

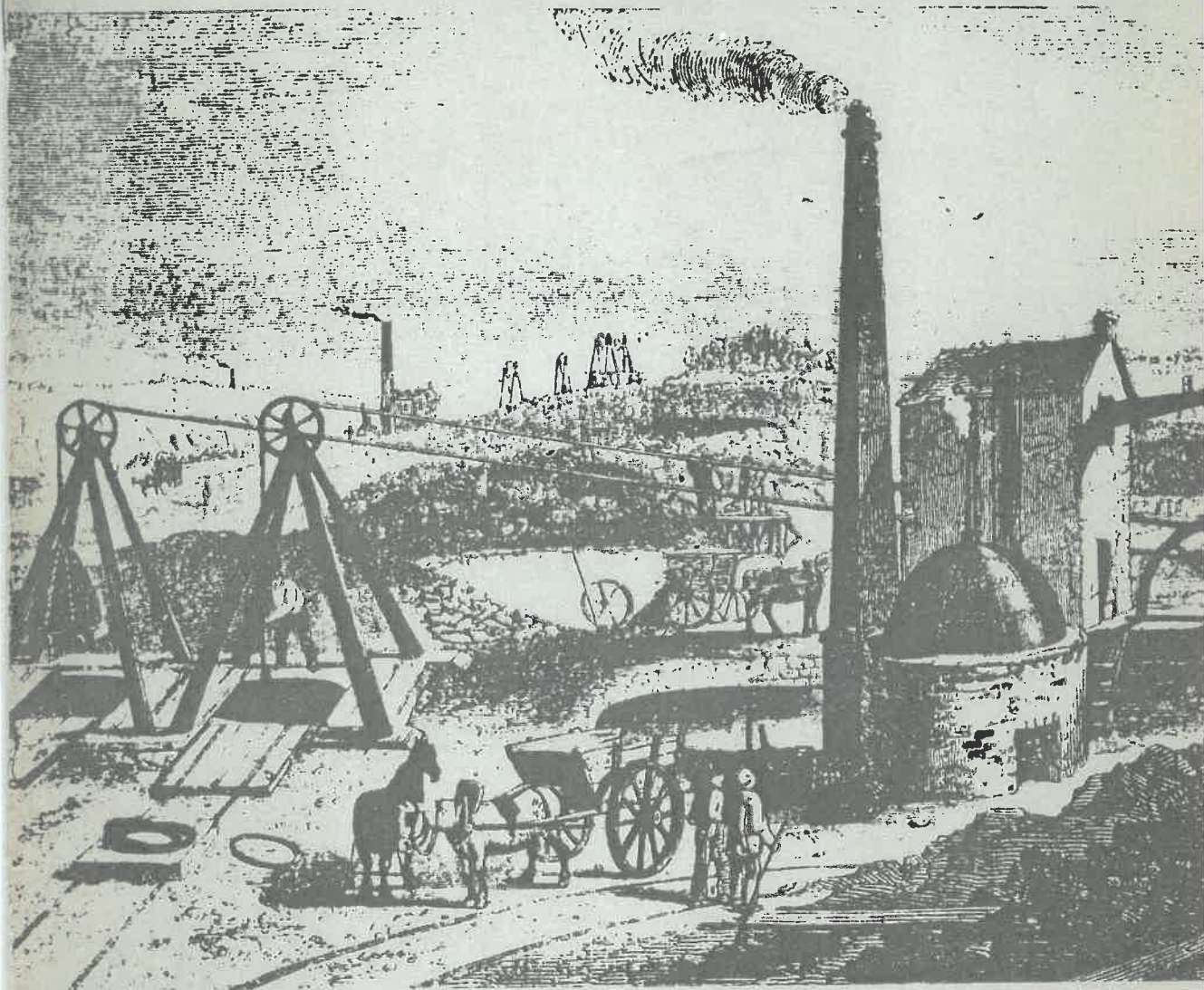
# OUR HISTORY

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DICTATORSHIP OF THE BOURGEOISIE —



SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE  
19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY BLACK COUNTRY

by G. BARNSBY

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# Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie – Social Control in the Nineteenth Century Black Country

George J. Barnsby

## 1. THE PROBLEM OF STATE POWER

This is an attempt to outline the methods whereby the working class were controlled, the capitalist system consolidated and extended, profits protected and the immense strength of the working class movement contained in a small, but key area of the Industrial Revolution, the Black Country. This area bounded by Wolverhampton, Stourbridge, Walsall and Birmingham contained the famous 10 yard seam of coal (the thickest in Britain) and since ironstone was interspersed with the coal measures developed rapidly after 1750 as a major coal and iron centre.

Today, in the period of state monopoly capitalism Marxists discuss the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in national terms as the domination of private owners of capital over the mass of the population by exploitation at the point of production, together with ownership or control of the mass media of propaganda and central control of the administration of the State, including the coercive apparatus of armies, police, prisons and the like. Such control in the era of monopoly is largely and necessarily centralised. In the nineteenth century and earlier, however, the tempestuous development of the working class posed vital problems of control which, at that time, could not be solved centrally, but only at local level. It is with these local levels of control that this article is concerned.

When the iron and coal industries in the Black Country developed on a large scale after about 1750 the capitalist class already had wide experience of control of labour and advancement of their own business interests. From the sixteenth century there had been a gradual development of iron smelting, slitting mills, iron castings, nail making, coal mining etc. These industries were controlled either by monopolistic partnerships or, as in the case of the domestic nail industry, control of the final product was in the hands of large merchants<sup>1</sup>. This, together with control of local government (either directly or through the good offices of the county aristocracy and gentry, most of whom were involved in industrial development) was the basis of the apparatus of control which was extended and refined during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Hence two myths of the Industrial Revolution must be dispelled at once. Namely that the society that developed from the Industrial Revolution was one of *laissez-faire* in which conditions approximated to perfect competition. Secondly that the labour force was free, wages and conditions being largely determined by supply and demand. Neither of these conditions applied in the Black Country.

## 2. CONTROL BY EMPLOYERS

The control of workers at the point of production was the key aspect of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The two decisive groups of workers were the miners and ironworkers accounting in 1841 for 23% of the employed male population over 20.<sup>3</sup> Wages in these industries were always uniform, fixed by the monopoly organisations of iron and coalmasters to be described later. Further control of the labour force was ensured by the methods of payment. The normal period of payment was every two weeks, but the 'reckonings' were often longer and non-payment of wages for 10 weeks was not unknown. This gave rise to 'subbing' whereby employees became ever more deeply enmeshed with an employer and the ubiquitous tommy shop or payment in truck which existed throughout the life of the coalfield. With regard to miners, there was the additional control of the butty (sub-contractor) who paid wages in public houses and late at night, the miner understanding full well that his prospects of continued employment depended on how much he drank.<sup>4</sup>

In the domestic trades of locks, keys, guns, chains and nails long-term contracts of employment were widespread. For adults there was the system of one year contracts and also the system of sale to an employer. In the latter case an employer advanced a sum of money to an employee, usually £5. This money was contracted to be repaid at 1s. or 2s. a week. The amount had to be paid strictly according to the letter of the contract and could not be repaid in a lump sum. Between 1839 and 1843 960 persons of both sexes were committed to Stafford Jail for default of these agreements, including 584 children and young persons.

Very large numbers of children became the property of employers through apprenticeships. These were usually by the illegal method of binding by attorney. Of apprentices in mines the Children's Employment Commission of 1842 had the following to say:

"Many boys and young men are working in the mines as apprentices. Such is the demand for children that there are no boys in the union workhouses of Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Stourbridge.... The boys are sent on trial to the mines between the ages of eight and nine and are bound apprentice for 12 years being to the age of 21.... Now here is slavery in the middle of England as reprehensible as any in the West Indies which justice and humanity alike demand should no longer be endured."

In Willenhall, the lock town, in 1842 it was claimed that nearly all children and young persons were apprentices. In 1863 many apprentices lived in similar conditions to those employed by Forster a locksmith of Canal St. Wolverhampton:

"The nail shops are in a yard at the back of the lowest street in the town. Adjoining are the masters houses and pigsties, in the most degraded Irish style. Forster lives in a house with his wife and six apprentices. The youngest is 13 and the oldest nearly 20. They often begin work at 5 am and sometimes 4 am. They often work to 10 pm at night or even 11 pm. There are no regular times for meals. The boys do not get wages. Forster sometimes gives them pocket money 2d. or 6d. or even 1s."

Such conditions (except in the mines) continued through most of the century and in the worst years of the Great Depression during the 1870s and 1880s were as bad as in the 1840s.

The keystone of the control of employers over their workers was, however, the Master and Servant Acts, going back to 1720. The main provisions of the Acts concerned breaches of contract and default of duty. The former concerned the giving of proper notice before leaving employment, usually 14 days. The latter concerned the spoiling of materials being worked or damage to machinery and plant. If the employer was in default he was subject to a civil action and damages could be claimed from him. If the employee were at fault however, this was a criminal matter and the worker was hauled before a magistrate and was liable to three months hard labour. Between 1858 and 1867 there were 10,000 prosecutions in Staffordshire under these Acts. Many of these would be mass prosecutions involving up to 50 men.<sup>7</sup>

The ways in which these laws were invoked almost defy belief. No strike could take place without 14 days notice and when strikes did occur the first recourse of the employers was to the courts under the Master and Servant Acts. Workers had no certainty of payment for work done and few had the money, or the confidence of receiving justice, to risk prosecuting an employer. Militant workers were sitting ducks for these Acts. In 1860 Edward Gough went on a deputation to his butty. He was instantly dismissed with 40s. in wages unpaid. He sued the butty, but was told he had broken his contract by not being in the pit and lost both the case and his wages. Striking nailmakers, after being careful to give 14 days notice of strike were promptly charged with embezzling the iron which was lying in their homes unworked. Puddlers, who had given the requisite notice of strike were prosecuted for damaging the furnaces which they were not working.<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie was the manipulation of the law by the masters. Employers, especially large ones, were above the law. For instance, the Earls of Dudley were by any definition, the greatest mass murderers the Black Country has ever known. Large numbers of men were killed in the Dudley mines, particularly from roof falls and incidents in the shafts. Most of these accidents could have been avoided; yet however blatant the neglect, the Earls of Dudley were never prosecuted. When prosecutions were reluctantly granted to Mines Inspectors by local JPs it was invariably an engineman who had worked 36 hours without a break or a small butty who were made the scapegoats for neglect sanctioned at much higher levels.<sup>9</sup>

A good example of the flouting of the law is the question of tommy. To pay wages in truck had been illegal since 1465. Additional acts were frequently passed to enforce this prohibition. In 1820 and 1831 acts were passed on the initiative of one of the MPs for Staffordshire, Lord Littleton. In the latter year it was stated by the Overseer of the Poor that two thirds of Bilston men were paid in tommy and examples quoted such as a man who had not received one penny in money for the past six months. In the late 1840s huge campaigns were waged against tommy in the Black Country with a united front stretching from members of the aristocracy to labour leaders such as Joseph Linney. Some prosecutions would be made and some tommy shops would close, but soon the evil would reappear.<sup>10</sup> Tommy existed during the whole period that the coalfield produced. Nor can tommy be excused by imagining that it was used by small masters with virtually no alter-

native because of a shortage of working capital. Tommy shops were owned by some of the largest ironmasters in the district and by the most respectable of middle class people including clergymen.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of legislation favourable to the working class being ignored and manipulated is the case of climbing boys. An Act of 1840 stipulated that no one under the age of 21 was to sweep chimneys and regulations were laid down for the proper construction of future chimneys. In the 1860s when the Children's Employment Commissioners came to Wolverhampton it was said that the law was a dead letter in the town and all chimney sweeps had boys, some of them under 10 years of age. The Chief Constable stated that there had been no prosecutions under the Act in the past five years, nor had he any instructions to prosecute offenders. The Borough Surveyor said that he knew of no regulations regarding the construction of chimneys. Finally the Town Hall janitor was interviewed and he stated that when the Town Hall chimneys were cleaned they were always swept by climbing boys! The scandal in the Black Country was not only that domestic chimneys were swept by climbing boys, but also enormous factory chimneys.<sup>12</sup>

Antecedent to the stage of manipulating the law was the process of opposing all legislation favourable to working people. Among the numerous campaigns of the nineteenth century organised and financed by the vast resources of the employers can be mentioned opposition to the reduction of hours of work of children, resistance to the ending of night work for children, and successful resistance to the granting of Good Friday as a holiday which explains why, to this day, Good Friday is a working day over much of the Black Country.<sup>13</sup> The most determined, protracted and highly organised campaign of the masters was that against the Employers' Liability Act of 1880. This was led by Fisher-Smith, the Earl of Dudley's agent, and the South Staffs and East Worcestershire Institute of Mining Engineers. Even after this Act was passed employers flouted it by giving all men 14 days notice and them making them sign a form agreeing to pay 3d. a week to which the employer would add 25% and stating that the employer would not then be liable under the Employers' Liability Act. This procedure was successfully defended in 1882 by a judgment in the case of Griffiths v the Earl of Dudley.<sup>14</sup>

Until 1867 there was no legislation regulating conditions in factories and Workshops. Even the Acts of that year concerned only the employment of children and were a dead letter due to the inadequate number of Factory Inspectors. The first job of the Inspectors was to find the factories that they had to inspect and for this purpose they were recommended to use local directories. In 1876 (11 years after the passing of the Factory Acts and 6 years after the passing of the Education Act which was intended to implement compulsory education) the local Factory Inspector gave a vivid account of his difficulties. In the brickmaking centre of Oldbury, he found it necessary to leave the train at a previous station and approach the town in a closed carriage. Even by this strategem he caught only one employer, the word being quickly sent to other employers who hid the children employed in canal barges, hay lofts, chimney flues etc. After 5 pm when managers and clerks left, any illegal practices could take place. If he caught a boy it would be said that he only brought the meals in. Several visits to a factory might be necessary to get sufficient evidence to convict. If a prosecution were made, it would as likely as not be dismissed by the magistrate and in the case of convictions the fines were derisory.<sup>15</sup>

This brings us to the direct control exercised by employers over the legal apparatus. In Black Country towns the magistrates were invariably employers or clergy, usually of the Church of England. The police, Chelsea pensioners and Yeomanry were under the control of the local authorities. The troops were nominally under the control of a military commander and the Home Secretary, although the calls on their services usually came from the local authorities. As is still the case, troops were usually the cause and not the result of riots, although in certain cases the influence of the military commander was a restraining influence on bellicose local authorities. Troops were permanently stationed in the Black Country from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until the 1850s.<sup>16</sup>

If political activity were considered "sedition", it could be forbidden. One of the most blatant cases was that of John Mason in Sedgley in 1842. The constable had openly stated that the first Chartist to set foot in Sedgley would be arrested. Mason held a peaceful meeting in the town. He was dragged from the platform, arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment. This outrage was discussed in the House of Commons in a debate in which both Peel and Palmerston spoke, but it was ruled that the House could not interfere with the local judiciary and Mason had to serve his sentence.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The ruling class sought to control all aspects of working class life. Few working men had the vote until 1867. Perhaps even more important, the working class had no representation on local governing organs until the removal of the property qualification in the 1890s. Trade Unions were illegal from 1799 to 1824 and thereafter controlled through the Master and Servants Acts, legal restrictions on the right to strike, and the refusal of employers to deal with trade unions. National political parties were forbidden by the Corresponding Societies Acts and the Conspiracy laws. Chartism existed in the shadow of these laws and maintained itself only by the elaborate fiction that it was controlled by locally elected members. Political leaders were invariably victimised, so that many - Joseph Linney and Samuel Cook among Black Country Chartist leaders - became or were shopkeepers.

Control of the press was a constant local concern. In 1816 Thomas Worth was arrested in Wolverhampton market place for selling newspapers, detained overnight and fined £10.<sup>18</sup> He was lucky. In nearby Broseley, the Rector "caught two men selling Cobbett's Political Register and had them well flogged at the whipping post." The working class newspapers which were widely circulated in the mines, factories and public houses were constantly being sent to the Home Secretary for his advice regarding the prosecuting of publishers and sellers. In 1819 the Constable of Dudley sent the following letter to the Home Secretary regarding a local paper:

"I think it my duty to lose no time in transmitting an Infamous paper to your Lordship which has this day been published in Dudley. It is the opinion of many persons that it is a Libel on our Laws and the Author of it has long been known to the Police as a very active Agent in the promotion of Union Societies in this Town.

"I have the satisfaction to inform your Lordship that the loyal Inhabitants of Dudley have had the 'Patriot' suspended upon a Gibbett at the Market Cross all this afternoon and it has this evening been publicly burnt."<sup>19</sup>

Incidentally, a more innocuous publication than the 'Patriot' would be difficult to imagine.

The authorities also tried to destroy the working class press by stamp duties. The prices of typical papers circulating in the Black Country were Thelwell's Champion in 1816 - 10d; the Reformer (Birmingham) 1835 - 7d; Northern Star 1839 - 4½d; Beehive 1860s - 2d. Penny papers were only available in the 1890s. Despite this, working class newspapers had large circulations. In 1850 Tremenheere, a famous mines inspector, stated that of eight newspapers circulating among the working classes in Wednesbury, five were "seditious".<sup>20</sup>

The control of working class education was also a matter of deep concern to the local ruling class. The working class movement promoted progressive policies in both teaching method and content, but funds were never sufficient to support working class schools for very long. Nevertheless there were both Owenite Socialist and Chartist schools in the Black Country for short periods during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Control of education was in the hands of the religious bodies, and particularly the Church of England. Theirs was the main responsibility for the backwardness of education in the Black Country. They had not a jot of moral right to control the development of education. In 1847 in Black Country schools, expenditure per child per week ranged from 4d. in Wolverhampton to 1½d. in Gornal. These costs were met approximately as follows:

Government Grants	41%
Fees of children attending	35%
Voluntary Contributions (and much of this would come from the children and their parents)	24%

Greater success was achieved by the working class in adult education. The lavish Mechanics Institutes of the area were usually set up as a direct result of the growth of anti-capitalist ideas or the establishment of Working Men's Institutes.<sup>22</sup> The Social Institute in Stourbridge, originally set up by the Owenite Socialists in 1840 exists to this day.

#### 4. MONOPOLY CONTROL OF BLACK COUNTRY CAPITALISTS

An important aspect of capitalist control was the monopoly they exercised in the two decisive industries of iron and coal.

The iron trade had been controlled from its inception. Prices were determined at the quarterly meetings of ironmasters. Just as important was the fact that these meetings discussed also wages to be paid, conditions of work, contracts to be tendered for, decisions as to which firms should tender and the prices they should quote, contacts with ironmasters in different parts of the country etc. Whatever effect the Combination Acts were intended to have on lesser mortals, they made no difference to the ironmasters who continued to meet regularly during the period 1799 to 1824 and the iron prices decided upon were openly published in the local press. The price of coal was controlled. It is true that pits were small and masters many in the Black Country, but the most important coalmasters were also ironmasters and the uniform wage throughout mining in the area and the single price of coal is testimony enough to the general effectiveness of this control.

This monopoly system of control of prices and wages was underpinned by a price leader in the Earls of Dudley. In the middle of the century the Dudleys enjoyed the sixth largest income in Britain from a relatively small, but enormously productive estate. Much of Black Country coal-bearing land was owned and leased by the Earls. They mined one seventh of the coal of the area.<sup>23</sup> They controlled the politics of the town of Dudley. Theirs was the greatest influence at the quarterly meetings of ironmasters. They never took the lead in improving social conditions, their mines were no less death traps than those of other owners, they did not set up schools, although they contributed to local charities. Theirs was the greatest influence in determining labour conditions. The decision to embark on the great strikes and lock-outs of the century which invariably resulted in a state of virtual civil war with the calling in of troops could not have been taken without the support of the Dudleys. They were also responsible for the perpetuation of the twin evils of Black Country mining namely the butty system and the pillar and stall method of working the coal.<sup>24</sup> With regard to the former the Earls of Dudley used butties in their pits into the twentieth century. Pillar and stall was the method whereby the whole 30 feet seam of coal was removed at one operation. This made it impossible to timber the roof and vastly increased the danger of working. From the inception of mining the alternative method of removing the coal in two operations was canvassed and received increasing support, but the Earl of Dudley's mines were invariably worked pillar and stall.

## 5. THE RESULTS OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The effectiveness of the local measures of control were considerable. Despite a militancy of the working class movement in the Black Country which at periods, particularly in the first half of the century, was equal to any in Britain the gains of the working class were limited. Neither social conditions nor the standard of living improved substantially before the 1890s.<sup>25</sup> Education improved in the 1890s, there was some improvement in the treatment of children, particularly Workhouse children during the century, hours in some industries, notably mining, ironmaking and building decreased. But on the whole substantial improvement came only in the 1890s. Housing conditions failed to improve through the century; sanitation improved little and, considering the needs of a vastly increased population, was probably relatively worse in 1900 than in 1800; factory hours were 12 a day at the beginning of the century and 11 at the end with Saturday afternoon closing rare; death rates fell spectacularly only in the twentieth century and in the 1890s infant mortality was rising; starvation diets in Workhouses, provision of out-relief and conditions of labour in Workhouses improved only with the election of working class representatives to the Boards of Guardians in the 1890s.<sup>26</sup>

Real wages also rose substantially only in the 1890s. The 1850s and 1860s were decades of high prices and also considerable unemployment. From 1874 the Great Depression lasted until 1890 with real wages often as low as in the Hungry Forties. The only real periods of prosperity in the Black Country after 1815 were 1824-25, 1834-37, 1845-52 and 1870-74.

The corollary of the depression of working class living standards was an extremely high rate of capital accumulation. In the coal and iron industry, it was expected that capital invested should be recovered in three years at the most and often it was recovered in a shorter period. It remains to be investigated whether the ironworks of the Black Country closed because of bankruptcy or because the traditional rate of profit was no longer obtainable and firms preferred to move elsewhere.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

With the flooding of the coalfield and working out of the iron ore which occurred at much the same time as the Great Depression from 1874, the basis of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the Black Country changed. The monopoly of the iron-masters eroded and mining ceased to be the most important occupation in the area. Whatever the new methods of control and to what extent power passed to national monopolies and financial interests assisted by a now much more powerful national state, the old method had ensure the survival of capitalism. At times it was touch and go. At times there were serious difference between the bourgeoisie and the local aristocracy and gentry, despite the community of interests engendered by common industrial enterprise. The Reform Act of 1832 brought only a precarious predominance of Liberal over Tory interests in the main Black Country towns. The bourgeoisie breathed more easily after 1857 when it became a convention that one of the two County seats should be reserved for the "manufacturing interest."<sup>27</sup> But apart from 1832, it was clear that in a real crisis such as those of 1817, 1819 and the great Chartist strike of 1842, the aristocracy would stand together with the manufacturers against the working class.

The real challenge, of course, came from the working class. They could not be persuaded to accept the abominable conditions of the time. Despite the apparatus of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the united strength of the working class could have obtained the limited demands which the movement from the Corresponding Societies in the 1790s to the SDF in the 1880s put forward, namely working class control of Parliament. One is deeply impressed by the quality of the local leadership of the working class movement which strove to realise this unity. At times they came within an ace of achieving it. The period from 1815 to 1819 is one where the political movement won the support of a widespread industrial and strike movement and threatened the existence of the bourgeoisie. But the greatest challenge was in August 1842. Here an extremely strong Chartist movement headed by outstanding local leaders such as Joseph Linney, Samuel Cook and John Chance led a general strike of Black Country miners and, with extreme skill avoided provocation and attempted to bring all working class people into action. For almost a month, the working class were the real masters of the Black Country. Had Chartism been as strong in other parts of the country as here, the Charter would have been achieved. But the troops were able to move in, the leaders were arrested and the strikers were beaten. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the Black Country was clumsy but thorough; it needed to be for the working class challenge was both formidable and sustained.

## APPENDIX I

### THE ECONOMIC POWER OF THE EARLS OF DUDLEY

The economic stranglehold of the Earls of Dudley on the coal and iron industries of the Black Country was not openly criticised by the bourgeoisie until the 1870s, although the Tory political influence of 'the Castle' led at least once to a revolt against the Earl of Dudley's nominees when H.B. Sheridan was elected Radical M.P. in 1857.<sup>28</sup>

The development of bourgeois criticism of the economic power of the Earl of Dudley can be followed through the comments of the local correspondent of one of the main trade journals representing the interests of the iron trade, *The Engineer*. The basis of the criticism was that in the great boom of 1870-1874, the high price of coal was restricting the profits to be made on the manufacture of iron. The first muted criticism appeared in the issue of August 8, 1873:

"The key of the position as to the future of the iron trade is held by coal owners. In this district it is held by the leading colliery firm; not so much because of the ability of that firm to bring into the market all that is needful, as from the ease with which that firm could greatly undersell others if it should arrive at the conclusion that it had cause for such a course."

The Earl of Dudley enjoyed the best of both worlds since he was the largest producer of both coal and iron in the Black Country. On January 9, 1874 *The Engineer* was further complaining on behalf of the lesser ironmasters:

"The rise of the price of the Earl of Dudley's large coal has led to a rise in the price of marked bars to £16 per ton."

By 1876 the Great Depression had descended on the Black Country. On January 28 of that year it was noted that the Conciliation Board to regulate wages in the iron industry had ceased to exist and neither the Earl of Dudley nor William Barrows had been members of this Board.

"The withdrawal is of some significance as the price of coal, pig-iron and finished iron in South Staffordshire is mostly regulated by these two firms."

On October 31, 1879 the curtain was raised on the proceedings at a meeting of the Coalmasters' Association, indicating what must have occurred on many occasions during the two hundred year hegemony of the Dudley family:

"The Committee of the Coalmasters' Association met yesterday in Wolverhampton under the chairmanship of E. Fisher-Smith, the agent of the Earl of Dudley. The chairman desired to raise the price of coal by 1s. a ton. This view was not generally concurred in by a majority of the meeting which numbered some 10 or 12 members. They desired to keep prices at the present level until the New Year.... The chairman held the view that an advance in the price of 1s. a ton at this juncture was altogether the wiser course and expressed his intention to issue circulars declaring that rise. Upon that the meeting gave way for, by the terms of the sliding scale wages agreement with the miners, the price of the Earl of Dudley's coal was the basis of all calculation."

The ultimate comment came on November 21, 1879 when the agent of the Earl of Dudley told representative colliers who had asked for higher wages that the price of coal might go up on December 1:

"The trade utterances of the representative of the Earl of Dudley are as significant to the mining and iron industries of this part of the kingdom as are the political utterances of the Earl of Beaconsfield to the courts of Europe."

## APPENDIX II

### WORKING CLASS CONDITIONS IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

#### Employment of Children.

##### EDWARD OAKLEY

"I am now nearly 40; I first went down the pit at 8. I had to carry slack back to the gob and wait on the men. I was an apprentice to a butty collier. I never received any wages till 21. I served 13 years apprenticeship."

##### JOHN GREAVES

"I went down to the pit when I was 7 years of age to open doors. About from 9 to 10 I took to carry dirt back from the men into the gob. Every boy has to clear away for two men, and if they did not do it they strap him. He dare not say much about it for fear of them giving him more, or the master perhaps tuming him off."

THOMAS ROGERS

"I began to work in the iron mines at 9 years of age. I drew with the girdle and chain I suffered great misery. My skin was chafed very much. I wrapped my shirt around the sore place. It was very cruel work."

Evidence given to the Children's Employment Commission 1842.

FORSTER, locksmith, Canal Street, Wolverhampton.

Worst specimen of the lowest class of lock manufacturers. The shops are in the yard of the lowest street in the town. Adjoining are the master's house and pig stys. Forster lived in the house with his wife and six apprentices. They are bound by deed to Forster. They often begin work at 5 am and sometimes at 4 am. They often do work until 10 pm or even 11 pm. There are no regular times for meals. The boys do not get wages. Forster sometimes gives them pocket money 2d. or 6d. or even 1s. a week.

SIDNEY CARTWRIGHT, Wolverhampton town councillor and owner of a toy factory.

"I shall have no difficulty getting children above 10 years of age if the law were to prevent their being employed below that age, but would it be wise or right to prevent parents employing their children?... there is too great a tendency in these days to interfere with the industrial habits of the people. These philanthropical interferences induce a considerable amount of insubordination among the labouring population."

Evidence given to the Children's Employment Commission 1862.

### Conditions in Mines.

"The collieries of S. Staffs are so surrounded by old pits that no one is safe traversing the area at night. In the most public as well as the most secluded places; in fields, in gardens, by the highway and footpath and in the village they yawn to receive the passer-by."

Report of Inspector of Mines 1850.

"There has been a melancholy loss of life from roof falls of coal and I fear they will not decrease until a better system of management is introduced. In no district is the danger from falls so imminent as in S. Staffs and nowhere is mining carried out with so little supervision from the proprietor. The only check on the avarice or caprice of the butty is the weekly visit of perhaps two hours duration from the ground bailiff or his assistant.... If the coal proprietors could be induced to take a deeper interest in their mining pursuits and in the welfare of the men whose lives are dependent upon them a better system would soon be in operation."

Report of Inspector of Mines 1852.

"Deaths from roof falls amount to the fearful number of 73. In the thin coal much timber is used and therefore there are few deaths. When this is brought to the notice of proprietors they say: "The butty must know the best and cheapest way of getting coal and it would not do for us to interfere with him." At a Tipton colliery owned by Bagnall & Sons a man called Lloyd was killed by a fall of coal. No one appeared at the inquest above the grade of working miner, so little is loss of life thought of. The next day I inspected the pit and pointed out that only part of the coal had fallen and the rest remained. The doggy (foreman) said: "I would as soon sleep under that coal as in my own bed." The next day the coal fell and the doggy was killed."

Report of Inspector of Mines 1854.

"A most appalling shaft calamity occurred in one of the Earl of Dudley's collieries from the use of the single link chain. (The single link chain was illegal - G.B.). Eight men fell 40 yards when near the surface. Men, skips, chains and immense masses of cast iron called dollies all fell together, whereby the poor sufferers were crushed and mangled in a manner so frightful as to be too shocking for description.

"One would expect a district which was the cradle of the steam engine to excel all others in machinery. But this is not so. It is most inefficient with inadequate power, open topped cylinders, wooden beams, spherical and waggon shaped boilers.

*"One engine may draw up to five pits. The whimsey is left where it was erected and continues to work pits at 200 to 300 yards distance so that the whole place is a network of heavy chains, some drawing at acute angles. Over the heads of miners swing dollies. These are suspended to counteract the weight between the drum and the pit frame, otherwise the heavy iron chain would swing back over the pulley."*

Report of Inspector of Mines 1856.

Sanitary Conditions.

*"The Hope Tavern. Has a cesspool and pump; the refuse is pumped out once a week; it then runs along the surface into Stafford Street and the corner of High Street; the smell is very offensive.*

*"Mrs Mary Westwood's property. The whole surface saturated with the drainage from a stable; no pavement. All behind the property in Queen's Cross Hill there are the most abominable privies, and refuse passing under the buildings; privies almost invariably against houses and people complain of the stench. The houses on Queen's Cross Hill are all moving and the coal underneath is on fire.*

*"The Mambles, King Street. Fifty to sixty houses, no water. Mr Richardson says that if the company were to lay a pipe for two or three houses, all the others would use it without paying. All dirty, pallid, diseased and some idiots. The people complain even in the midst of their filth, of want of water. All so bad as to be indescribable; a man almost dying; a woman with half a face; children almost devoured with filth; prostitutes and thieves."*

The Sanitary State of Dudley 1852  
Report of Inspector W. Lee, page 75.

<u>Town</u>	<u>Sewerage &amp; Drainage</u>	<u>Excremental Disposal &amp; Removal</u>	<u>Refuse Removal</u>
Willenhall	No systematic drainage.	Cesspit and midden privies of the worst type.	Unsatisfactory
Walsall	Older parts sewered 1876. Pleck and Birchills sewered 1885. Bloxwich etc. unsewered.	Mostly deep vault and midden privies sometimes draining into sewers. Only emptied when full.	Unsatisfactory
Wednesbury	Efficient scheme now being completed.	Vault and ashpit privies often large, deep and foul. Only emptied when full.	Unsatisfactory
Sedgley	Sewage nuisances abound due to lack of sewerage and drains.	Midden privies of bad construction. Insufficient.	Unsatisfactory
Coseley	Absence of.	Cesspits and midden privies of bad construction. Large accumulations.	Unsatisfactory
Tipton	Fragementary	Cisterns or ashpits a grave nuisance.	Unsatisfactory
Rowley Regis	Fragmentary	Midden privies of worst type	Unsatisfactory
Smethwick	Unsewered. Sewage flowing over roadways or soaking into soil which is saturated with liquid filth.	Midden privies of most objectionable type.	Unsatisfactory

Local Govt. Board Report 1887 on  
Sanitary Conditions of S. Staffs.

## REFERENCES

1. B.L.C. Johnson, 'The Stour Valley Iron Industry in the late Seventeenth Century' in *Transactions of the Worcester shire Archæological Society 1950*, p. 35. As early as 1692 a single partnership controlled the greater part of the iron trade of the Stour Valley.
2. For the most comprehensive account of the politics of leading ironmasters and industrialists in the Black Country, the Party affiliations of the aristocracy, the business interests of the aristocracy and the inter-connections between industrialists and aristocrats see V. Tunsuri, 'Party Politics in the Black Country 1832-67' (unpub. M.A. thesis, Birmingham University 1964.)
3. 1841 Census of Population.
4. Midland Mining Commission 1843, Grievances of Miners pp xxxiii to lxii.
5. Children's Employment Commission 1842 vol xiii.
6. Children's Employment Commission 1862, Report of F.D. Longe on the Ironworks and Metal Trades of S. Staffs. 3rd. Report pp1 -40.
7. Proceedings under the Master & Servant Acts were invariably the fourth largest category of prosecutions in Wolverhampton each year ranking after common assaults, offences against local bye-laws and drunkenness. These laws were ineffectively amended in 1867 and replaced in 1875 by the Employers and Workmen's Act. Even after this, prosecutions were widespread there being 94 prosecutions in 1878 and 96 in 1880. For all these figures see Reports of Wolverhampton Watch Committee 1850 to 1888 (at Wolverhampton Town Hall.)
8. Cases reported in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. Similar and even more outrageous cases were reported almost every week in this local paper.
9. Mines Inspectors' Reports 1851 to 1900. Thomas Wynne's Report for 1854 stated that it was common for enginemen to work for two days and a night without intermission and two were then in prison for 'over-winding' i.e. bringing the skip over the pit head gear because the engine house was too far away from the pit for them to see what they were doing. In 1856 the Mines Inspector for S. Staffs reported a 'most appalling shaft calamity' in a pit of the Earl of Dudley due to the snapping of the illegal, single-link chain which was an iron rope of  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch diameter. "Men, skip, chain and immense masses of cast iron called dollies all fell together whereby the poor sufferers were crushed and mangled in a manner as to be too shocking for description." The inspector added that this deplorable event had not led to any perceptible diminution in the use of the illegal, single-link chain.
10. See the Midlands Mining Commission 1843 for an outline of anti-truck legislation and a history of tommy in S. Staffs. Also *Black Diamonds or the Gospel in a Colliery District* by HHB (Nisbet 1861) for an account of the anti-truck campaign of 1844.
11. D. Bailey, *The Truck System, a Book for Masters and Workmen* (London 1859). Bailey was a Bilston schoolmaster.
12. Children's Employment Commission 1862, 1st. Report. Report on the Violation of the Law relative to the Employment of Climbing Boys in Sweeping Chimneys.
13. All these things were demanded by employers in 1876. See Report of the Commissioners enquiring into the working of the Factory Acts. Employers also demanded the extension of night work for children from ironworks to other trades in the district such as hollow-ware and enamelling. Employers also wanted children to begin work at an earlier age e.g. Groucutt (representing 75 employers) stated that the best men in iron and coal began work at the age of 8 or 9. John Sparrow (reputed to be the richest ironmaster in the Black Country) wanted the Factory & Workshops Acts to be repealed entirely.
14. Proceedings of the S. Staffs & E. Worcs. Institute of Mining Engineers. Also G.T. Warwick, *Centenary History of the S. Staffs & E. Worcs Institute of Mining Engineers* (1967).
15. Report of Sub-Inspector of Factories for the Wolverhampton District, Mr Blenkinsopp, December 1875.

16. For a detailed discussion of the army and police in the Black Country based on the Home Office papers see Chap. 11 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1815 to 1867' by G. Barnsby (unpub. M.A. thesis, Birmingham University 1965).
17. Ibid.
18. Home Office papers HO 41/2 p. 320
19. HO 42/198 6 November 1819.
20. H.S. Tremenheere, *The State of Mines in S. Staffs.* quoted by Francis Place in the Place Collection August 1950, British Museum.
21. There was an Owenite Socialist school at Stourbridge in 1840, see the *New Moral World* August 1840. For the Chartist school in Bilston see the Midland Mining Commission 1843. In Wednesbury there was a Chartist school for a short period in the specially built People's Hall in 1843. See the *Northern Star* March 1843.
22. The Chartist controlled Working Men's Institute in Dudley is dealt with in J.R.Deans, 'A History of Libraries in Dudley,' typescript in Dudley Reference Library.
23. For the Dudley estates see the writings of T.J. Raybould, inter alia, 'The Development and organisation of Lord Dudley's Mineral Estates 1774-1845' in *Economic History Review* 2nd. Series vol 21 1968
24. For a fuller discussion of the political influence of the Earls of Dudley see my 'Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century' pp. 348-350 (unpub. Ph.D. thesis Birmingham University 1969).
25. G.Barnsby 'Standard of Living in the Black Country during the Nineteenth Century' in *Economic History Review* 2nd. Series vol xxiv No. 2, May 1971.
26. G. Barnsby, 'Social Conditions in the Black Country' op. cit.
27. V. Tunsuri op. cit.
28. G.F.C. Clark, *Curiosities of Dudley* (Birmingham 1881) item under the year 1857.

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