

Britain: Former Mirror editor admits slandering miners' leader

Mike Ingram
1 June 2002

The Media section of the May 27 *Guardian* carried a remarkable story by former *Daily Mirror* editor Roy Greenslade.

Under the heading “Sorry, Arthur”, Greenslade apologises for his role in a media witch-hunt conducted against the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the aftermath of the 1984-85 national strike. The articles published in 1990 alleged that NUM president Arthur Scargill had paid off the mortgage on his house with money donated by Libya. The newspaper claimed that at the height of the strike, Scargill had counted out £70,000 from money supposed to go to strikers and their families, to clear his £25,000 home loan from the NUM, along with those of two other officials, the then general secretary Peter Heathfield, and then chief executive Roger Windsor.

Windsor, along with Scargill’s former driver/minder, Jim Parker, subsequently approached the *Daily Mirror*, securing cash deals of £50,000 for their stories. Greenslade reveals that when he took over as editor from Richard Stott in February 1990, an investigation that had been underway for some months, code-named Operation Cyclops, was nearing completion. At the same time, Central Television’s *The Cook Report* was conducting a similar inquiry.

With NUM assets still under court sequestration and the closure of most of Britain’s remaining coalmines in the pipeline, the allegations contained in the reports were a transparent attempt to discredit the NUM and justify the attacks on the miners. Firstly, the central leaders of the NUM were accused of corruption and a disregard for the suffering of their members. Secondly, the NUM was linked with Libya at a time when it was being denounced as terrorist state, thus justifying Thatcher’s categorisation of the miners as the “enemy within” and the refusal of either the Labour Party or the

Trades Union Congress to mobilise industrial and political support behind the miners.

Greenslade now claims to have, “thought it inappropriate for the left-of-centre *Mirror* to target a trade union leader” and that “the copy presented to me was both impenetrable and lacking in substance.” “With the NUM’s assets under sequestration during the strike, it had been entirely understandable for Scargill and his executive to use subterfuge to protect their funds,” Greenslade says in the *Guardian* article. His concerns notwithstanding, however, Greenslade went ahead and published the story to coincide with the broadcasting of *The Cook Report*.

Even after Gavin Lightman QC ruled that the mortgage story was “entirely untrue”, in an inquiry held at the NUM’s prompting, Greenslade chose to remain silent on how the story came to be run and on its dubious veracity. His article in the *Guardian* comes only after the highest court in France, the Cour de Cassation, ordered Windsor to repay a debt of £29,500 to the NUM. The ruling was the result of a long running case brought by the International Energy and Miner’s Organisation (IEMO), headed by Scargill, seeking to recover the £29,500 Windsor had admitted to having received from union funds. The IEMO had won its case in 1994, when a French court decided that Windsor had signed a mortgage deed. Four years later, two courts of appeal in Bordeaux upheld that judgment. On March 19 this year the Cour de Cassation also ruled against Windsor and he faces a bill for the loan, plus interest, costs and damages, estimated at £250,000.

Stating that the judgment of March 19 went unreported in Britain, “as did an NUM press release more than a month later that celebrated the court’s ruling,” Greenslade says:

“Yet this case—and Windsor’s humiliation—deserve

the widest possible audience because they are the culmination of a deplorable saga which goes some way to vindicating a wronged man: NUM president Arthur Scargill. Wronged by the press in general, by the *Daily Mirror* specifically and, since I was the editor, by me.”

After going through numerous twists and turns to explain his decision to publish, Greenslade then turns to the obvious question: “Had the *Daily Mirror* been duped as part of a secret service plot to discredit Scargill? Was Windsor, if not an agent of MI5, being manipulated by one of its officers?” Saying that the three reporters working on Operation Cyclops “dismissed any such notion,” Greenslade goes on to cite the fact that when the *Guardian* asked former MI5 head Stella Rimmington if Windsor was working for MI5, she replied, “choosing her words carefully,” “It would be correct to say that he, Roger Windsor, was never an agent in any sense of the word that you can possibly imagine.”

Concluding, “the mystery behind Windsor’s decision to make such sweeping allegations against his former union colleagues may never be solved,” Greenslade says:

“I am now convinced that Scargill didn’t misuse strike funds and that the union didn’t get money from Libya. I also concede that, given the supposed wealth of Maxwell’s *Mirror* and the state of the NUM finances, it was understandable that Scargill didn’t sue.” (In the years after publishing the story, Greenslade had maintained that if the allegations were false, Scargill would have sued the *Mirror* for libel.)

Greenslade then offers, “the sincerest of apologies to Heathfield and Scargill,” saying, “I regret ever publishing that story. And that is the honest truth.”

Whatever the declarations of innocence on the part of the individuals involved, the only sensible conclusion that can be drawn is that Operation Cyclops was the result of a high-level operation carried out by Britain’s secret services. Why then did mass circulation newspapers, TV current affairs programmes and experienced journalists such as Greenslade fall over themselves to run a story he now admits was obviously “lacking in substance”? And why did everyone concerned remain silent for 12 years, despite numerous exposés of the fraudulent character of the allegations? (Greenslade admits, “I know, sadly, that some old friends and colleagues won’t appreciate this mea

culpa.”)

The *World Socialist Web Site* holds no brief for Scargill. Our political differences with him are well known, not the least of which is over his refusal to challenge the betrayal of the miners by the Labour Party and the TUC. But in the eyes of the Labour leaders and trade union bureaucrats, just as he was for the Tory party and the employers, Scargill had come to symbolise an association with industrial unrest, reformist policies and the nationalising of basic industries which the Labour Party and the trade unions were desperate to break free of.

The miners’ strike was a watershed in the political degeneration of the official labour movement—not a rebirth of trade union militancy but rather its swansong. After first isolating the miners and ensuring their defeat, the trade union and Labour Party leaders then proclaimed the strike as proof of the failure of class-based politics and the need to move towards the “political centre-ground” based on an assertion of the primacy of the national interest.

Scargill, with his continued advocacy of traditional Labour policies and socialist rhetoric, became a pariah for the “modernisers” within the labour bureaucracy and its periphery that were later to coalesce around Tony Blair’s “New Labour” project. Hence the willingness of pro-Labour papers such as the *Mirror* to join with their pro-Conservative rivals in berating the NUM president, in order to rubbish everything “Old Labour” and so reassure big business and the upper middle class that they had broken from the outdated dogma of the class struggle. In this ignoble cause, it was truly a case of “Anything goes!” No blow was considered too low to deliver. Provocateurs, scabs and spies were hailed as heroes and a commitment to journalistic integrity was largely confined to the dustbin.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact