of health and safety in the Zonguldak coalfields in chapters seven and eight is arguably the most compelling aspect of the book. His vivid and well-written descriptions illustrate not only the hazards that miners faced, both on the job and away from the mines, but also the miners' conflict with operators and the state. Quataert explains that miners frequently traversed the coalfields by trainhopping, the illegal practice of jumping onto the moving freight cars. While this caused several deaths and a large number of injuries, the Eregli Company's biggest concern was that such behaviour violated order and caused disruption. The company employed soldiers and gendarmes to thwart the practice, although they never hired enough to halt it

completely. According to Quataert, Eregli could have provided transportation for the rank-and-file miners, as it did for mine personnel and supervisors, but it rejected that measure, in the belief that the miners would become disorderly. Overall, the company's actions reflected its belief that miners would automatically behave in an unruly manner if they lacked supervision.

Quataert's overview of accidents inside the mines makes for gripping, if uncomfortable, reading. His inclusion of a miner's testimony about a youth who drowned (168–169) is particularly touching, and one of the few instances in the book where he is able to include a source created directly by a mine worker. His brief discussion of underground fires and explosions highlights the violent nature of mine work, while setting the scene for his later consideration of the state mine administration's campaign to introduce safety lamps. Quataert argues that the campaign was the result of the state's desire to retain a steady workforce and provide reassurance to miners discouraged from working by underground disasters, and ultimately to uphold the profitability of the mines. He shows that the campaign was only partially successful because of miners' resistance to it.

In some respects, Quataert's discussion of health and safety is incomplete. He does not discuss the long-term health consequences of mine work, particularly black lung disease, although, as he explains, this omission stems from a lack of information in the primary documents. However, in explaining the problems inherent in studying documentary evidence of miner's lung disease, his analysis is rather careless. He writes, "Though in most other mining centers, such as Western Europe and the United States, the connection between mine work and respiratory disease had already been well-established, statistical data still were lacking." (156) This statement ignores the fact that, even in the late 1960s, black lung disease was still a fiercely contested issue in the United States. Several physicians working on behalf of mining companies argued the link between lung disease and mine work could not be proven, and that lung disease was more likely the result of cigarette smoking. In the larger context of the chapter, though, this is a minor oversight, and does not detract from the fine quality of Quataert's writing and interpretation. The two chapters on health and safety segue into a final chapter on the decline of the coal industry during World War I, which highlights how under-funding and a shortage of workers at the mines led to a decline in productivity, and in turn coal shortages. In its entirety, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire* combines a sustained narrative and engaging story-telling with intelligent analysis. It is a worthy addition to the literature on capital, labour and the state in the Ottoman Empire.

During World War I, as the Ottoman state faced a significant coal production crisis, the anthracite coal industry in the United States was at its peak. In 1917, production in the anthracite coalfields of Pennsylvania was at its highest-ever level. However, immediately after the war ended, the industry slumped into interminable decline. In *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite*

*Region in the Twentieth Century*, Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht examine the growth and economic and social deterioration of the Pennsylvania anthracite coal region. In their introduction, the authors state that the region "provides an opportunity to understand sustained economic decline as a complicated, evolving process and fine-grained subject." (5) They not only show convincingly that the decline of the anthracite industry was a long-term process, beginning in the early 1920s, but also that it was a tragedy with significant human and environmental costs.

The first chapter of the book provides an overview of the origins and ascendancy of Pennsylvania's anthracite coalfields. The authors' discussion of how railroad companies gradually exercised control over the mines and transport networks through a series of mergers and takeovers is particularly engaging, while their concise, if brief, discussion of miners' strikes in the late 19th century serves to emphasize that labour unrest was firmly entrenched in the anthracite fields long before the prominent strikes of 1900 and 1902. It is in chapter two, however, that their story gains momentum. The authors convincingly show that the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had to work much harder to establish a presence in the Pennsylvania anthracite region than in the bituminous coalfields, because of the significant political and economic power of the operators. While the Anthracite Coal Commission Settlement of 1903 enabled the union to make some important gains, such as the 1916 agreement that mandated an 8-hour workday and a three to seven percent wage increase, the union failed to achieve its most significant goal: recognition by coal operators.

After a surge in production during World War I, the anthracite region went into a steady and prolonged decline from the early 1920s, which Dublin and Licht adeptly explain. In chapter four, they highlight how demand for anthracite coal fell after World War II, and how operators responded to the crisis by downsizing their operations, diversifying their interests, or merging with other companies. Frequently, they made substantial reductions to miners' wages, which local unions were unable to challenge. The authors assert that the intervention of large investment firms was another reason for the decline of the anthracite industry. To take one example, the Leigh Coal and Navigation Company (LNC) was taken over by several large investment firms that intended to break up the company for profit, but such was the deep-rooted structural nature of the industry's decline that they were unable to do so. (89)

As the authors later show in chapter five, efforts to thwart economic decline in the anthracite region came from three different levels. First, they came from the community level. In Scranton, the joint efforts of local elites and the chamber of commerce brought a major federal defense contract to the town, contributing to its wartime prosperity, while after the war, the community council in Hazleton was able to attract investment for an industrial park that created many new jobs. Secondly, the Pennsylvania state government played a crucial role in trying to bring economic regeneration to the state. Governor

George Leader established an organization called the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority, which provided financial support to firms setting up in economically depressed regions. The third key actor was the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company, which played a crucial role in facilitating economic development by offering to provide utility services to companies that relocated in the region.

The consequences of anthracite coal's decline were by no means completely negative, a point the authors emphasize by providing a case study of a town called Fairless Hills. By the late 1980s, residents enjoyed a higher standard of living, and there was more religious, occupational, and class diversity. However, many traditional aspects of coalfield life had disappeared, and the decline of the anthracite industry had deeply impacted the people of the town, and indeed the wider region. Dublin and Licht's book excels at describing the human costs behind the anthracite industry's decline. Their descriptions of communities gradually falling apart, and of unemployed miners leaving their hometowns to find work emphasize the real costs of the pit closures.

*The Face of Decline* shows that the United States federal government only intervened in the anthracite coal industry when it felt absolutely compelled to do so, such as during the strike of 1902. For the most part, it left the management of the industry to the operators, a decision that clearly played a significant role in the industry's decline. Similarly, in Great Britain prior to World War II, the government was reluctant to interfere with the prerogative of private operators. However, the British government's economic policies had a major impact on the coal industry, particularly in the years immediately after the First World War. These policies had a significant effect on miners' wages, and played a major role in the miners' lockout of 1926.

The lockout is the focus of a new book edited by John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, and Keith Gildart, *The Struggle for Dignity: Industrial Politics and the 1926 Lockout*. Whereas previous accounts of the 1926 miners' lockout have been regional in focus, or have been overshadowed by a broader discussion of the General Strike that happened the same year, *The Struggle for Dignity* brings a national focus to the lockout. In their co-authored introduction, the editors argue that regional perspectives of the strike are flawed because they ignore how the miners overcame regional factionalism to forge a cohesive national identity. This identity was based on shared class interests, and it prevailed long after the 1926 strike ended. However, as several chapters in the book demonstrate, the relationship between operators and the miners differed according to region, and this often proved detrimental to the miners' interests.

John Foster's opening chapter, "What Kind of Crisis, What Kind of Ruling Class?" explains the background to the strike, tracing its origins to the end of World War I. Foster argues that market failure, brought about by the government's reversion to the gold standard in 1925 and the decline in wages that followed, precipitated the conditions for the strike. Britain's flailing grasp on its overseas colonies, which necessitated massive government spending

increases, further exacerbated the economic crisis. Foster's chapter would have benefited from more attention to how opposition parties in the British Parliament reacted to the government's actions. Moreover, given Britain's insatiable demand for coal in the 1920s, he should have elaborated on just how much the crisis affected the coal operators, and if it affected them to the extent that they claimed.

In their chapter "Fighting the Legions of Hell," McIlroy and Campbell turn their attention to union protest in the British coalfields. Weaving together documents that encompass a range of perspectives, including those of the government, the coal operators, and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), they create the most compelling chapter in the book. They tell the story of the miners' struggle against the forces of capital and the state, but in a way that does not depict the miners as victims. Their evidence shows that the miners' failure to achieve their demands was just as much about their refusal to compromise with their opponents and the TUC as it was about the firm stance taken by coal operators and the government. In a broader sense, the chapter has much to say about the condition of organized labour in Great Britain during the 1920s. At the beginning of the chapter, McIlroy and Campbell explain that British miners had already developed a sense of national identity by the end of World War I, as a result of the union's alliance with the Labour Party and an earlier national strike in 1912. Further contributing to the miners' sense of cohesion was the government's takeover of the coal mines during the war. However, the government's decision to return the mines to private ownership undermined that collective identity, as private operators set wages in accordance with regional levels and refused to negotiate with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB).

Although the union was able to bargain for minor wage increases in 1924 as a result of rising coal exports, its success proved short-lived. The economic slump of the following year, discussed by Foster in the previous chapter, prompted operators in several regions to slash miners' wages and lay off workers. When the miners threatened to strike, not only in response to the operators' actions but also to the deteriorating living conditions in the British coalfields, the government intervened, and on July 31, 1925, now known as 'Red Friday,' it promised to subsidize miners' wages for nine months. When the miners rejected the subsidized wages, and continued to threaten industrial action, the operators enforced a lockout in the coalfields. The authors note that the operators found support from Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who blamed the miners for the lockout. Baldwin planned to force the miners back to work by cutting off funds from their families and importing more coal from abroad. By aligning with the operators, the government condoned their actions and effectively undermined the miners' bargaining position.

In defense of the coal miners, the Trades Union Congress called a nationwide General Strike. The authors segue rather too quickly from 'Red Friday' to the General Strike, providing limited discussion of the events that occurred



in the aftermath of 'Red Friday'. That said, their penetrating analysis of the General Strike's failure focuses on the rifts within British organized labour during the 1920s. They argue that the TUC over-reacted by withdrawing from the strike when the miners refused to accept a new wage settlement offered by Baldwin. Their explanation for the organization's behavior is that it was not fully invested in the strike to begin with, merely using it as a bluff and never intending it to achieve substantial results. Despite the loss of support from the TUC, the miners continued with the strike, but regional differences and a lack of centralized control in the MFGB, along with a lack of support from transport unions, thwarted their progress. Moreover, steady imports of coal from abroad and operators reaching wage settlements in some regions further limited the miners' ability to bargain. By the end of the year, the miners had returned to work, many having been forced to accept substantial wage reductions.

McIlroy and Campbell's chapter is important for several reasons. It shows that, unlike miners in the Ottoman coalfields of Quataert's study, British coal miners had firmly established class consciousness by the early 20th century. It was this consciousness that proved instrumental in the miners' willingness to engage in industrial action. However, the authors also show that the government and operators were unwilling to tolerate such action. Unlike the Ottoman state, the British government simply imported coal when production did not meet its needs.

Other chapters in *The Struggle for Dignity* are also worthy of attention. In her chapter on women in the coalfields, Sue Bruley brings a gendered perspective to the miners' strike, arguing that women were instrumental in forging solidarity among mining communities during the lockout. In Bruley's eyes, women were by no means equal to men, as they lived and worked in an environment that perpetuated strict gender segregation. They were confined to a domestic role, and beyond the home generally socialized in women's organizations such as the Cooperative Women's Guild and the Labour Party Women's Section. Moreover, miners affirmed their masculine identity through their economic power over their wives. But during the lockout, women moved beyond the confines of domestic life to play a more visible role in the coalfields. With the help of donations, they operated communal kitchens for the miners and provided meals for children from destitute families, which in many cases enabled the families to avoid the humiliating process of applying for poor relief. Women also harassed blacklegs (scabs), sometimes through physical violence or rituals such as whitewashing, and became politically active in organizations such as the Communist Party. As Bruley explains, though, their most important task was fundraising, and maintaining the resources necessary for the miners to continue the strike. Ultimately, though, their significant contribution did not prevent the failure of the strike, and by late 1926, with many families in severe debt, the miners returned to work.

Bruley's chapter presents a colourful account of life away from the picket lines in mining towns, and more significantly demonstrates that miners

cannot be examined independently of their families and wider communities. That said, the chapter focuses specifically on Welsh coal women, and is not representative of women in all British coalfields. Thus, it somewhat contradicts the editors' intention of compiling a volume on the strike that abandons the regional focus in favour of a national perspective. On the whole, however, the chapter emphasizes the importance of women's contribution to coalfield life, and brings a gendered perspective to the book that is noticeably missing from some of the other publications reviewed here.

In their brief prologue, the editors explain that the MFGB survived the 1926 lockout, despite its defeat, and went on to engage in further militancy from the mid-1930s. They also draw a comparison between the 1926 lockout and the 1984 miners' strike, asserting that by the 1970s, a generation of miners existed that had only ever worked under the framework of nationalization, and that the hardships they protested in the early 1980s were trivial in comparison to what their predecessors of the 1920s had to endure. This assertion hardly seems relevant, given that the editors stress in their introduction that the book is not a comparative study of the 1926 and 1984 strikes. Moreover, it does not consider the miners of the 1970s and 1980s in their own terms and in their own historical context. However, this does not detract from a study of the 1926 lockout that is broad in scope and rich in detail. *The Struggle for Dignity* is a valuable addition to the literature on British coal-mining history.

As the authors of *The Struggle for Dignity* point out, British coal-mining unionism persisted into the 1930s and beyond. However, after World War II, it had to function in a completely new environment. In 1946, the British government nationalized the coal mines, and assumed control of their operation through a new office called the National Coal Board. The leadership of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain reorganized the union and it became the National Union of Miners (NUM). Andrew Taylor's *The NUM and British Politics: Volume 2, 1969–1995* examines the NUM and its relationship with the British national government from 1969 to 1995. For Taylor, the story of the NUM is ultimately one of failure, and of a union in decline. He argues that the NUM lost the tenuous strike of 1984 because of regional factionalism and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's private determination to destroy it. The divisions in the union were caused by the regional nature of pit closures and the fact that the National Coal Board tended to invest in the mechanization of what it perceived as 'core' coalfields, while abandoning peripheral ones. Divisions in the union were exacerbated by the fact that miners in areas of stable employment often refused to protest for fear of being targeted. Taylor further argues that lethargy in the union did not just exist among right-leaning leaders, but rather that a lack of motivation existed throughout the ranks. Taylor's argument is well supported, in a comprehensive and detailed study.

For all his focus on the regional fractures in the NUM, Taylor's narrative in chapter two, entitled "Heath and the Miners," depicts the union as strong, cohesive, and largely effective in trying to win its demands. He explains that

in early 1971, the union issued Composite Resolution II, which outlined its demands for a wage increase for all miners. When the NCB offered a smaller increase than that sought by the NUM, the two parties went to the bargaining table. After extensive negotiations through most of 1971, the wage increase offered by the NCB was still not to the union's liking, and at a Special Conference in October 58 percent of its members voted in favor of industrial action. While Joe Gormley, the NUM leader, was concerned that the union did not have the requisite two-thirds majority required for industrial action, he believed that wages provided a strong focal point for national unity in the union.

The miners began their walkout in early January 1972, and in the early weeks of the strike quickly gained an advantage over the government. The police did not have sufficient forces to break the strike using force, a problem that was exacerbated by the unexpected militancy of the miners. The NUM's different area branches, not the centralized leadership, were responsible for the management of the strike. The NUM rejected the Heath government's offer of negotiations, stipulating that it would only negotiate if the NCB made a better pay offer. The NUM's position was strengthened by support from the general public and co-operation from other unions such as the Miners' International Federation (MIF), which agreed not to handle imported coal. Taylor's discussion of the early weeks of the strike is compelling and well sustained, capturing the drama of the confrontation between the miners and the government. However, one minor problem is that he does not pay enough attention to the relationship between the NUM and other unions. He touches briefly on the support the miners received from the MIF, but for the most part, he neglects the issue of the NUM's place in the broader organized labour movement in Britain.

By the second week in February, coal stocks had started to decline, but government ministers were reluctant to increase the police's powers to deal with the miners, fearing that doing so would push the miners to escalate the strike. The shortage of coal posed an acute threat to the operation of Britain's power stations, and so the government devised a plan called "Operation Arbitrator" that proposed the delivery of lighting-up oil to power stations. However, it soon abandoned this idea in favour of taking action to remove the pickets outside power stations. Lord Wilberforce, a prominent government minister, believed miners were of vital importance to the economy. After carrying out an investigation of the miners' demands, he offered them generous terms to end the strike. When the miners rejected the terms, Prime Minister Heath intervened, informing the miners that if they accepted the terms and called off the strike, he would agree to non-wage concessions. The union leadership agreed to Heath's offer and began drawing up a list of demands. They eventually returned to work on February 25, becoming one of the highest paid groups of industrial workers in the country.

Based on his evidence, Taylor argues that the strike cast doubt on the NCB's competence as a negotiator and for many, including the rank-and-file members of the union, reflected negatively on the government. For Taylor, the key ques-

tion that emerged during the early strike was how the government should deal with industrial unrest. As the strike drew to a close, Heath's cabinet adopted new measures, including the deployment of regional commissioners to coordinate the police and the establishment of an intelligence-gathering system based at Scotland Yard. However, because Heath did not want the embarrassment of another strike, he did not take away the miners' right to engage in industrial action. He felt that cooperation, not coercion, was the best way forward for the government.

Despite the gains the miners had made, their wage gains quickly deteriorated, and by late 1973 they had reverted to their 1971 level. (83) The union's National Executive Council argued in favor of abandoning the overtime ban, one of the concessions the miners had gained from the 1972 strike, to make up the shortfall, but the rank-and-file refused to adopt that measure. The NUM bargained with the NCB throughout much of the year, but when the miners failed to achieve their demands, they voted once again to strike. The international political situation worked to their advantage, as the Arab-Israeli crisis had prompted a significant rise in oil prices and the nation was in turn becoming increasingly reliant on coal as a source of fuel. In February 1974, the miners once again went out on strike.

As a whole, chapter two gives a real sense of the militancy that existed among not just the union leadership, but also the rank-and-file members, and shows that the NUM wielded a great deal of power in the early 1970s. It also gives credence to the argument made by the editors of *The Struggle for Dignity* that miners' unionism was not moribund after the failed strike of 1926, and demonstrates that, if anything, it was more able to thrive under nationalization. Taylor skillfully weaves together competing strands of evidence, including government documents, union papers, and reports to depict the fraught and often hostile nature of relations between the NUM and the government.

The chapters that follow provide a clear account of the disintegration of the NUM, and the emergence of the factionalism that would ultimately destroy it. "The Enemy Within" is by far the most striking chapter in the book, offering an emotionally resonant account of the 1984 strike. Taylor explains how the Thatcher administration became more aggressive in its politics as the strike progressed. As violence became more common on the picket lines, the government increased the powers of police forces and even resorted to using covert surveillance of the NUM through MI5. Taylor's account of the clashes between police and the miners shows that the police action became more aggressive during the course of the strike.

"Endgame," the penultimate chapter, explains the deterioration of the NUM after the 1984 strike. Although Margaret Thatcher and her Cabinet outwardly adopted a cautious approach towards the union after the strike, to maintain the illusion that they were not intentionally trying to destroy it, privately they were determined to silence it. The government sometimes barely concealed its intentions, notably during its talks with railway unions, which reflected

its desire to isolate the NUM. To add to that, the National Coal Board made clear its refusal to negotiate with the miners by abandoning the Arbitration Conciliation Advisory Service, an impartial arm of the government intended to resolve industrial disputes, and by conducting an extensive propaganda campaign in the national media. Under such pressure, the miners found it increasingly difficult to resist. As different regional branches of the union came to accept its defeat as inevitable, the national leadership sought to preserve the NUM.

Taylor goes on to explain that the NUM found it increasingly hard to engage in militant action in the mid-1980s. Factionalism among different left-wing elements of the union and disagreements between regions over the utility of such action were the biggest obstacles, but the memory of failure in the 1984 strike and the lack of an issue to mobilize around were also a hindrance. The NUM tried to fight back with its overtime ban of 1987, but the union was too divided for the ban to work. The Lightman Inquiry, following revelations in the media that leaders Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield had accepted money on the union's behalf from the Soviet Union and Libya, further added to the union's woes. The union's National Executive Council ordered the enquiry when the NUM took steps to stop the funds from being sequestered. For the Inquiry team, the main point of contention was not that the union had accepted the money, but that it had tried to conceal it from the NEC. Scargill and Heathfield kept their jobs, but the fiasco contributed further to the union's decline.

Taylor gives an acute sense of the tense atmosphere that prevailed in miner-government relations after the strike. He depicts a government that was ruthless and intent on destroying coal mine unionism, whatever the cost. As a whole, *The NUM and British Politics* is dense, combining extensive detail with comprehensive analysis, but it contains enough engaging stories to make it accessible to the general reader, not just historians.

By far the most ambitious book on coal-mining societies to have been published of late is *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, edited by Stefan Berger, Andy Croll, and Norman LaPorte. Covering several continents and an extensive time span, each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of coalfield life in a comparative context. It is an approach that, for the most part, works well, but is not always successful.

In his chapter "The Myth of the Radical Miner," Dick Geary dispels the idea that all coal miners fit the model of what he describes as the "archetypal proletarian." He argues that while many industrial (or industrializing) societies have viewed coal miners as heroic for working in dangerous conditions, engaging in strike action more than other workers, and demonstrating class consciousness, not all miners behaved in this manner. He provides evidence to show that this variability among miners generally applied to most coal-producing countries. In Scotland, for instance, some coalfields were more prone to going on strike than others, while in South Yorkshire radicalism was not universal but located in particular spatial clusters. His assertion that the divisions in the

British coalfields were exposed during the miners' strike of 1984–85 reinforces Andrew Taylor's conclusions. Geary notes later in the chapter that British miners frequently rejected political radicalism. Many refused to support the Labour Representation Committee, while the National Mining Union was the last major industrial union to join the Trades Union Congress.

The same divisions, asserts Geary, were present in Imperial Germany, where strikes were often small in scale, short in duration, and focused on a single pit. He substantiates his point by highlighting a 1913 strike in the Ruhr, in which local unions were divided by ideology and their perceptions of the best course of action. As he explains a few pages later, a high percentage of the miners in the Ruhr Valley were moderate and even loyal, seeking redress for their grievances through petitions to the monarch.

The level of radicalism varied across different countries depending upon the legal framework and governments' attitudes towards labour organizations. In Britain, the state's liberal attitude towards organized labour through most of the 20th century facilitated a high number of strikes, while the repressive attitude to unions in many central and eastern European countries made industrial action more difficult. Geary argues that economic depression also created divisions among miners and prevented a unified radical response, because miners were competing for scarce jobs. Furthermore, gender and ethnic divisions often thwarted cooperation among the residents of mining communities, although cooperation was more prevalent in some communities than others. In Lanarkshire, Scotland the workforce was ethnically homogenous, while in the United States it was composed of a range of ethnic groups. Finally, the power of the coal companies was often an obstacle to unified militant action by the miners, although this was more common in countries like the United States where private interests controlled the coal industry. Geary's chapter works well because it compares so-called 'western' societies that were largely at similar phases of industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, one wonders about the utility of comparing societies that were so ethnically and religiously diverse.

Janet Wells Greene analyzes photographs in her chapter, "Cameras in the Coalfields: Photographs as Evidence for Comparative Coalfield History." She compares the perceptions of operators and miners towards photographic documentation of the coalfields. Greene explains that in the late 19th century, photographs of mining communities were commonly used by social reform organizations to draw attention to the miners' living conditions. Gradually, operators introduced stricter controls over photographers' access to the coalfields and the kind of pictures they could take. However, they were by no means unique in their efforts to limit the scope of photographic evidence. The United Mine Workers of America was also reluctant to establish a photographic record of coalfield life, in the fear that pictures of cramped housing and poor living conditions might deter people from joining the union.

After World War II, both operators and the UMWA regarded photographs as

an important tool in disputes and contract negotiations. The UMWA used pictures of dilapidated and unsanitary miners' houses to press for the installation of running water and sanitation, while the operators used photographs of model villages to convince the general public that such improvements were unnecessary. By using the photos that fit their argument, both sides claimed victory in that dispute. But, as Greene notes, the situation was somewhat more complicated, as mine operators, such as one company in Shawmut, Pennsylvania, owned houses that varied immensely in quality. Moreover, it was only after the war that the UMWA decided that publishing images with a strong emotional impact was important. In 1946, it published an image of an unkempt child in its journal, the first time it had used such an image. In essence, what emerges from Greene's chapter is that each side's attitude to photographs was complicated and ambiguous. Her comparison shows that each side used photographs when doing so fulfilled its purpose, but that both were equally willing to reject the use of pictures when necessary. As Greene notes, "images are often artifacts of the political struggles that created them." (82)

Greene makes good use of photographic evidence, but could have included even more photographs, given they are the focus of her analysis. Also, she could have spent more time discussing the identity of the photographers, or at least highlighting the obstacles that prevented her from discovering their identity.

Carolyn Brown goes beyond the western world in her chapter, "Nigerian Coal Miners, Protest, and Gender, 1914–19: the Iva Valley Mining Community." She gives particular focus to the Nigerian capital, Enugu, where, she asserts, miners resisted the British colonial administration's attempts to thwart class consciousness. In doing so, they set themselves apart from women and, over time, the rural workers that they had once affiliated themselves with. In essence, they adopted an "urban identity," and started to resist colonial rule forcefully. Brown suggests that one of the contradictions of World War I was that Enugu was economically dependent on its miners, yet granted them few political rights. The most glaring omission from Brown's article is that she does not explain if other African colonial societies dependent on mining experienced a similar crisis.

*Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies* is so broad in scope that it is difficult to give a comprehensive assessment of it within the confines of this review. To sum up, it emphasizes the diversity of miners' experiences across the globe and through different eras with flair and precision. Many of its chapters provide a starting point for further and more comprehensive research.