

Miner's Strike | Guidance notes

Introduction |

'Picture Bank' resources provide a set of images focused on a particular theme or subject.

This 'Picture Bank' provides a set of images on the Miner's Strike in Wales, between 1984-85. The images have been selected from Amgueddfa Cymru's collection. They are high resolution enough for use as a whiteboard resource.

Within these guidance notes you will find background information on the theme, interpretation of the images, possible learning outcomes and details on further reading and web resources.

The resource is downloadable and does not have a specific age or progression step in mind. We would encourage users to read through the notes and edit the resource to best suit their needs.

Background Information |

By the 1980s the British coal industry was one of the safest and most efficient in the world.

However, the new Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher wanted to make industry more efficient by slimming down what they regarded as unprofitable industries. Under her leadership, many former state run industries like gas, water and the railways were transferred to private sector ownership i.e. they were privatised. At the same time she wanted to weaken the power of the trade union movement which she believed had become too powerful.

In the UK as a whole there were 235,000 men working at 223 pits in 1979. By 1983, this had fallen to 182,000 working in 175 pits. The recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s had also damaged other

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Welsh industries. Therefore, unemployment in south Wales was already over 13%, much higher than the UK average.

As a result, many miners and their families felt they had no choice but to fight for the right to work and the future of their communities.

The strike was not a straightforward contest between the government and the NUM. Whole communities could sometimes be divided between miners who wished to work and those who were out on strike. The decision not to hold a ballot on strike action gave a reason for some miners to continue to turn up to work. To prevent this happening NUM 'Flying pickets' would travel to coal mines away from their normal places of work to persuade their colleagues who wished to work not to cross their picket line.

Police would be on duty to make sure those 'working miners' could get to work. The miners' strike has often been seen as a war between the police and pickets in spite of the fact that most picketing was carried out in an orderly and peaceful manner.

In March 1985 nearly 20,000 south Wales miners returned to work. Despair, poverty and frustration had all increased the pressure to return.

Images used and interpretation |

Slide 2-5 | These slides are intended to give the class an idea of what the coal mines in Wales looked like above ground and below ground in the 1980s.

*Mae'r adnodd hwn ar
gael yn Gymraeg.*

*This resource is
available in Welsh.*

*[amgueddfa.cymru/dysgu/
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Images used and interpretation |

Merthyr Vale Colliery downcast shaft, 1980

Penallta Colliery, 1984

Underground roadway at Merthyr Vale Colliery, 1981

Miner and Pit pony underground, Neath Valley, Wales, 1993

Slide 6 | This slide is a scan of an original leaflet printed by the NUM and gives the reasons for the strike from the NUM's perspective.

Original NUM leaflet about the reasons for the strike, 1983

Slide 7-11 | These slides show picket lines at various collieries, along with police lines in opposition. The strike was not a straightforward contest between the government and the NUM. Whole communities could sometimes be divided between miners who wished to work and those who were out on strike. The decision not to hold a ballot on strike action gave a reason for some miners to continue to turn up to work. To prevent this happening NUM 'Flying pickets' would travel to coal mines away from their normal places of work to persuade their colleagues who wished to work not to cross their picket line. Police would be on duty to make sure those 'working miners' could get to work. The miners' strike has often been seen as a war between the police and pickets in spite of the fact that most picketing was carried out in an orderly and peaceful manner.

Police at Nantgarw Colliery, c.1984

Picket line at Penallta Colliery, c.1884

'Boot Inspection', Aberaman Phurnicite Plant, c.1984

Police at Nantgarw Colliery, c.1984

Police presence at Cwm Colliery, c.1984

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Slide 12 | This leaflet from the Miners' Strike in 1984 uses the language and an image of an earlier bitter dispute in the Garw Valley in 1929 to comment on the activities of strike breakers in the 1984 Miners' strike. The language of traitors, scabs, blacklegs, biblical references and the photograph of marching police leaves the reader in no doubt about the attitudes of people to those who broke ranks with the strikers in 1984.

NUM leaflet, 1984

Slide 13-15 | These images show various organised marches across Wales during the strike. Large scale marches were different from picket lines, instead of preventing work happening at collieries, marches were meant to keep the fight in the public eye, to ensure that people knew what they were fighting for and that they were still fighting.

NUM lodge march, Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1984

Miners' march, Queen Street, Cardiff, 1984

Abernant NUM lodge and Labour Party march, Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1984

Slide 16-18 | These images show people and groups organising fundraising activities to help provide food, clothing and money to workers on strike. While on strike they are not earning any money. These people and groups raised funds, set up food centres, provided clothing and ran soup kitchens.

Retired miner collecting food donations outside Maesteg Co-op., 1985

Poster advertising a march and rally benefit event, 1984

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Slide 19-21 | These images show badges that were created to support the strike. Like marches badges were a great way to get support for the striking. All branches would print stickers and have badges created; some were given out, others were sold to raise funds. Badges were even created after the strike to help raise money for workers after the strike.

NUM leaflet, 1984

Unknown miner with badges, c.1985

Strike badge sold for £1 to help sacked miners, Cwm Lodge Strike Badge, 1986

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Debate |

The 'Picture Bank' shows people and places directly affected by the strike and generally focuses on supporter's of the strike. But there were those who did not support the strike.

You may wish to use the below 'for and against' arguments to have a debate the two sides. This is a great way of getting both sides across and discussing what you have learnt from the images and information.

6 arguments for closure |

Oil, natural gas and nuclear power were all cheaper than coal for producing electricity.

The coal industry had not made a profit for over 40 years.

It was cheaper to import coal from overseas than it was to mine it in Britain.

It did not make economic sense for the British people to subsidise a loss making industry.

By closing inefficient coal mines the future of the remaining coal mines could be safeguarded.

People should not look to the government to protect their jobs and livelihood.

6 arguments against closure |

Closing down coal mines will create massive unemployment

There is usually no other type of industry in coal mining areas – unemployed miners and their children will have little chance of finding new work

There are vast reserves of coal underground; collieries should be worked no matter what the cost.

A coal mine is central to the community; if you close the mine you kill the community.

The closure program is simply the Conservative government's way of getting revenge on the coal miners for defeating the Conservative government in 1974.

The government should protect and ensure the long term future of the country's important natural resources.

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Key vocabulary |

Strike

An organised body of employees, as a form of protest, refuse to work, typically in an attempt to gain a concession or concessions from their employer.

Colliery

A coal mine.

Drift mine

A mine which is entered by a tunnel rather than a vertical shaft.

Flying Pickets

Strikers sent to picket places of work other than their own.

NCB

National Coal Board.

NUM

National Union of Mineworkers.

Picket line

Body of men positioned outside a place of work to persuade other workers to support their cause.

Scabs

See strike breakers.

Strike breakers

The name given to men refusing to strike or who returned to work. Known as 'scabs' by strikers and 'working miners' or 'returnees' by the media and NCB.

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Further reading |

WCCPL & NUM Striking Back (1985), Salesbury Press

*Michael Thomas The Death of an Industry (2004),
Colben System Pte. Ltd.*

*John Davies History of Wales (1994), Penguin D. Gareth
Evans A History of Wales 1906-2000 (2000), University
of Wales Press*

*W. Gareth Evans The Role and Changing Status of
Women in the Twentieth Century (2000), ACCAC*

*Deirdre Beddoe Out of the Shadows: A History of
Women in Twentieth Century Wales (2000), University
of Wales Press*

*David Egan Coal Society: A History of the South Wales
Mining Valleys 1840-1980 (1987), Gomer*

*John Gorman Banner Bright – An Illustrated History of
Trade Union Banners (1986), Scorpion Publishing*

Websites |

Amgueddfa Cymru Collections and Research

<https://museum.wales/collections/>

People's Collection Wales

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>

*South Wales Coalfield Collection at University of Wales,
Swansea.*

<http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/>

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