



**Diarmaid Kelliher**, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners’ Strike*, London: Routledge, 2021. ISBN: 9780367672423 (paper); ISBN: 9780367355203 (cloth); ISBN: 9780429340758 (ebook)

There are strikes that define the Atlantic neoliberal assault on trade unions in the 1980s. As President, Ronald Reagan fired over 11,000 US air traffic controllers in 1981 when the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) refused to return to work. The union was decertified later that year and the striking workers were banned from being rehired. In the UK, the National Union of Mineworkers’ (NUM) strike in 1984–5 redefined industrial relations in Britain and was a foundation of Margaret Thatcher’s legacy. Despite the harsh reality of the NUM strike there are other stories to tell, voices to hear, and broader labour histories and geographies to uncover. Was everything lost in these struggles or were lessons learnt and new capacities for resistance born?

Diarmaid Kelliher’s *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners’ Strike* is a very welcome contribution to the labour history and geography of the 12-month battle. The book has a clear narrative with the argument that despite the outcome of colliery closures in Britain, class-based “translocal solidarities” were made between mining communities and London that can be traced to earlier struggles and that shaped future actions well into the 1990s. The argument confronts interpretations such as those by Raphael Samuel that support movements for miners based in London were less class solidarity and more charity focused projects.

Overall, the book is a rare example of concise writing and meticulous research. At approximately 240 pages, there are over 1,200 endnotes citing literature, newspaper coverage, union documents, film, and witness interviews. In some cases, the writing is too concise. The conceptual chapter, in a brief seven pages, covers Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright’s as well as Raymond William’s writings on solidarity from the 1980s, David Harvey’s “militant

particularism”, decolonization, parochialism, intersectionality, as well as the author’s use of the concept of translocal solidarities, influenced by the work of David Featherstone and others. I do not blame Kelliher for brevity as I imagine the publisher’s strong cost containment editorial hand is at play here. Nevertheless, the book’s theoretical contribution would have been enhanced with a few more pages in the first chapter.

From here, the author takes the reader through the “long 1970s” of labour conflict that set the stage for solidarities in 1984–5. For example, NUM support for suburban London workers in a long dispute with Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories between 1976 and 1978 built relationships of mutual aid among labour and community groups. At this time, the continued migration of workers into metropolitan London also established familial links between the city and mining communities. Kelliher also makes strong links between the deindustrialization experienced by unemployed factory workers in London to the experience of mine workers facing unemployment as coal production declined.

These allegiances were vital to the “infrastructure of solidarities” that went “beyond the union hall” during the strike as support movements in London were twinned with mining communities. “Twinning” was the geographical strategy of assigning specific support groups in London with specific communities. Fundraising was the primary activity, but bringing miners and their families to London and supporters to communities was pivotal and created spaces for various “encounters” among different groups. It is here where the book is at its most powerful. In Chapter 5, the various interactions between women from London and women in mining communities are documented. The author also traces the encounters between racialized supporters from the city and miners. Here, the author is careful to avoid essentialist readings of mining communities and the cosmopolitan “other”. Kelliher also does not romanticize the encounters as idealized class awakening or feminist self-awareness. The contradictions of racism among miners and conflicts between women over what it meant to be feminist at the time are documented.

Similarly, the account of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' (LGSM) efforts during the period is both crucial and revealing. LGSM was popularized in the 2014 film *Pride* directed by Matthew Warchus. The author argues that “defence of community” served as the common bond, whether it be against mine closures or HIV/AIDS or violence from police assaults on both queer communities and miners. Interestingly, some of the original interview data was drawn from activist screenings of the film organized by the author and colleagues.

Again, Kelliher does not over-exaggerate the new solidarities among miners and LGSM in the way the film does. The analysis of “mutual change” is qualified with contradictions of movements that address issues of “sexuality and solidarity”. In the final chapters of the book, the analysis shifts to a somewhat more sober tone. After all, the miners’ strike did not prevent closures and the “limitations of solidarity” become more apparent. Indeed, workers and their unions in the UK, and elsewhere, were challenged by the contradictions of violence on picket lines, the last purge of “communist” influence in unions as the cold war ended, and lack of internal union democracy. The alliances between mining communities and London were not enough to thwart the power of a neoliberal state fuelled by authoritarian populism. Yet, *Making Cultures of Solidarity* does not lose its optimism and demonstrates that the relationships built in 1984–5 and organizing lessons learnt did make a difference in future campaigns as Thatcherism ran its course.

This is an important book that can be read by both seasoned labour scholars and undergraduate students. There will be readings from an “old left” that will question Kelliher’s optimism and engagement with processes that challenge a class first and class only analysis. My reading of the book left me with two questions, or perhaps areas for future research. First is the role of metropolitan based environmental groups in the 1984–5 strike. The author does address the tensions between the NUM and unions representing workers in oil and gas extraction and nuclear power, but what were the union-environmentalist relations at the time? The NUM was clearly not engaged in any discourse of just transition for miners in the 1980s as coal was already

being phased out. In the decades following the strike, some environmentalists have credited Margaret Thatcher with reducing emissions as the last deep-pit mines closed and cheaper opencast mines were disappearing. What opposition or solidarity did London's environmentalists provide miners in 1984–5 and what impact, if any, was there on future blue-green solidarities?

Second, as noted above, I think the book requires a deeper theoretical elaboration of its key concepts. For example, how does the concept of “translocal solidarities” inform debates on the metropolitan dominance of extraction zones or planetary urbanism? Here, I think the concept can make important contributions well beyond literatures on social movements, labour history, and labour geography.

Again, this is not a criticism of this excellent book, but rather an indication that there is something very interesting happening in Glasgow. Kelliher, Featherstone, and others with an intellectual debt to Massey are tracing transnational and translocal solidarities through time and space in ways that redefine labour geography. The rigorous archival methods, nuanced understandings of class, and measured optimism for resistance combined with analytical maturity are truly “generative” of new ways of seeing struggle. The approach is different from those that are more cynical about the possibilities for change. Perhaps it is premature, but maybe someday we will speak of a “Glasgow School” of labour geography.

*Steven Tufts*  
*Department of Geography*  
*York University*  
*tufts@yorku.ca*

*July 2021*