AT YESTERDAY'S DAWN AT ROTHBURY an army of miners advancing upon the colliery was met by a strong force of police.

At 9.45 a section of the miners, behind a barrage of stones and bricks, charged towards a fence near the colliery gates. Police drew their revolvers and fired over the heads of the crowd. A district photographer was in the midst of the riot with his camera, and pluckily snapped the unique pictures on this and the inside pages, at great risk of injury.
BLOODSHED—FIERCE RIOTS AT ROTHBURY

POLICE FIRE ON MOB

Loss of Life and Many Wounded Reported

BULLETS AND STONES

Fierce Fights at Rothbury Colliery Gates

ONE MAN KILLED: 45 WOUNDED

FOUR THOUSAND MINERS IN BUSH

ROTHBURY: THE DAY THAT SHOCKED THE NATION

"The events of the early morning of December 16, 1929, have now become legendary in mining communities and indeed throughout the labor movement in Australia . . ."

That is how Dr. Robin Gollan, in his history *The Coal-miners of New South Wales*, refers to the Rothbury affair, in which a miner was killed and others were wounded by police gunfire. It was a grim happening, which the *Sydney Daily Telegraph Pictorial* the next day described as "the most dramatic industrial clash that has ever shocked Australia." From it, Rothbury — like Eureka of 1854 — became an indelible name in the history of the Australian working people.

Now, after half a century, the 50th anniversary of Rothbury is being commemorated in northern NSW coalfields areas on the weekend of December 15-16, 1979.

At Rothbury on that December morning in 1929, when northern NSW mineworkers had already been locked out for over nine months by wage-cutting mineowners, police drew their pistols and fired on the workers who were demonstrating against the introduction of scabs for Rothbury mine by the anti-Labor Bavin State Government. Edgar Ross writes in his *History of the Miners Federation*: "Whether the police fired into the crowd, at the feet of the men or over their heads, as various accounts of the happening claimed, or all three, there is little doubt that they ran amok . . ." Some who were there have spoken of having seen deliberate aim taken, and shots fired at close range. Harry Cockerill (who later was the Miners Federation's Northern District vice-president and then a member of the NSW Legislative Council) said in a 1978 interview with the Miners Federation's journal *Common Cause* that, while there were indications that at least some of the police fired low, he believed that some of the shooting was directly into the crowd. (The point has been made that most of the police had been brought in from other areas and that their actions on that day and subsequently upset local police.)

The police bullets at Rothbury killed 29-year-old miner Norman Brown and wounded many others ("how many it is impossible to tell, as the wounded were hurriedly got away in case their wounds were used in evidence against them," Dr. Gollan's book says.).

Press reports the next day gave an incomplete casualty list of wounded miners which named David (Jackson) Brown, Walter Wood (who in August 1979 was one of the veterans who figured in an ABC *Broadband* radio session on "The Battle of Rothbury"), Robert Hunter, William Harrison, George Lindsay, Keith Elliott, David Walton, Robert Cameron and William Gorton.
The reports spoke also of numbers of “minor casualties,” and Edgar Ross writes (in History of the Miners Federation) of “upwards of 40 men” having been injured that day.

Some police, too, were hurt but, — unlike the bullet wounds suffered by miners — the injuries among police were confined to cuts (very likely from stones), abrasions and the like.

As well as the shooting, police — including mounted men — used their batons ferociously. The late William Mahon, who was there that day (he later became general secretary of the Miners Federation; he died in 1967 while holding that office) said afterwards: “I will never forget the viciousness displayed; in fact, I was a victim of it.” One of those who was batoned was Jack Baddeley, who had been the Miners Federation’s first general president and who was a Labor member of Parliament at the time of Rothbury (he later became a Minister for Mines). In the fury of one of the clashes, Tom Flannery, a Rothbury miners lodge member, collapsed and died.

Meanwhile, as a sideshow to the main demonstration, a group of miners embarked on the task of pulling up the railway line near the colliery. Police turned up, and 11 of the men were arrested.

* * *

Against the guns and batons used by police that morning, miners had no weapons, other than any sticks or stones which they might gather. One who was there, Wal Dawson, said in a 1976 Common Cause interview recalling the Rothbury events: “We swung our fists as best we could and some maybe had waddies — but no guns.” Alf Purcell (who later became Rothbury miners lodge president) told Common Cause in 1979: “There were no guns on our side — no one expected shooting to happen.” Alex Watters (who had been locked out from Aberuare Extended), in recalling Rothbury, said: “I was standing just behind one chap who had a shanghai: that was the only weapon that I saw on the miners’ side.”

In the fiery debate in Parliament which followed the Rothbury affair, George Booth (who had been a miner before his election to Parliament as MLA for Kurri Kurri) declared: “Let me tell the House and the country — and I would say this if I knew I were about to be called before my Maker — that the miners never fired a shot at all. I was there from the start to the finish.”

The funeral of Norman Brown in Greta cemetery was attended by what the Cessnock Eagle described as “the largest crowd that has ever been in Greta.” Business houses in Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and some other centres were closed in the afternoon, and the Cessnock Eagle said that the occasion was “a remarkable tribute to the memory of a comrade, cut off in the flower of his life.”

* * *

In defiance of the facts of what had happened at Rothbury, the Bavin Government set out to blame the miners for it all, even to the extent of falsely claiming that there had been shooting from the miners’ side. Newspapers dutifully peddled the Government and the police versions, distorting the facts by using such headlines as “Rioters fired first shots” and “Miners attack police” and quoting claims of “common-sense restraint and discretion” by the police. One newspaper, in an editorial, took it on itself to accuse “extremists and revolutionaries who seek to white-ant unionism itself” of having caused the trouble!

Contrary to the lurid Government propaganda against the miners over the Rothbury events, one of the things which Rothbury veterans have recalled in Common Cause interviews and elsewhere in the past couple of years is that the miners had had no presentiments or forebodings about what was to happen at Rothbury that day. The miners had, in fact, gone there almost light-heartedly, despite the desperate seriousness of the issues which they faced in the lockout and then the introduction of scabs.

For instance, Henry Scanlon (later Northern District vice-president and president of the Federation) recalls that, when the Cessnock contingent set off for Rothbury on the night of Sunday, December 15, “the women saw us off at the School of Arts corner; it was as if we were going off on a picnic.” Mick Frame (who was later Deputy Mayor of Cessnock for seven years and who is still a Greater Cessnock alderman) says that the Sunday night at Rothbury was spent in a festival spirit, with songs and ditties and yarning; another referred it as being “a night of bonfires, fun and singing.” In the morn-
ing, when the demonstrators moved towards the minesite, they were headed by the Kurri Kurri pipe band, which the previous night had piped the Rothbury-bound marchers. Frank Mattocks, coalfields correspondent for the Newcastle Morning Herald, described the 5 a.m. assembly of some thousands of mineworkers as being like nothing so much as a picnic crowd.

Then the police guns and batons came out . . .

Government use of police against the miners continued after Rothbury. For example, when the Rothbury affair was debated in the State Parliament in Sydney and a huge assembly of miners and others gathered outside Parliament House, police were there in force and they made a baton charge to disperse the crowd.

Big numbers of police, brought from Sydney and elsewhere, were retained on the northern coalfields in the period after Rothbury. Miners saw them as a virtual army of occupation, implementing a reign of wanton and unprovoked violence, under cover of Government legislation against “unlawful assemblies.” As Dr. Gollan records (in The Coalminers of New South Wales), police “seem to have conducted themselves with an arrogance and brutality that went far beyond the requirements of maintaining order. Demonstrations and even meetings were broken up by baton charges, in which many miners were severely injured.” Groups of miners standing or sitting talking would find themselves suddenly set upon by predatory bands of police. Mick Frame (later Deputy Mayor of Cessnock) recalls an occasion when he and others were sitting beside the railway line at Neath; a band of police came up, and Mackay (later Police Commissioner) told his men: “Into the bastards!”; Mick Frame himself was one of those who were hit and kicked.

In the aftermath of Rothbury, miners moved to form a Labor Defence Corps. One writer on Rothbury (Miriam Dixson) has said: “Indeed, for a few weeks after Rothbury, some of the northern coalfields communities were caught up in something like guerrilla war. At any rate, a Labor member in the Senate described the situation as one of impending civil war.” Neither the Government of the day, nor other instigators of police violence, can claim any credit for the fact that that ultimate stage of conflict did not eventuate.

The northern lockout itself, which had begun on March 1, 1929, lasted into its sixteenth month before the alliance of Government and mineowners, together with the growth of real poverty among the locked-out miners and their families, forced the workers back on reduced contract and other pay rates. But the design of John “Baron” Brown and others, through the lockout, to smash the Miners Federation as a fighting union was defeated: the Federation remained intact, and with its great traditions reinvigorated and embellished.

So now, 50 years on, in 1979, we extend our respect and gratitude to all those whose efforts and sacrifices in the past went into making our Miners Federation what it is, and helped to defend and to better the conditions of mineworkers.

A commemorative plaque in the Miners Federation’s Northern District office is dedicated to the memory of Norman Brown, to the many miners who were wounded at Rothbury and to the rank and file “who endured 16 months lockout in defence of their conditions.” Similarly, a tablet being unveiled by the Minister for Mineral Resources & Development (Mr. Ron Mulock) at Freeman’s Waterhole miners memorial in the commemorative ceremony there on December 16, 1979, is dedicated to the memory of Norman Brown “and in tribute to all mineworkers and families whose sacrifices and courage laid the basis for all our gains.”

On this Rothbury anniversary, we recall with gratitude and pride the stirring deeds and struggles by mineworkers of past years.

—For the NSW Northern District Board of Management of the Miners Federation: Bill Chapman (president), Jim Hayes (vice-president), Ken Fogg (secretary).
Eyewitnesses' Stories of 'Tragic Mine Riots'

CASUALTY LIST

Police and Miners Riot Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>Maitland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Clark</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Maitland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jones</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INJURED

ROBERT BROWN (42) of Newcastle, burnt in head, left hand, and stomach.
GEORGE WHITE (30) of Maitland, burnt in both hands.

PLAYED ON BY PIPERS, MINERS ATTACK POLICE

One Killed and Many Wounded in Desperate Riot at Dawn

(By Special "Picture" Reporter, who was on the scene of the riot)

The tragedy, when one miner was killed and many on both sides injured in a sensational fight between police and pickets, stands out as the most dramatic industrial clash that has ever shocked Australia.

Nineteen thousand mourned the gallery, which the Government is determined to open and work, and were driven back by batons and automatics.

"We want Weaver!" "That — Weaver, where is he?" roared the shout. The roar roared and swelled like a great windstorm.

In the fear they matched the cries, over a thousand, led by the shriek of the factory's pipe. Hand to hand, in a full tear. In a tremendous rage, in the tone of "The Rambler's Coming," they surged over the hill in a flood of flame and fight.

The miner for Mr. Weaver was thundered at the camera, his money dropping from his fingers, the mark of the superintendents have been erased.

The Zero Hour

At last came the shot that had been gathering in the gallery. Above the hundreds of reports for an instant the silence returned.

We can do nothing but wait, the men were told. By a side door, the miner was then taken, the door closed behind him.

Policemen entered for the gallery were quickly handled.

Savage Attack

One hundred between Beresford and Beattie's Hill were bashed today. One man was killed. By the same token, two miners were arrested.

Shots in the Air

Mr. Weaver was shot, but the police turned the town to the windmill.

The Line Breaks

Money was taken, but the police were not to be deterred by the line.

(Continued on Page 31)

POLICE CHIEF REPORTS

"Commandable Restraint"

He says a few and solid cartridge was handed down by the police to the miners and charged the crowd.

A few shots were fired by the miners.

Mr. Webs, who was on the scene, described the situation as follows:

"There were no more than 300 men in the gallery, but they had four times that number above.

"The miners were armed with rifles, and the police replied with bullets."

The miners were driven back, and the police fired several shots.

PRODUCTION TO-DAY

The miners for Mr. Weaver's reward, after the battle, were heard to say:

"The police fired on us, and we returned fire."

(Continued on Page 31)

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West Wales
Sensational Happenings at Rothbury Colliery

FIVE THOUSAND MINERS ASSEMBLE AT COLLiERY GATES

RIOTING; SHOOTING, AND LOSS OF LIFE

DEMONSTRATION AGAINST INTRODUCTION OF FREE LABOUR.

Ugly scenes were witnessed at Rothbury Colliery yesterday morning.

Following the decision at Sunday's aggregate meetings, some five thousand miners from Cessnock, Kurri, and other parts of the field, assembled at Rothbury yesterday morning. They went to the gates.

ELEVEN ARRESTS

Alleged Interference With Railway Line.

During the upheaval at Rothbury yesterday the police made eleven arrests.

The men arrested were, it is alleged, engaged in the removal of rails from the colliery railway siding when the arrests were made.

They were charged under a section of the Amended Crimes Act, and will appear at Branxton Police Court on January 28.

The men were charged that they did maliciously remove two rails belonging to Rothbury Colliery, with intent to obstruct an engine and carriages on such railway. They were all released at 4.10 p.m. each, paid in £200 each.

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FUNERAL OF NORMAN BROWN.

Thousands From Coalfields Attended.

The largest crowd that has ever been in Greta—not excepting the time of the memorial mining disaster—found their way to the mining village this afternoon. All roads led to Greta, the reason being to attend the funeral of Norman Brown, a victim of the tragic happening at Rothbury yesterday. Brown, only 20 years of age, was shot in the stomach in a clash with the police, and died in the Maitland Hospital.

Every available lorry and car in Cessnock was placed at the disposal of the miners of Cessnock. Thousands from Cessnock were present at the funeral, and from Kurri Kurri and district the attendance was almost as large.

The tragic death of the young man was referred to in the funeral service, and the hearse was followed by the miners' leading men, who took the lead in the procession.

It was a remarkable tribute to the memory of a comrade, cut off in the prime of his life.

The business houses in Cessnock and Kurri were closed during the afternoon as a tribute to the memory of the deceased.
VETERANS OF ROTHBURY

In the Rothbury 50th anniversary commemoration, a special place will be held by men who were themselves in the mineworkers’ demonstration at Rothbury on that grim December day in 1929 and by widows of men who were there.

In organising the commemoration, the Miners Federation’s Northern District Board of Management in September called for Rothbury veterans to get in touch with the Federation so that they could be fittingly involved.

Here, in alphabetical order, is a list of those who (up to the time of printing, in mid-November) had notified the Federation of their having been there, or of their husbands having been there, or who are known to have been there and still to be living in the Northern coalfield areas:

Mrs. BERYL ARMSTRONG, the Boulevarde, Toronto (before her marriage in 1927, she was Beryl Butler); her husband (the late Tom Butler) and brothers took part in the Rothbury demonstration, and she herself watched from the verandah of her home opposite the minesite.

JOSEPH BAILEY, Caldwell Street, Merewether.

EDDIE BUTLER, Millfield Street, Spion Kop, and ROLAND BUTLER, North Rothbury, who are brothers of Mrs. Beryl Armstrong. Another brother, Vic Butler, now of Mudgee, started work at Rothbury in 1915; a bullet went through the roof of his nearby house in the Rothbury shooting.

ABE CAULD, Kurri Kurri.

HARRY COCKERILL, Marianne Street, Cardiff (later Northern District vice-president of the Miners Federation and subsequently a member of the NSW Legislative Council).

JIM COMERFORD, Fifth Street, Weston (who became Northern District president of the Federation and who was Federation general secretary in 1968).

ALBERT CRUIKSHANKS, Sale Street, Greta (at various times he was lodge president at New Greta and Whitburn; he describes Norman Brown as having been “the quietest fellow who ever walked”).

STAN DAWN, Wallsend Street, Stanford Merthyr.

WAL DAWSON, Samford Road, Leichhardt, Ipswich (Queensland).

NORM DUNNICLIFF, Wollombi Road, Bellbird (he was one of the 11 men who were arrested for pulling up the railway).

MRS. EDITH ELLISON, Faucett Street, Blackalls Park (her late husband, James Ellison, cradled Norman Brown after the shooting: “he came home sputtered with blood . . . It was a terrible affair, but a lot of good came out of it and all workers should know that they have to stand together . . .”)

Mrs. MILLIE ETHERINGTON, First Street, Weston (her late husband, Bill, was at Rothbury that day).

A. J. (“MICK”) FRAME, Harle Street, Abermain (he is a Greater Cessnock alderman and was Deputy Mayor for seven years; he is secretary of the Freeman’s Waterhole miners memorial committee).

JIM GILLIARD, Maitland Road, Mayfield West.

WILLIAM J. GOODWIN, Cruickshank Street, Bellbird (he and his father-in-law, the late William Stothard, were both at Rothbury).

LES HARRIS, Northcote Street, Kurri Kurri.

BILL HARRISON, Maitland Street, Kurri Kurri (he was shot in the leg).

BILL JOHNS, Northcote Street, Kurri Kurri.

MRS. MURIEL MALAM, Lavender Street, East Cessnock (her late husband, James Malam, was at Rothbury “and in other protest marches of that ghastly period of the lockout”).

JIM MAYBURY, Harle Street, Weston.

PATRICK O’KEEFE, Anstey Street, Cessnock.

JIM PEARCE, Northcote Street, Kurri Kurri (he was wounded in the back by a bullet at Rothbury).

HENRY PICKERING, Deaken Street, Kurri Kurri.

ALF PURCELL, Cessnock Road, Branxton (after the eventual resumption of work, he became Rothbury lodge president).

PAUL RILEY, Mulbring Street, Kurri Kurri (“I was one of the 11 men who were caught pulling the railway line up at Rothbury — I didn’t run fast enough”).

DICK ROSTRON, Victoria Street, Kurri Kurri.

H. RUSSELL, Challice Street, Beresfield.

HENRY SCANLON, Halcyon Street, Cessnock (later vice-president and president of the Northern District of the Miners Federation).

JAMES SPICER, Tirriki Street, Blacksmiths.

MRS. ADA (MILLIE) STOKES, Price Street, Greta (her husband, Henry Stokes, who died about three years ago, was at Rothbury; their daughter, Mrs. Val Randall, is a member of the Greater Cessnock City Council).

HARLEY TANNER, Turnbull Street, Merewether.

MRS. SARAH TILLEY, First Street, Weston (her late husband, Bill Tilley, was at Rothbury).

ALEX WATTERS, Lewers Street, Belmont (he was later secretary of Belmont miners lodge for 13 or 14 years).

ALEXANDER WHITSON, Fisher Street, Neath.

GWILYN WILLIAMS, Cary Street, Toronto.

WALLY WOOD, Coonanbarra Street, Raymond Terrace (he was shot in the throat, and had to have long hospital treatment; later he was for many years secretary of the Raymond Terrace branch of the Australian Labor Party).

As well as mineworkers, another who was at Rothbury that day was journalist WILF McCLUNG, now of Fellowes Street, Merewether; he was there as Maitland representative of the Newcastle Sun.

Very probably, there are other veterans of Rothbury of whom we do not know; if so, we are sorry that their names do not appear here, and we would be glad to have the chance of including them in later lists.
TRAGEDY AT ROTHBURY

There were sounds of sobs and crying as the daylight floods the sky,
The hour of life has vanished and the long night passes by,
I lift my eyes to heaven and in tears I'll call her son,
Who was taken from his mother by the crack of someone's gun.

Yes, in the hour of sorrow there's one thing I can't conceal,
For my heart is always longing and my thoughts will often steal
Across the bush to Rothbury whose surface leaves a track
To the boys who went on picket and the boy who'll never come back.

There was music at the graveside and in grief the mourners stood,
Still the wind a hymn was humming with the trees upon the hill,
The sun was shining brightly on sad friends from every town,
And the minister started praying for our dead pal Norman Brown.

Yes, in the hour of sorrow there's one thing I can't conceal,
For my heart is always longing and my thoughts will often steal
Across the bush to Rothbury whose surface leaves a track
To the boys who went on picket and the boy who'll never come back.

(From the song "A Sad Day on the Coalfields", by R. Grant, a miner of those years.)