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THE 1984/85 MINERS' STRIKE  
IN EAST DURHAM, A STUDY IN  
CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

BY

MICHAEL ATKIN

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THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY. MAY 2001.



22 MAR 2002

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## DECLARATION

No material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree with this or any other University, and is my sole work.

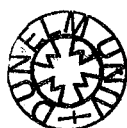
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## PREFACE

In 1984 when the miners strike started I was employed as a Civil Servant in Devon, an area as far removed from Britain's coalfields as it was possible to get. My first experiences of a miners strike came in 1972 and 1974 when, like so many others I had to endure the three day week, power cuts and other problems caused, it was alleged, by sections of the media by the miners strike. During 1984/85 the strike became a series of images that appeared nightly on the television news, images of picket line violence, of police wielding truncheons and of mounted police charging row upon row of pickets. As the dispute went on the images changed to newspaper headlines of how many more miners had returned to work that date. As 1984 finished and 1985 began the images were now of a hard core of miners still defiant, but I, like many more people knew that they were defeated.

In 1987 I moved to Durham where pits still produced coal, where the strike was still talked about, often with great bitterness, and people that I worked with talked of their families and relations being attacked by the police for picketing and that one half of the family would not have anything to do with the other half because a relation had gone back before the strike was over. This came as a shock, for I had imagined that when the strike had finished the area returned to normal. I was even more amazed to find that the actions of families during the 1926 General Strike were discussed and comments made to the effect that as his grandfather was a scab then, what more could you expect from his family. This was my first experience of something that became a very powerful theme which ran all through my research, that of historical memory. It also said a lot for the tenacity of the mining families and the communities to which they belonged in that they were prepared once again to take industrial action in what they considered was a just cause.

By 1993 I had finished my BA Degree with the Open University and was looking to research some topic to gain a post graduate degree. I decided that



there was a subject which was suitable, namely recording the experiences of miners and others during the 1984/85 strike. In 1994 I met, through Common Purpose, Bill Williamson who suggested that my idea was worth pursuing and would make a significant contribution to our understanding of the strike.

There now came the problem of how to begin. Talks with a number of fellow members of Common Purpose resulted in interviews with a couple of police officers who had been at Easington during the violence there, plus an interview with the Rev Tony Hodgeson, vicar of Easington during the strike. People that I worked with who had families involved in the strike also provided a number of people prepared to talk to me, and most of those seemed to have a friend or relation who would also be prepared to be interviewed.

It quickly became clear to me that in order to carry out the research successfully I would have to get inside a culture, elements of which had not changed dramatically since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The main theme of this culture was that of an historical memory which had been handed down from one generation to another, and whose tales, myths and legends were told and retold in Miners ' Welfare Halls of pit villages, several of which had seen their pit close many years ago.

During the four years that I spent researching this study, I found that my attitudes and assumptions had changed. The strike was no longer about a group of workers, but was about whole communities defending their way of life, their jobs, and their future against the government, and all the forces that the government could master against them. It was not just a strike where miner was against employer over wages or conditions, it was far more complex, and historically deeper than that. And it is this complexity and historical depth that this thesis attempts to explain, especially the relationships between historical memory and the police, the media, industrial and community relations, which have the twin threads of legality and betrayal running through them.

I would like to thank all those that agreed to help me with my research,

especially those that gave their time to allow me to interview them about their experiences. For many it brought back powerful memories. Thanks are also due to those people who allowed me access to other material, the staff of Tyne Tees Television archives and the staff of Durham University Library and Sacriston Library. Finally my thanks must go to Bill Williamson for all his help, motivation, guidance, to my wife Sam for her help and encouragement and to Mandy Oram for helping produce this thesis. All the faults are mine.

## INTRODUCTION

The question posed in this thesis is: how far were the prevailing local interpretations of the strike in East Durham – concerning its origins, developments and outcome – consistent with the debate taking place at the time and subsequently in the realm of public discourse. At times prevailing interpretations, attitudes and feelings appeared to be similar to those in other coalfield areas, but on closer examination it was actually different in several important respects.

The Durham coalfield's role in the conflict mirrors the very essence of the whole strike. After some misgivings about the lack of a national ballot in the beginning, the Durham area came out solidly behind the NUM. The area was initially quiet, requiring only minimal pickets at pits, workshops and other institutions. This resulted in miners being available for picketing duties elsewhere such as Ravenscraig Steelworks and Bilston Glen Colliery in Scotland. Durham miners also picketed pits in Staffordshire. However, in August, as nationally the first men returned to work, including one man at Easington, and fourteen at Wearmouth, violence flared.

This violence was not the protracted battles seen over weeks in Nottinghamshire, or the ferocity seen at Orgreave. It was short and sharp, but nevertheless brought scenes of violence of a level not seen in the Durham coalfield since the disputes of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From then on, as with the overall national picture, men started to return to work in ever increasing numbers until finally the strike ended in March 1985.

Durham, too, reflected the deeply emotional themes and allegations of betrayal and legality, two points, which have never been fully explored in literature about the strike. These are the themes which I shall attempt to analyse in the chapters of this thesis. This was a strike in which all the groups involved - miners, unions, police, government and the ordinary men and women who

make up Durham's mining communities, could claim to have been betrayed in some way, and who debated constantly whether the strike was legal, or not.

The miners strike of 1984/85 was an historic turning point. Never again has an industrial dispute reached, or sunk, to such levels of violence and intimidation. Never again have the police been used in such an overtly political role and never again have whole communities risen up in support of its workers and been prepared to take on the full force of government and the agencies at its disposal.

Each coalfield area, however, had its own unique experience of the strike. Differences in political tradition, leadership and in patterns of employment are all detectable in the way the 1984/85 strike unfolded in each coalfield. In this study the unique historical experience of Durham miners is shown to have played a key role in shaping attitudes, interpretation of events and eventually the manner in which the strike collapsed, the return to work and in retrospect the way it is now viewed in history.

## THE TWO THEMES – BETRAYAL AND LEGALITY

These two themes of betrayal and legality were not at the forefront of my research as I had started with a fairly open research agenda. However as I completed further interviews and delved deeper into the literature of the strike these two themes emerged. As I concentrated my research on these two themes I became aware that they had not been prominent threads that ran through the history of the strike. This is a gap that my thesis is going to fill.

In order to understand how these themes related to the strike it is necessary to understand that the framework in which the miners worked had changed. Their old understandings which had helped them make sense of their world were no longer making sense in the new world which the strike had brought about.

Their sense of trust, obligation, loyalty and normality had been destroyed.

Things that once could be explained such as the actions of the police and the process of law became inexplicable. The police were now firmly against them and this gave rise to suspicion and resentment about their, actions. This in turn gave rise to suspicion and resentment about the process of law and the judicial system.

The theme of a fast changing world that runs all through this study illustrates how the themes of legality and betrayal are inter-related and how they helped the miners invent new explanations for the factors that were otherwise inexplicable within the old mental frameworks of their world.

The community of 1984 was not the 'fixed' community of historical memory, rather it had to be re-invented in order to make sense of the NUM slogan 'Save Our Pits – Save Our Communities'. For a miner living in a former pit village in West Durham but travelling to, say, Easington or Murton in the East, which community were the NUM trying to save? Logically it would be that where the pit was but by 1984 many pits had a cosmopolitan work-force, that the 'Save Our Communities' theme could have applied to many former mining communities. The idea of community was used for political ends to try and portray the idea of a community dominated by the pit, but it no longer reflected sociological realities. This explains some of the ambiguities that can be detected in the way miners supported the strike.

In this way the themes of betrayal and legality are tied in to the notion of community. Groups sympathetic to the miners' cause attempted to portray how whole communities were being betrayed by the NCB and the Government through the closure of the colliery.

The question of betrayal is described by Ackerstrom (1991) as follow,

'Betrayal not only consists of treachery towards the country, but experiences of betrayal are often entangled in relations with family and friends.'  
(Ackerstrom 1991 p xii)

He goes on to argue that certain types of betrayers are heroes, and those miners seen by the Thatcher government, the chairman of the National Coal Board (NCB), Ian McGregor, and the NCB as betraying their country, would be seen as heroes by sections of the Labour movement. He goes on to suggest that other groups have little or no chance of being portrayed as heroes.

‘Those not joining a strike, ‘scab’ or police informer are such types of betrayers....

Regarding scabs for example, employers may well protect them, but they do not praise them. Apart from the absence of a glorious cause openly praising them would certainly antagonise strikers and negotiations would be much more difficult. Nor are scabs, police informers, or collaborators ever belong to the other side : the employers, the police or the enemy. The betrayers who do not have opportunities of being given a glorious status are those not given membership of another WE.’  
(Ackerstrom 1991 pp 53 54)

Ackerstrom’s assertions in the above are not however true of the miners’ strike. Here returning miners were seen as heroes, and were openly praised both by government, Coal Board and sections of the media. The question of categorising strikes or creating difficulties in negotiations did not appear to enter into the scheme of things. The returning miners were given a glorious status and official membership of another ‘WE’, namely the National Union of Democratic Miners that had formed in Nottingham in opposition to the NUM.

In truth both miners who returned to work, and those that remained on strike suffered the same emotions. Both groups felt let down, thus there was an end to a sense of trust, a widespread feeling that boundaries had been crossed and that relationships could never be the same again.

Legality is an area of debate which brings in a third party, namely that of the forces of the law. Betrayal is, simply, whether the actions of a group of people are right or wrong and in many cases there is no right or wrong answer. However the question of legality is normally settled by the process of law, whose decision is inevitably the ‘right’ answer.

The question of legality was contested by both sides, disputed and negotiated through a series of courtroom battles, the outcome of which had practical considerations such as, whether, miners picketing was legal or not and whether the strike itself was legal. For both sides the question of legality became entangled with the notions of truth and justice, and what emerged was a series of legal rulings which were ignored if they were not seen to give the 'correct' answer. To the strike as a whole, these issues became specific in Durham through a series of events in Easington that have become iconic in local memories of the strike. The account developed here of the so-called 'Paul Wilkinson Affair' and of picketing and policing in East Durham, highlighted how local events have some general underlying logic to them but, nevertheless, have local roots too. The challenge is to explore the general in the unique in the experiences of miners throughout the different coalfields in Britain.

## THE LITERATURE OF THE STRIKE

The miners' strike of 1984/85 is possibly the most written about industrial dispute in British history, including the General Strike of 1926.

Since the start of the strike in March 1984 there has been a steady flow of literature on the history of the strike and studies on the effects of the strike on local communities. Today the strike continues to be mentioned as the various political 'heavyweights' of the 1980s retire from public office and publish their memoirs.

The literature covers all aspects of the strike and themes running through it from class conflict, Conservative policies and energy policy, social history and community, the actions of the police and the general 'politics' of the strike.

Many books cover several aspects of the strike and its associated themes. For example Paul Routledge's (1993) unauthorised biography of Arthur Scargill

covers all aspects of the strike as well as an in-depth assessment of Arthur Scargill's political views, which helped shape his thinking of the strike itself.

Also into this multi-themed category of books on the strike come those by Goodman (1985) and Adney & Lloyd (1986).

The policy of the Conservative Government of that time towards the strike, industrial relations in general and its Energy Policy is covered in works by Margaret Thatcher (1993), Nigel Lawson (1992) and Nicholas Ridley (1991). The overall opinions of these authors is that the strike was a necessary evil, something that they perceived needed to be endured to break the power of the Trade Unions in order to make Britain an industrially more competitive nation. Into this category also comes Drower's (1994) book on Neil Kinnock, surprisingly anti strike for the son of a Welsh miner and Tony Benn's diaries for the period entitled *The End Of An Era* (1992) covering his time as a newly elected, with Arthur Scargill's help, MP for Chesterfield. Roy Ottey's 1985 book of his bitter experiences as leader of the non-striking Nottinghamshire miners provides another interesting and valuable angle on the dispute.

Alongside the political literature about the 1984/85 miners' strike there is a considerable archive of local reports and pamphlets on local communities, such as *The Heart and Soul Of It* (1985) written as a documentary account of how the strike affected the people in the pit village of Worsbrough in West Yorkshire, Arthur Scargill's old pit, and provides a graphic description of what life was like in the feeding centres, the work of the support groups and how the community coped during the strike. In Durham Huw Beynon's (1985) book *Digging Deeper* has used the experiences of the Durham miners, their families and communities to explain the issues of the miners' strike, while Pat McIntyre's (1992) unpublished thesis *The Response To The 1984/85 Miners' Strike in Durham County: Women The Labour Party and Community* has examined the role of women in the strike in the Durham coalfield.

In Nottinghamshire, Richards (1996) provides a comprehensive history of class and culture in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and attempts to offer an explanation as to how these factors played a part in that areas decision not to support the 1984 strike call, while Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) provide a sociological analysis of mining communities in West Yorkshire.

The actions of the police are analysed in many of the books written on the strike but are examined in greater depth by Graef (1989) and Reiner (1985 – 1991). Issues concerning the actions of the media are covered by Cumberbatch, McGregor and Brown (1986), Hetherington (1985), and Jones, Pitley, Power and Wood (1987).

In addition there is a growing local literature on the miners' strike coupled with the demise of the Durham coalfield. Examples of this are Temple's two volumes of the *Collieries of County Durham* published in 1996 and 1997 and his more recent volume *Durham Miners' Millennium Book (2000)* and those books by Emery (1992) and Marrs (1997).

Current literature is re-constructing the memory of the strike and reinterpreting it and this study tries to probe attitudes and feelings that were prevalent at that time. In some ways the strike is still being fought out, only now it is a question of the truth of history. This study, based substantially on recalled memories is, nonetheless, an attempt to understand how people interpreted the strike as it developed.

As mentioned earlier in the introduction the aims of this thesis is to analyse the two themes of betrayal and legality and to see how they fit in the context of the actions of the Police (Chapter 4), the Politics Of The Strike (Chapter 5) and The Role Of The Media (Chapter 6). However, in order to understand the miners' strike of 1984/85 we need to understand a number of historical elements and the strike needs to be placed in the context of the history of the Durham miners. This is done in Chapter 2. Chapter 7 looks at life within the mining communities during the strike and illustrates the support that the local

communities received. Finally Chapter 8 will look at the last days of the strike and the return to work. It will also look at the strike in retrospect and at the pit closure programme of the 1990s. It will take at least three generations for this strike to lose its political significance. It has been a difficult task to separate accounts of 1984/85 from longer term popular memories or earlier strikes in 1974, 1972 and above all, of 1926. The strike of 1984/85 will surely be talked about and written about as long as there is a political interest in the history of the Labour movement of this country.

# CHAPTER 1

## METHODOLOGY

This thesis seeks to understand the 1984/85 miner's strike in East Durham by investigating two underlying themes which run through it: the question of legality and the question of betrayal. Both of these themes can be explained from different angles as different groups of participants had their own views on the strike and different experiences of it.

Why then base the research on events within Durham or even within the area in East Durham? The main reason is touched on in the Introduction, namely that the events in Durham during the strike of 1984/85 are under represented in the growing literature on the strike. As the strike was experienced differently in different coalfields, there is a need to qualify all generalisations about it by detailed studies of the events of 1984/85 in different localities.

Records on the events of that strike exist as newspaper and television archives; they exist in the memories of the leaders of the various factions, and they exist in numerous books and articles specifically written about the dispute. It has become so historically significant that the strike now exists as a powerful symbol and historic moment within the field of the arts, it is well represented in museums, for example, the mining museum at Woodhorn Colliery in Northumberland, as well as exhibitions in museums held in places such as Sunderland. But the main archive of memory exists in the experiences of those people actually involved in those events.

However there is a gap within the oral history records, particularly in respect of the themes of law and order. This is because many people, no matter how they were affected, have not had, or been given, the opportunity to describe how they viewed the events of 1984/85. Therefore the gaps in these two themes have to be 'triangulated' with two other factors, comparison with the official and

contemporary writings, and that of other archive material. What arose was a series of relationships between the oral record and individuals' experiences, the relationship between the oral record and other data and between the individual's experiences and the other data. This enables a new interpretation of the events of 1984/85 has to be developed, which was not available to people at the time or since. From this point of view the strike will always be open to re-interpretation. History changes, and the questions historians ask change.

The first relationship is of memory and the construction of memory gained by the individual's experience of actually taking part in events. The second relationship is a direct comparison of the interviewee's story compared to what has been written, or presented in other material. The third relationship is those people's experiences compared to other data, for example media images. In analysing these relationships, it is important to remember that data, in whatever form, is open to interpretation, and therefore for each of these sources there are strengths and weaknesses.

What is important is the meaning and significance of the strike to the participants. This has to be recovered, as at times, the actions of the participants are not always self-evident. Many sources of data are needed, and none can stand-alone. Each is reliant on others to authenticate or repudiate its findings. Each source is therefore subject to examination based on subjective perceptions, limited information, deliberate deception or fallible memory.

Many sources tell only one side of the story. There are ambiguities between them, and in some cases they are heavily biased towards one group or one interpretation of the strike. Oral history too has its weaknesses. Memories are not documentary realistic records, and can be affected by myth, anger, and coloured by political interpretation. But the memories of the strike are vivid, necessary and revealing. The recalling of memories opens up new questions.

## TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is a term deployed in discussions of social research methodology to highlight the need to cross check data from different sources. Burgess (1984) describes it as a process of combining methods of research and investigation, data sources and accounts of events – including the investigators own perceptions – to assess propositions at different levels and analysis, Bulmer (1978) states that a good check on the validity of personal documents is to compare it with other accounts, or to supplement it with data from other sources. This process of triangulation he argues can give a different perspective on the same phenomenon.

Triangulation enables the researcher to keep their interpretations open as they encounter new data and accounts of the event they are studying. This cross comparison of different interpretations enables a researcher to see more clearly the strength and weaknesses of particular interpretations. It also allows the researcher to overcome the limitations of the use of particular methodologies. This allows for a check on the quality of the data being analysed and for the validity of the interpretation.

Therefore the methodology needs to be suspicious of all data sources and the knowledge of the interviewees. It also requires the researcher to cross check information, for example, from a written source to an interviewee or interviewee to interviewee. This process of assessing ones data source and the conclusions drawn against the conclusions known from another data source is known as triangulation, which provides proof of veracity, consistency and credibility.

The strike is, and was, a highly interpreted political event and participation in the strike shaped people's perception of it. The historian's task is to go beyond the immediate data, to cross check it, and interpret it. The participant's account could well be different from the historian's account.

In practical terms this meant that all sources had to be critically analysed. For example interviewees threw up the problem of fallible memory; biography and other archive material could be subject to bias and subjectivity, while visual evidence could be subject to distortion.

My own account of the strike – with its emphasis on legality and betrayal – is yet another interpretation. Faced with the evidence collected, these themes emerged as a credible interpretation of the events as they were revealed to me through my sources. The process of interpreting this data was one of setting events and actions into local and national context and against different sets of data.

The narrative forms which are used now to recall the strike are elements of the changing ‘popular memory’ of the North East of England. During the strike the miners attempted to portray themselves as historically the most oppressed section of the working class and, as Williamson (1992) argues,

‘The bitterness of their memories of the 1920’s shaped their understanding of the pit closures and redundancies of the 1980’s. The rich emotional core of these memories, centered on the community itself, was what supplied miners and their families with the inner resources they needed to organise their campaign.’

(Colls and Lancaster 1992 p 154)

The main bulk of research for this thesis was gained by interviewing people actually involved in the strike in one way or another. Most were more than happy to speak quite openly about their experiences and in many cases seemed pleased to tell their side of the story. Some were initially suspicious, which was not surprising when one considers what they endured during the strike. It appeared that they wanted to keep control of the narrative of the strike, that they did not want ‘their story’ questioned by someone who took no part in those events. They certainly did not want to be exposed as someone who had ‘been clinging to a myth for fifteen years only to have it, and their credibility, destroyed’. It quickly became apparent that detailed preparation for the interview done in advance was important. A list of questions had to be formulated which frequently triggered supplementary questions. On numerous

occasions information was revealed to me that required me to explore a new avenue of questioning. This new avenue could then be incorporated, where appropriate, into the next interviewee's questions. It became more and more apparent that the more you knew about the subject the more you got back. Also the more you were trusted the more open interviews became.

After the initial two or three interviews I became aware that I was not just fulfilling the role of interviewer but also of being an observer while they told, with a little prompting in the form of questions, what in some cases was a very emotional story. I quickly realised that in order to achieve the results that I needed from these interviews I had to meet a number of criteria in the interviewee's minds. I had to appear sympathetic, but detached from the emotion of the story, not too knowledgeable, but informed, although keen to learn more. To listen, but not be judgmental, to have credibility and to be using the content of the interview for a purpose of which they approved. Being objective, fair and honest, brought results.

Interviewing people in this manner had both a positive and negative effects.

The positive was that it produced the 'snowball effect', where names of people mentioned during the course of the interview, led to the opportunity to conduct further interviews, thus expanding my database of information. Arguably there was no other way of conducting this type of oral history research, and as the interviews were a sample of the many people and groups involved in the strike therefore they were contained within a framework dictated by the numbers of people prepared to talk about their experiences. However these people were not a random sample, and no sampling framework exists. It should also be noted that miners are, in many cases, reluctant to talk about the dispute. Also many miners still felt the pain of defeat and were therefore unwilling to be taken back to a time they want to forget. However some did and it was as if talking about it helped ease the burden of defeat.

The negative effect was that many told their story through 'rose-coloured glasses', telling it how they thought it should have been, not how it actually was. This resulted in some sharp supplementary questioning and careful unpicking of the typed transcript of the interview. One final point, which to me was quite surprising, was that after ten or more years after the strike many former NUM officials still gave what I came to summarise in my own mind as the 'Scargill line', with little or no deviation from what the NUM was saying about the strike in 1984.

Bruner (1986) argues that a story needs three factors. First a plight into which the characters have fallen; second, circumstances or intentions that have gone wrong and thirdly the consciousness that the characters know the plight they are in.

'These narratives once acted out, "make" events and "make" history.'  
(Bruner 1986 p 42)

Certainly the miners fell into the first category; the strike itself fell into the second category and thirdly by the time the strike finished the characters – miners, their families etc, - certainly knew the plight they were in. The narrative of the people involved in the strike added to the reality of the situation that they had found themselves in, and were trying to describe.

As my research took me deeper into the history of the mining communities, I came to realise that the 'Scargill line' was yet another set of narratives, which was rapidly becoming part of mining folklore. It compared to the intransigence of the mine owners in 1926 and the tales of bitter relationships between the mine owners and men throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was yet another example of how a story remained 'correct' despite evidence to the contrary.

The logic of the method of using oral history is that of interpretation, the telling of a story based on the stories of others. Stephen Humphries refers to oral

history as being 'life history', springing

'from the living memory. It draws upon the memories of people whose experiences have often been neglected and excluded from history books in the past'.

(Humphries 1984 Introduction P IX)

However the story needs to be credible and this thesis attempts to gain credibility because around the findings are the frameworks of conventional, documentary history, sociological analysis, and the contexts of contemporary politics and culture.

In addition to the oral history research a compelling insight into the events of the strike was obtained by reading the numerous political memoirs now available. Many of these told the story of the strike from those authors' perspectives. Naturally the memories of politicians like Margaret Thatcher (1993), Nigel Lawson (1992) gave the government angle on the strike. But books on the strike by Adney and Lloyd (1986) attempt to give a more balanced view, while Paul Routledge's (1993) unauthorised biography on Arthur Scargill successfully attempts to get behind the enigma. Also research through television and media archives provided another valuable slant on the strike. Careful analysis of this material was required because, unlike the last great miners' strike of 1926, this was a dispute played out under the full gaze of the television camera. The media formed people's opinions and were instrumental in making them 'for' or 'against' the miners. One of the most enduring photographs of the strike is that of a mounted policeman striking a picket with a truncheon. Later this was proved to be a false image as the camera had foreshortened the distance. However what will be remembered in future is the photograph, not that it was a false image. As Webster (1977) and Susan Sontag (1980) argue these types of photograph are important as they present the public with unbiased pictures of what is happening and help preserve the press's freedom to report the way it is. There was also the opportunity to view an amount of archive material, some of which was previously unpublished, that also contributed to the overall picture of the strike.

However it is not possible to understand the events of the strike without setting it in its historical context, of having some ideas of the differences between 'Corporatism', under which the NCB, and NUM had worked previously and 'Thatcherism' which is what was being forced on them and which was an alien philosophy to both the NCB and NUM. There also needs to be an understanding that the mining of coal gave rise to institutions and attitudes that created a culture unique to the pit villages not only of Durham, but in other coalfields. This culture had created a series of frameworks and interpretations on events and these had evolved through generations. The most powerful example of this is the seeming endless years of the 'bad times', or when 'times were harsh'. Yet the older generations would refer back to when they were working and speak of when 'times were better'. There is a contradiction in the interpretation of events which strengthen the argument that with certain exceptions the 'bad times' were not that bad and that a prismatic slant is put on these events.

Many generalisations have been made about the strike, and this thesis seeks to highlight the limit of these when viewed from within a small area. From within this area uniqueness emerges which frequently contradicts what is generally accepted as being the 'correct' view of the strike. For example as will be seen in a future Chapter there was not, at Easington anyway, an overwhelming desire to go on strike without a ballot.

History becomes part of popular memory and as mentioned above is often coloured by the rose-coloured view of 'bad times'. This study acknowledges this process and seeks after a gap of some fifteen years to try to show how the strike was not how politicians, union leaders and activists, and the media would like us to remember it.

## THE INTERVIEWEES AND THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

From the beginning I decided that in order to achieve a balanced analysis from my research I had to interview a wide selection of people. My early readings of

books on the strike by Goodman (1988) and Adney Lloyd (1986) showed that some groups were underrepresented in the literature on the strike. Although miners and their leaders – with the exception of Arthur Scargill – seemed to have been given plenty of opportunity to recall their experiences other groups such as the police, - with the exception of a number of Chief Constables – had not had the opportunity to put their side of events. Other groups whose experiences I felt needed to be obtained included the solicitors, both prosecuting and defending, the magistrates who sat in judgement on the evidence, and those groups representing the community, whose response to the strike managed to sustain it for a year.

The strength of this approach gave a much wider interviewee base especially as I deliberately attempted to interview people who had never spoken about the strike in this way. This decision was most successful when interviewing representatives from the police. They were quite open about how they viewed the tactics employed, their preparation, and their thoughts on the strike in general. The weakness of this method was simply that I could not interview everybody. So my interview base is a selection of those involved and who were prepared to talk about their experiences.

The strike was inescapable for the people of East Durham, everyone was involved. In principle the sampling frame for interviews covers thousands of people in different groups in East Durham society. Time and resources constraints for the research imposed a somewhat arbitrary, but necessary restriction on who would be selected for interview. Two strategies were therefore followed: some strategic interviewing for example, miners' leaders, and, secondly, a 'snowball' sampling strategy to gain access to informants. This method overcomes the problem of the deep reluctance that still exists among former miners to talk about the strike to people whom they have no reason to trust.

The people interviewed were not statistically representative of all shades of opinion of East Durham. Some however are crucial to any creditable account of

the strike and the views of others less involved politically are nevertheless telling and evoke the prevailing views and attitudes of that time.

As mentioned earlier I quickly became not just an interviewer but an observer listening to a story being told. Some interviewees had to be led with fairly direct questions, which brought forward short factual answers. Others would give long responses to questions often moving away from the initial question. Here I was faced with a dilemma. Should I let the interviewee continue in the hope that further recollections would be forthcoming? Or bring them back to the original question? Normally I let them continue and on occasions was rewarded with a telling insight, such as David Temple's, a member of Durham Mechanics Union, hope that the IRA would blow up some electricity pylons, which produced a further avenue of questioning.

Almost inevitably I was received with considerable warmth being offered tea or coffee and in many cases cakes and biscuits. Inevitably after the interview there was an invitation to come back if I needed any further help and that they hoped their interview had been helpful and wished me good luck with my work.

#### LITERATURE ON THE STRIKE AND ITS PREDECESSORS

Literature is important because it provides a record of what actually took place, or someone's personal opinion of events as they saw them. Some books or papers are data in themselves, and into this category fall such items as Lodge Minute Books, copies of Police Statements and the Writ issued against the Durham Area NUM by Paul Wilkinson. All literature helps set the scene or provides evidence that events took place and reinforces the recollection of events which have now become part of historical memory.

The literature reviewed fell into three types. Firstly, there was that which provided the historical background describing conditions, former strikes, and the development of the Durham coalfield. Into this category came Fynes' *The Miner's of Northumberland and Durham* (1983), Benson's *British Coalminers*

of *The Nineteenth Century*' (1980) and Garside's *The Durham Miners 1900 – 1960*' (1971). All of these set the scene and helped place the 1984/85 strike into its historical context.

The second group were books written after the strike, and fell into a number of categories, these have been reviewed in more detail in the introduction.

The third group is that of material written not only after the strike but also, in the case of Durham, after the disappearance of those pits which remained after the strike. This literature normally took the form of the findings of surveys into the socio-environmental problems that resulted from the demise of the coalfield. Into this category came Ken Coates (MEP) and Michael Barratt Brown's *'Communities Under Attack'* (1997) and a report on rural poverty commissioned by Durham County Council (1998).

Literature written after the strike is blessed with the gift of hindsight and it is easier to analyse the events and point out where groups made mistakes. One such point is the question of a national ballot and it is now accepted by most writers on the strike that this was a mistake and cost the miners considerable support. The weakness of this material is that it all tells the same story. For example there is little deviation from the 'party line' in the memoirs of Lawson (1992) and Tebbit (1988).

## UNPUBLISHED ARCHIVES

Unpublished archives provide a valuable insight into events. They are often quite personal having been recorded for sole use of the person, rather than for any thought of them being used in any form of publication. I felt, when, photographs or documents of some kind were produced, that I was seeing a part of the history of that family as, inevitably, these personal records would be handed down to future generations as a record of the part which Dad, Grandad, Uncle or Brother played in the strike of 1984/85.

Into this category fall those documents which have not been used in previous works about the strike. I was very grateful to have the loan of the NUM Easington Lodge minutes for the period leading upto and during the strike, the Save Easington Area Miners campaign minutes, various videos of police action against the miners and the photographs that appear in the text. I also had sight of various letters concerning the strike, police statements of miners arrested, and a copy of the Writ issued by Paul Wilkinson's solicitors.

The strength of these documents, videos and photographs is obvious, they add strength to the arguments that are put forward. It is exciting to write about Paul Wilkinson's Writ, when you have the actual document in front of you. Likewise to be able to quote directly from Lodge minutes gives a greater strength to the work.

What these actions of interviewing and reading resulted in was a continual process of interpreting the data that was being presented to me. My understanding of the strike was continuously evolving as evidence of actions was obtained. This data was eventually written up into a series of papers which form the basis of this thesis.

## CONCLUSION

Writing takes the form of fixing interpretation for posterity and therefore it is crucial to ensure that the creditable and coherent interpretation is put on events, this fits the best evidence available. This brings in the triangulation between documents, personal experience and historic memory. The main danger is trying to arrive at an interpretation when little, or no, evidence can be found to substantiate it. This I hope I have avoided. Finally there are a number of groups whose issues are not recorded here. They include the children, non miners, businessmen, and to a great extent the wives and mothers of striking miners. History will need these views and experiences in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This chapter seeks to locate the East Durham coalfield historically and to clarify the political and social structures and cultural values which make up the communities of the area. It will also seek to explain the type of NUM leadership that had developed in the area, and to show that politically the actions of the communities were formed by historical and political memories and by the political institutions that are rooted in the past.

It is important that the larger history of the area is known and understood because the culture of the Durham miners is one of constant referral back to the past. The past provides meaning for the present and shaped the actions of miners for the future. This has been true through generations of miners and was particularly true in 1984/85 where miners knew that their actions would shape the future for generations to come.

The Durham portion of the Great Northern coalfield produced gas, coking, household and steam coal. It was, in modern times the most important coalfield with regard to the nation's fuel economy. The coalfield was responsible for and sustained an industry for several centuries. The rivers Tyne and Wear were navigable and therefore the collieries had a unique transport advantage. The distances between pit head and staiths were short and transport was easy and relatively quick once the system of waggonways became developed.

Coal mining in County Durham was in progress in a small way at the time of the Roman occupation. Although it declined rapidly after the Romans withdrew, the *Boldon Book* mentions a colliery at Escomb, in 1183. The medieval markets for coal included Smiths, Lime Burners, Bakers, Brewers, Salt Makers and, by the 14<sup>th</sup> century London households. Exports to the Netherlands provided another market for Durham coal.

The demand from London, especially after the Great Fire of 1666, put the Durham coalfield on a sound economic footing and, on average 70% of mined coal was destined for the capital, whose consumption rose year upon year for over three centuries from 1650 – 1900.

1650 -	215,000 tons
1700 -	428,000 tons
1750 -	688,000 tons
1800 -	1,200,000 tons
1875 -	8,200,000 tons
1900 -	15,750,000 tons

Up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century mining was restricted to shallow horizontal or vertical mining to the coal seams. It was about this time that the first exhaustion crisis occurred as some parts of the area had been worked continuously for around 200 to 300 years and reserves had become exhausted. This exhaustion resulted in a determined attempt to mine coal from the coalfield east of Durham City. This area contains the pits which are the focus of this thesis, but whose coal seams were covered by what was considered to be an impenetrable deposit of limestone. However between 1820 and 1850 a number of shafts were sunk.

In the 1820s Hetton, Eppleton and Elemore collieries were sunk. In the 1830s Murton, was sunk, but it was not until 1899 that work started on the sinking of Easington Colliery.

The introduction of these new pits pushed production output upwards reaching a peak in 1913 as the table below shows:

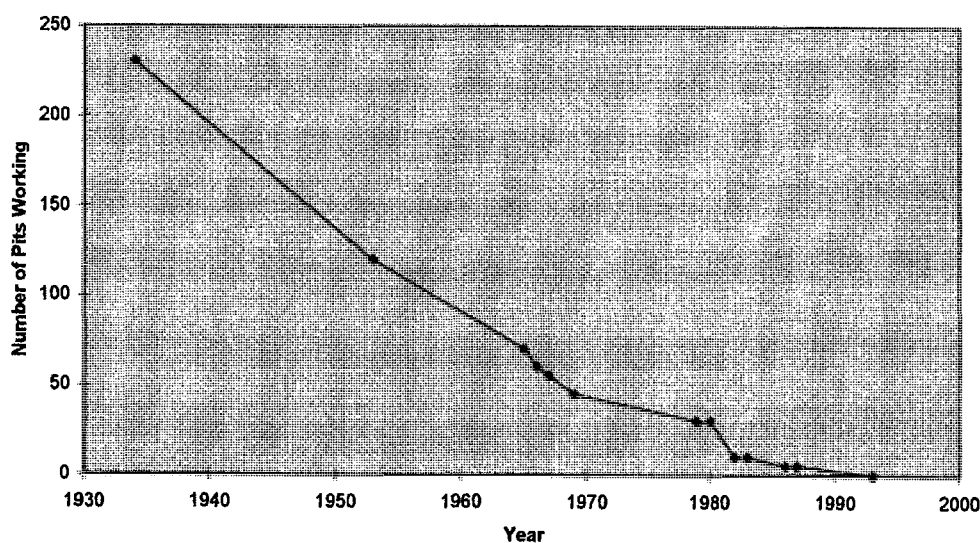
1880 -	28,053,346 tons
1885 -	27,737,224 tons
1900 -	34,800,719 tons
1905 -	37,397,176 tons
1910 -	39,431,598 tons
1913 -	41,532,890 tons

(Garside 1971 p 18)

This peak in production was produced by a labour force 185,246 workers of whom 132,661 worked underground, from 304 pits. From then until the strike of 1984/85 output, the number of workers and the number of pits fell. On the eve of the strike a labour force of 15,219 men were producing 7,271,811 tons from nine deep pits.

TABLE 1

## Pit Closures 1913-1993



Year	Pits Working
1913	300
1934	230
1953	120
1965	70
1966	60
1967	55
1969	45
1979	30
1980	10
1982	10
1983	10
1986	5
1987	5
1993	0

These pits developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were mainly in rural areas and gave rise to new isolated communities. Following the successful mining of coal at the Hetton Lyons pit in 1819 the area developed rapidly, further pits were

successfully sunk at Eppelton and Elemore and the population of the area rapidly increased. In 1821 the population of Hetton was 919, but by 1831 the population had increased to 5887. This population boom continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by 1891, 12,726 people lived in Hetton.

This sharp rise in population created a completely new environment. In 1821 in Hetton 143 families lived in 107 houses, a case of overcrowding that persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1856 streets of houses had been built by the coal companies close to the newly sunken mines. These streets were long, unpaved, undrained and unlit, their surfaces consisting of ash from household fires and the spoil heap. Conditions were unsanitary and outbreaks of Cholera were frequent. At Easington those houses built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were numbered in districts such as 12 First Street South, and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Easington Colliery had expanded at a rapid rate. Once coal had been reached, rows of colliery houses were constructed with a sense of urgency, in cramped rows almost on top of the colliery shaft.

These houses were, in effect, tied cottages. Priority was given to the miners, that worked on the coal face. If you were a miner with sons, there was a house for you. But the sons automatically had to go down the pit when they left school. If they did not then the family lost the right to the colliery house.

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century some 76% of miners at Seaham were the sons of former miners, and 78% of these married the daughters of miners. The families provided what the mine owners needed, a special kind of labour force, one that

‘must be bred to their work from childhood. Their number cannot be recruited from any other class... the increase of pit population comes solely from internal sources’  
(Beynon 1994 P 27)

Miners lived and died by a social arrangement which Beynon calls ‘the Durham system’. The system bred a culture in which mining was not just a job; it was a way of life. People in the mining communities would tell you ‘they just went to the pit’. Boys of 14 finished school on a Friday, went straight to the pit offices

to be interviewed, and started work at the pit on the Monday.

Many fathers did not want their sons to follow them down the pit, however

‘in those days you had to leave a record of your family with the pit manager. And on their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday the manager would say “send your son along to see me tomorrow”. “No I’m sorry he’s not going down the pit”. And then “Look you have a colliery house? You work at the colliery? If you want to keep your job and house send him along”.

(Beynon 1994 P 136)

Therefore it was a system of blackmail and threat that produced the next generation of miners and for generations fathers tried to prevent their sons from following them underground. The threat of eviction from colliery owned houses was one that hung over the miners whenever they took any form of industrial action. Previous strikes such as those of 1832, 1844 and 1863 had been marked by mass eviction as the mine owners attempted to force the strikers back to work, and suggests that the provision of free housing by the colliery owners was a major weapon deployed by them in dealing with striking miners. Because the majority of miners lived in this form of tied housing, they were trapped in a vicious circle from which it was hard to escape.

Miners who became union activists were threatened with eviction during and after disputes. In 1879 every member of the Durham Miners’ Association was evicted from their homes at Craghead by Messrs Healey the mine owners when the company decided that it would no longer employ any union members. The leaders of the DMA were quick to see the advantages in owning property thus removing the fear of victimisation and built houses for its officials in every Durham lodge as quickly as it could. Martin Daunton (1980) contrasts this system of colliery housing with that in South Wales where Housing Associations or Building Clubs were responsible for the provision of colliery houses. For example in Brynmawr colliery in the Rhonda Valley many of the miners’ houses were built by means of a building club. In parts of the South Wales coalfield where this system flourished the proportion of owner occupied houses stood at 19% of all houses in the coalfield area, whereas the level of owner occupier in the country as a whole stood at 7%.

It was the actions of management that led to bitterness, sometimes bordering on hatred that was passed from generation to generation. Ron Rooney remembers

‘I was fined 2/6d for threatening an Overman. He had threatened to hit me with a stick, so I took the stick off him and broke it. And I was accused of threatening behaviour and fined 2/6d. ... People living now don't realise what the miners were. They don't understand why the miners are so bitter now. They're bitter because they remember what it used to be in days gone by'.  
(Rooney 1979 p 37)

The mine owners' attitude to their workers drove many into politics, especially left-wing politics. Chopwell in North Durham became known as 'Little Moscow' and was really a Communist community. All the local trade union leaders and activists were either members of the Communist Party, the International Labour Party, or the left-wing of the Labour Party. Political schools were held, and leading members of the left-wing labour movement would go to Chopwell to address meetings.

The expansion of the East Durham coalfield was matched by an expansion of trade unionism within the mining industry. Previous attempts to form any trade union had failed, the most notable failure being the Hepburn Union, named after Tommy Hepburn which broke up after the strike of 1832 failed. On November 20<sup>th</sup> 1869 a group of trade union activists met at the Market Tavern in Durham. The outcome of the meeting was the formation of the Durham Miners Mutual Confident Association. This was later to grow into the Durham Miners' Association, the DMA.

Shortly after the formation of the DMA the colliery enginemen, mechanics and cokemen left to form their own union, but by 1878 had regrouped under the DMA banner. In 1876 the DMA was recognised by the mine owners and the membership had grown to over 32,000 members organised into 213 lodges. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century membership had exceeded 100,000 with almost 100% of underground workers being members. By the General Strike of 1926 nearly 100% of all Durham miners belonged to the DMA, and the Durham area had become known as one area where loyalty to the union was seen as

being of the utmost importance.

Equally as important were the objectives of the DMA. These were, in 1921, 'to seek the Abolition of Capitalism and the salutation of Common Ownership and contest of the means of life', 'To support the Labour Press, and, To Support Education'.

The union lodge looked after their members. Sid Chaplin remembers that the union's

'lodge secretary door was always open ... If you were in trouble, if you had an accident down the pit, if you were negotiating a new agreement, if you wanted an aged miners' home, if you had trouble with your coal – that is your concessionary coal -, if you wanted some roof repairs doing on your colliery house, if you had had to go to hospital and you needed an ambulance, well you went to him.'

(Benson 1980 p 213)

The influence of the DMA spread into the spheres of local and national politics. In 1919 the Labour party became the majority party on Durham County Council taking 56 of the 99 seats. This was the first time in the party's history where they had captured a County Council outright. Although they lost control in 1922, they regained it in 1925, never to lose control again.

However the 1926 General Strike saw the Durham men defeated, but the DMA never voted for a return to work. Union activists were blacklisted and the men returned to work demotivated and disorganised. For many the failure of the General Strike marked a shift away from traditional union militancy in Durham. From nationalisation in 1947 through the 1950s and 1960s the Durham coalfield contracted. Many pits closed either because of exhaustion or because mining coal was too costly. The number of banners being paraded at the Durham Gala grew fewer and fewer each year, reflecting the pace of pit closures. However the Gala still provided local union leaders with the opportunity to appeal to the miners sense of dignity and loyalty both to union and the labour party and still attempted to establish greater trust and co-operation in the union's policies, even if a rapidly increasing programme of pit closures formed part of the union

policies.

The Durham miners' long standing political commitment to the Labour Party became even more firmly cemented following that party's victory in the 1945 General Election and the Nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947. Watson, in a letter to NUM members on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1947 wrote that,

‘[it] was an ideological bomb that went off on 5 July 1945 and placed in power for the first time in the history of our country a Labour Government. ... A Labour government, which is trying ... to bring under public, control all essential services.’  
(Garside 1971 p490)

At the first NUM conference after Nationalisation Will Lawther, the union's first President, was putting the case for better industrial relations, arguing that unofficial strikes were a crime against the union's members and that disputes should be resolved without the need for unofficial industrial action.

Two years later in 1949 Sam Watson was warning the NUM lodges that

‘The next decade will witness many changes in the Durham Coalfield... That more pits which are uneconomic will close as their losses mount... Concentration on the best pits will mean a gradual closing of the most uneconomic pits and no amount of easy talking or easy thinking will hide the stark economic reality involved.’  
(Garside 1971 p 403)

What Watson was warning the NUM members of was quite simply that there would be considerable problems in the older parts of the Durham coalfield to sustain the levels of production and the reduction in costs that were being asked of it by the Labour government.

The support given to the government plans for the coal industry rested in part so as not to embarrass or harm the government, thus putting in jeopardy the long term prospects of the coal industry remaining in public ownership. The defeat of the Labour party at the General Election in 1951 prompted Watson to write that

'We lost a good Government. We have to organise and work to get it back.'  
(Garside 1971 p 494)

During the term of the Conservative government this process of co-operation with the government continued. One of Watson's aims was to work towards persuading the ordinary NUM members that they must identify themselves with the overall responsibility they had with regard to being part of a publicly owned mining industry within the national economy. Older coalfields such as parts of Durham had numerous inefficient and inadequately mechanised pits, that were costly to run and which had limited coal reserves.

Arguably Watson had the foresight to realise that the British coal industry of which Durham was a part had to be cost-effective if it was to compete in every market. He expressed his concern in 1958 over the growth of Nuclear power and reminded NUM members that the country would find the cheapest source of power no matter if it is oil, electricity, gas or coal.

Following 'Vesting Day' on 1 January 1947 the nationalisation of the mining industry saw a spirit of co-operation between the NCB, NUM and successive British governments both Labour and Conservative. This was the era of corporatism, when the NCB's leadership inevitably included someone with extensive experience of the affairs of the NUM. Inevitably this was a former NUM official. Sam Watson the Durham miners' leader became a part-time NCB official after his retirement from union office. Lord Robens Chairman of the NCB in the 1960s was himself a former miner, and in 1976 Joe Gormley was offered the Chairmanship of the NCB by the Energy Secretary Tony Benn.

However relationships between Board and Union were not always as co-operative and friendly during this period as some records would make out. A consequence of this 'cosy relationship' was a series of unofficial strikes during the 1950s by NUM members who thought that their interests were being ignored in order to promote a smooth relationship with the NCB. One statistic that supports this is the fact in 1957, 78% of all recorded strikes in British industry were in the coal industry. During the 1960s the number of days lost

due to strike action dropped, which is surprising given that this was the period of severe contraction within the industry. Arguably this shows that the NUM leadership was able to contain union militancy and discontent. This points to the fact that while there was some unease at the way the industry was contracting; there was little support for major industrial action to try to reverse this trend.

In Durham the contraction of the coalfield began in the North and North West. Only a small number of pits were in production around Consett and Stanley, while pits in the South West of Durham continued to produce coal. However from the 1950s production in this area began to slow down, as mining was concentrated in the North East and East of the county. As early as 1951 Durham County Council clarified 350 former pit villages as Category D, and were to receive no economic aid. Many of the pits that closed produced high quality coking coal for use in iron and steel making notably for the Consett Iron Companies works in Consett. But these pits had poor working conditions in narrow seams and had changed little since they were first sunk.

The closures were different from what happened in the 1930s when pits closed because of lack of demand for coal, and reopened when demand increased. But in the 1960s the closures were final. Crook was badly affected at both times. In the 1930s the town with its dependency on the coke works and pits, had one of the highest unemployment rates in Britain, but it still remained a miners' town. However with the final closure of the areas pits, that feeling of 'belonging' to an industry vanished leaving only the insecurity of factory work, travelling to different pits or unemployment. Some miners in hindsight wished they had opposed the union on this matter.

'Looking back I don't think we fought hard enough to stop the closures ... I think we were conned a bit by Sam Watson and the union. We accepted travelling all sorts of distances to another pit'.  
(Rooney 1979 p 38)

This period was marked by almost total union agreement with the Coal Board's closure plans and its policy of producing cheaper coal through a more

competitive and compact industry. However a militant minority began to challenge this policy and at the NUM's 1967 Conference an unknown rank and file delegate from Yorkshire, Arthur Scargill, challenged Labour's Minister for Power, Richard Marsh, stating.

'I can honestly say that I never heard such flannel like we got from the minister, ... he said we have got nuclear power with us whether we like it or not. I suggest we have got coal mines with us, but they did something about this problem, they closed them down. This represents a betrayal of the mining industry.'

(Holland 1994 Section 5 p7)

The 1972 strike saw the Durham miners on strike over wage increases. The strike lasted from 9 January 1972 to 28 February 1972 when the men returned. Over 32,000 Durham miners went on strike, receiving support from other unions such as the TGWU and the dockworkers who refused to unload imports of American coal.

In February 1974 another strike started with Durham voting 85.70% in favour of strike action. This led to the now famous 'defeat' of the Heath led Conservative government, the return of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, who immediately settled the dispute with the miners who returned to work on 11 March 1974.

The result of the pit closures of the 1950s and 1960s and, to a certain extent, the 1970s was that the older more moderate members of the NUM had retired or been pensioned off. This left a hard core of younger, more militant miners prepared to take industrial action and prepared to follow the now increasingly militant left wing leadership of the NUM.

As Powell (1993) states in 1969 faced with

'the evidence of growing militancy among the miners'  
(Powell 1993 p 184)

the miners' leader Lawrence Daly had to adopt a more robust approach to his

dealing with the Coal Board as the rank and file.

'had had enough of words. By 1969 what they demanded was action.'  
(Powell 1993 p 185)

In many pit villages generation after generation followed each other down the same pit. Many pits by this time were, at the time of the strike, approaching 100 years old and the highs and lows, the good times and the bad in many families' fortunes were reflected in the price of coal, the fortunes of the pit, and the attitude of the mine owners in relation to wage demands, better conditions and strike action. Miners have for generations talked endlessly about their work, often joking about the hardships and dangers that they faced. This produced a culture whose thoughts and stories were turned into literature, poetry and songs such as the stories of Sid Chaplin – *'The Thin Seam'* (1950) and *'Blackberry Time'* (1987).

What arose from the generations living and working in the same place was a historical memory of past times which bound together the community. The knowledge of what one's father and grandfather had endured during the strikes of the 1920s, the depression of the 1930s, and of disputes in the early years of the century helped unite and motivate the communities during the 1984/85 dispute. Uppermost in many families' memories was the miners' greatest defeat, the General Strike and lock-out of 1926, still vivid in many former miners' minds. This issue which dominated this dispute was simple, the mine owners decided that the workers had to work longer hours for less money. Initially supportive the TUC General Council perceived disaster when they saw the full forces of the state, police, troops and courts working overtime, being mobilised against them. So they called the strike off and left the miners to fend for themselves. Arguably the miners could have survived for longer if other trade unions had organised a regular weekly levy to support them. As it was, soup kitchens, seemingly a feature of all major mining disputes, were set up. Men and women would collect donations of food, cook and serve the meals so that those at school, those on strike, the old and the sick all had one square meal a day. As many miners held out for months with little or nothing to support

them, a regular levy from nine million other trade unionists to support ¾ million miners, would have given them a better chance of victory.

The 1984/85 strike was therefore viewed in similar fashion although the defeat of 1926 had to some extent been expunged by the miners' victories of 1972.

But as the number of working pits decreased many sons concerned about the threat of redundancy looked for work outside of not only the local pit, but of mining in general. This brought to an end the fund of shared memories which families and communities had fallen back on in hard times.

As the western half of the Durham coalfield contracted, many pits in East Durham became receiver pits, taking in miners from those pits which were closing. This resulted in the break-up of the pit solely employing men from one community, and led to these incomers being referred to as 'travellers' or 'strangers', a term first used to describe those men employed on sinking pits in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. This led to a change in the social geography of the region. Some miners moved to pits in different coalfields notably Nottinghamshire. As one ex-Durham Miner recalled

'Whitburn closed in the late 60's and that's why I came [here to Bilsthorpe] from the Durham coalfield. ... I've been at pits in Notts that weren't doing well, but you never had that feeling that you were under any immediate threat. ... I felt I'd got a job until I retired.'  
(Richards 1996 p 182)

The importance of living and working within the same community for miners cannot be underestimated. Most miners generally hated moves to another pit, although they continued to live in the same community. Miners gained security from working with trusted companions on whom they could rely, and becoming familiar over time with a particular mine or area within it.

In 1969 the closure of Tudhoe Park colliery in South West Durham led management to attempt to transfer 50 miners to South Hetton. Their attempt failed. Not one miner transferred despite a management promise to set aside



- 1.SACRISTON
- 2.HERRINGTON
- 3.WESTOE
- 4.WEARMOUTH
- 5.EPPLETON
- 6.MURTON
- 7.HAWTHORN
- 8.SEAHAM
- 9.VANE TEMPEST
- 10.DAWDON
- 11.EASINGTON
- 12.HORDEN

one face with similar working conditions to Tudhoe.

By the start of the strike in 1984 the area of the East Durham coalfield contained the coastal pits of Seaham – Vane Tempest, Dawdon, Horden and Easington, along with the inland pits of Murton, the Hawthorn Complex and Eppleton making up the area on which this thesis focuses. Durham also had four other deep mines, those further North on the coast at Westoe and Wearmouth and two inland pits to the West at Herrington and Sacriston.

By 1984 the workforce of the mining industry felt insecure, shipbuilding on the rivers Tyne and Wear was but a shadow of its former self, while the closure of the British Steel works at Consett brought big time steel production in County Durham to an end. The closure of Consett arguably created a feeling that the miners were next on the list, and with the NUM's move to a more left wing militant stance confrontation with the government was becoming inevitable.

Perhaps there is some truth in the idea of a 'traditional community' but maybe the idea that it was an almost utopian society is part of the myth that was handed down from generation to generation where those people in the 1930s compared the community in an unfavourable manner to what it was like at the turn of the century.

The idea of 'community' as applied to those villages in Durham whose existence was a direct result of the coal mining industry is fully explored by Bulmer (1978). Bulmer puts forward a number of explanations of the term community, but admits that there are limitations to the term 'community' as a concept. He contends that the idea of community was fostered because these villages were physically isolated and in the main occupationally homogeneous.

He goes on to argue that these tight-knit communities when feeling economic and social hardship used militant aid and self help as a means of survival which in turn stimulated the idea of community spirit.

Bulmer also puts forward a number of reasons as to the demise of the concept of community, including that people moving into the community are not so friendly, not related to other members of the community and are not as easy to get on with. He admits that the idea of community has been lacking in many streets of mining communities, but arguably the idea of community in the study of the 1984/85 miners' strike cannot be ignored, but it has to be seen within context of what form the community took at that time.

The pit remained the life blood of the village. Everything was connected to the pit. The miners and their families supported the local shops, the corner shop was seen as the place for the miners' wives to meet and exchange gossip, their children attended the local schools and the people used local facilities such as libraries, which themselves were often the descendants of reading rooms set up either by the union or mine owners. Retired miners and their families stayed in the village often in aged miners' homes, another extension of the pit into the local community.

If the pit were closed then the village would decline. Shops would close due to lack of support as families moved away to find work. Schools would close because of falling class numbers and many pit villages would lose public transport and other services. The increase in car ownership during the 1960s did much to offset the reduction in public transport, although many older people still relied on public transport to travel out of the village. The closure of the pit and the fragmentation of its communities would see the end of a distinctive way of life in these communities. They would become dead communities liken many of those in recent memory in West Durham, that were destroyed through the Category D village policy.

In hindsight the area had become too dependent on coal. But in 1984 the culture of the Enterprise Zone was in its infancy, Nissan had yet to enter to the area and miners still regarded jobs outside the industry as not 'proper jobs'. Since the victories of 1972 and 1974 the NUM had been inward looking and had failed to see the rise of Margaret Thatcher or had chosen to ignore her

philosophy of the free market, and of industries free from government subsidy. The Miners' Gala with its symbol of the past, the colliery band and banner harked back to a time when the miners were living on little more than starvation wages and needed to be motivated by the likes of A J Cook, Sam Watson, and Labour leaders like Nye Bevan.

Zygmunt Bauman (1982) supports this notion of collective memory and class consciousness but argued that the role of 'class' had changed. By 1984 unions had won better conditions for their members, through greater legislation on conditions of employment. There were more paid union officials looking after the members and there had been a rise in the number of 'white collar' workers. Class, Bauman argues, was very different towards the end of the twentieth century than it was in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. Given the long term decline in numbers of manual workers, the development of employee status among the middle classes, the growth of corporatism and welfare states, the dynamics of class conflict of late industrialisation are profoundly different to earlier periods of its history. Bauman's point, however, is that historical memory and prevailing perceptions of social divisions still retained many features of an older and superseded class consciousness. This analysis helps explain most of the way that Durham miners and their leaders interpreted the recent past and the challenge of the Conservative government's approach to the mining industry. For them this was an aspect of class warfare requiring class based opposition of mining communities were to survive.

During the 1960s the NUM, along with the Labour party had begun a steady move to the left, the attitude of the NUM hardening as pit after pit in every coalfield closed. Within the NUM the left-wing group began to press for official action and when that failed, began to encourage unofficial action on wages and conditions. In October 1969 there were unofficial strikes in Yorkshire, Scotland, the Midlands and South Wales, with a total of 70,000 miners on strike. In terms of realising its objectives the strike was a failure, but what it did achieve was the complete take over of the Yorkshire coalfield by the militant left. This strike laid the foundations of the victories of 1972 and 1974,

and ultimately to the defeat of 1984/85.

The strike of 1969 gave heart to a union that had been drifting along in the political sea for many years, and led to a change in the union's constitution, reducing the required majority for strike action from two-thirds to 55%. Prior to this change a call for national strike action in October 1970 was defeated when the two-thirds majority failed to be reached. Only the Communist dominated areas of Scotland and South Wales achieved the soon to be introduced 55% level, although Yorkshire managed a 60% vote in favour of a strike.

While failing in its attempts to achieve a majority for strike action, the vote created a situation where militant coalfields, such as Yorkshire, began to regard the threat of strike action as a legitimate weapon with which to achieve their demands.

However the election of the conservative government in 1979 brought the tone of militancy back to the speeches of the 'Big Meeting'. The run down of British industry, steel and shipbuilding, much of it in the Durham miners' 'back yard' generated a feeling of unease. The need for motivation reappeared; the threat to the industry was now apparent. Now it was not just the old pits, uneconomic with little or no coal left that were being closed, but pits whose winnable reserves would last for many more years. The tone of the speeches hardened.

The speeches at the 1983 Gala were full of the plans that the Conservative government had for the mining industry. Arthur Scargill's speech warned of the breakup of mining communities, the need to save the industry from destruction and an appeal for solidarity. He spoke of the power of the union being thrown away, arguing that the Durham coalfield was strong following nationalisation but had not used its power and it had been eroded through pit closures. He compared how the miners had fought before nationalisation and warned the crowd that it would have to happen again. Tony Benn continued this theme of struggle arguing that the history of the Durham miners in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century was a century of conflict. There was still a strong bond of solidarity and a belief that the miners were still engaged in a struggle, not now with the likes of Lord Londonderry, but with the NCB and the government. The constant referral to the past with its symbols of the struggle, such as evictions from colliery houses, soup kitchens and scab labour provides a predictable reading of the past, its history and help to promote a sense of injustice stretching back generations. Even the colliery banners were seen as battle honours and those of closed pits seen as war wounds.

In 1984 miners were relatively well paid. Many owned their own houses, enjoyed their two weeks in the sun, drove new cars and their families enjoyed a good standard of living. The communities, in 1984, were still male dominated,

‘a masculine, hierarchy based on wage, age and an apprenticeship system.  
Working class associations - trade unions, the clubs, co-ops and societies - was inevitably a male movement’  
(Robert Colls, 1995 p 12)

#### CHANGING STYLE OF THE NUM

By 1984 the power that the NUM and other mining unions enjoyed in 1974 had been eroded. However the NUM still regarded itself as all powerful within the community and many other groups looked to them for support in fighting for their own causes. The election of Arthur Scargill as NUM President had moved the union left of centre, and its leadership was now more prepared to engage in ideological political discourse to take a pragmatic view of what was happening in the industry and the wider political scene.

The NUM leadership underwent a fundamental change in style once Scargill became NUM President. Whereas Joe Gornley was a negotiator, a man who would compromise, he was a miners’ leader who obtained all his union demands plus a bit more from Ted Heath in 1972, and whose, not Scargill’s, actions ultimately brought down Heath’s Government in 1974. In contrast Scargill was a Marxist whose apparent aim was to bring down the Conservative Government by a national strike called about the right of the NCB to close

uneconomic pits. He was steeped in the history of past miners' strikes, especially that of 1926 and had as his role model A J Cook the miners' leader at the time of that dispute. Scargill was a man who would not compromise. If the NCB said 'No' to his proposal, then his reaction was to threaten strike action. Long after the defeat of the miners' in 1985 he was still calling for strike action over pit closures.

For many miners the union had two roles. It was there to sort out problems connected with the pit, such as working conditions, safety and training. Secondly, it was there to help its members in issues outside of the pit. The Easington NUM Lodge minutes record that on 9 November 1983 a request was received that the union help get a member's mother into an old people's home. On 15 February the minutes record that the lodge would fully support the campaign to keep a local Maternity Hospital open.

From speaking to people from these communities it soon became clear how their lives had been ordered. Harry Bannister, a resident of Easington and a miner from 1934 to 1980 recalled that he had received his allotment via the union and the local allotment society in 1939. He made no reference to the outbreak of war, only the fact that he received his piece of land the same year as the colliery baths opened.

Even after retirement miners still had cause to be grateful for the actions of the unions. Retired miners could live in colliery houses, or aged miners' homes, paying little or no rent, or could have been given the chance to buy them at much reduced prices. They received free, or cheap, coal and many enjoyed the benefits of weekly compensation payments fought for by the union.

The union's involvement in helping its members to solve run of the mill problems generated a sense of extreme loyalty to the union. This loyalty to what had become a multi-functional union involved, as noted above, not only in colliery affairs but also in the affairs of the community resulted in local pressure which could influence Area and National officials. Local loyalty produced the

confidence to engage with union politics. National and Area issues are refracted through local lenses. The actions of the NUM lodge at Cortonwood, when faced with closure, in picketing the NUM Area Offices in Barnsley resulted in Jack Taylor – Yorkshire NUM President and Scargill's successor – announcing that an all out strike by Yorkshire's 56,000 miners would start in support of the miners at Cortonwood. Arguably this action by Cortonwood miners led to the 1985/85 strike.

At times however local actions had quickly been brought to an end by the lack of support from Area or National level. On other occasions, however, pits had refused to support the lead of Area or National decisions, the most famous - or infamous - being the refusal of Nottinghamshire miners to support the National decision for a strike without a ballot in March and April 1984.

Such was the faith in the union that many miners were certainly more likely to believe what the union told them than the NCB's side of the story. Hence the almost universal, Nottinghamshire and other isolated pits notwithstanding, support for Arthur Scargill when he declared that the Conservative Government was out to destroy the mining industry. As one miner from Derbyshire commented,

'Arthur told me to come out, and he told me to go back. And that was good enough for me'.  
(Richards 1996 p62)

Many members put loyalty to the 'National' union first and some argued for the disbandment of the 'Area' structure to become a true 'National' union. Because of the union structure it could be argued that any National industrial action took place in spite of, and not because of this 'Area' structure of the NUM. Had the 'Area' structure been abolished before 1984, it is questionable if the NUM in Nottinghamshire would have ignored a strike call by the National Executive Committee.

## COALFIELD DECLINE

By the eve of the strike the problem facing pit communities nationally was that of falling levels of recruitment. Certainly this was one of the biggest problems facing the Easington District; Easington District had always had an historic dependency on the coal industry to employ its school leavers and to keep up levels of employment in the area.

Much of Mark Hudson's book *'Coming Back Brockens'* (1995) deals with the effects of the decline and ultimate demise of the coal industry on places in Easington District such as Horden and Peterlee. He describes how through unemployment and the lack of prospects for those leaving school whole areas have become 'ghettos' where crime especially juvenile crime is rife, where drugs are dealt openly and where the police seem to have neither the resources or will to rectify the situation. While all the blame cannot be placed at the closure of the local pits, it does seem from Mark Hudson's observations that the pit was a point around which the local communities built and lived their lives.

In 1971 the coal industry in Easington District accounted for 49.4% of total employment, and 67.7% of all male employment in the district. However by 1981 this figure had reduced to 56.5% of all male employment in the district. Overall between 1971 and 1981 employment in the coal industry fell by 5,870 jobs (17,962 – 12,092), a loss of 32.7% in the Easington district.

Table 2 Coal mining employment in Easington District, 1971-1981

	Males Only			Total Employment		
	Mining	Total	% Mining	Mining	Total	% Mining
1971	17,796	26,315	67.6	17,962	36,378	49.4
1972	17,056	25,777	66.2	17,236	35,877	48.0
1973	15,470	24,767	62.5	15,641	35,765	43.7
1974	14,795	23,155	63.9	14,961	32,642	45.8
1975	14,867	23,703	62.7	15,051	34,561	43.5
1976	14,480	23,399	61.9	14,687	34,476	42.6
1977	14,167	23,511	60.3	14,373	35,155	40.9
1978	13,200	22,511	58.3	13,369	33,378	40.1
1979	11,911	21,111	56.4	12,092	31,658	38.2
Net Change	-5,885	-5,204		-5,870	-4,720	

Source: Annual Census of Employment (Accessed on NOMIS)

As recruitment and employment in the coal industry fell, so unemployment rose. From a figure of just under 2,000 in 1974, unemployment had risen to 6,800 in September 1981, a rise of 256%. By the start of the strike in March 1984 the number of people employed in coal mining in the Easington district had fallen to 9,401. Factors accounting for the loss included the closure of Blackhall Colliery in 1981 with the loss of 1,289 jobs, a substantial reduction in employment at Hawthorn where the workforce was cut by 35.1% and the closure of South Hetton in 1983 with 525 job losses.

One set of forecasts predicted that employment in the coal industry would fall to 10,620 in 1986 and 9,201 by 1991. But by March 1984 this figure already stood at 9,041 with a predicted fall to 6,991 in 1991. At the start of the strike 7,000 people were unemployed in Easington district, and 2,000 males had been unemployed for longer than 12 months.

Table 3 Unemployment trends within Easington District, 1979-1984

(April)	Males	Females	Total
1979	2,560	1,276	3,836
1980	2,721	1,455	4,176
1981 (May)	3,816	1,841	5,657
1982	4,678	2,090	6,768
1983	4,841	2,122	6,963
1984	5,010	2,005	7,015
Net change (1979-1984)	+2,450	+ 729	+3,179
% increase	+95.7	+57.1	+82.9

Source: Monthly Registered Unemployed (accessed on NOMIS)

The contraction of mining operations within the Easington area had a knock on effect as regards recruitment within the area. Between 1979/80 and 1983/84 the number of persons recruited by the NCB fell to just 2,600. In an area where traditionally son followed father down the pit the reduction in recruitment increased youth un-employment. In 1979 15% of all male school leavers and 12% of all female school leavers were registered unemployed. By 1982 these figures had risen to 26% and 21% respectively.

Table 4 Long-term unemployment trends within Easington District, 1979-1984

(July)	Males	Females	Total
1978	947	201	1,148
1979	928	211	1,139
1980	856	214	1,070
1981	1,212	266	1,478
1982	2,012	506	2,518
1983	1,849	550	2,399
1984	2,052	603	2,655
Net change (1978-1984)	+1,105	+402	+1,507
% increase	+116.7	+200.0	+131.3

Source: Quarterly Registered Unemployed (accessed on NOMIS)

By November 1983 a campaign was started by members of the Easington Constituency Labour party to save not only the Easington pit, but also those other pits still working within the Easington area. The founders quickly realised that for the campaign to succeed, it would have to be non party political and encompass all organisations within the Easington District. The inaugural meeting took place on 16 December 1983, where the minutes record that the main aim was to:

‘appeal to the whole community for support’.  
(Campaign for Coal Minutes 16.12.83)

This meeting was attended by amongst others Jack Dormand MP, although Tony Blair was unable to attend due to other commitments.

At the meeting on 22 December 1983 the name Save Easington Area Mines (SEAM) was adopted.

This meeting also set out the aim of the SEAM campaign.

- i 'Pits are the centre of our community – they need to be supported'
- ii 'Emphasis [to be] placed on the uncaring attitude of the present government – ignoring the plight of mining communities and the environment. Closure of pits would be the death of our communities'.
- iii 'There was a need to look at our resources and manpower in order to make more effective use of them'.
- iv 'County Durham was being damaged. We need more involvement from the County Council'.
- v 'The NCB did not care either. We had 10,000 jobs in Easington District at the moment with a reduction in manpower of 5.10% annually. It was estimated that 4,000 jobs would be lost over the next five years. We need help to keep pits open; there was no chance of creating a 'one for one' job solution when mining jobs were lost'.

(SEAM Minutes 22.12.83)

The meeting also decided that to stop the closures they would need to:

- i 'pressurise the government'.
- ii 'pressurise the NCB'.
- iii 'go about this by inviting as many organisations as possible to participate'.

(SEAM Minutes 22.12.83)

The campaign received advice from many people, including this from S S Hughes the MEP for Durham to Councillor J S Cummings, leader of Easington District Council. He suggested that a social audit should be prepared showing the impact of job losses at particular levels on the community. His letter states that,

'in drawing up such a report your officers [of Easington District Council] will find it quite easy to arrive at figures for the loss of rates (council tax) revenue. Loss of tax revenue, the burden arriving on the state arising from the payment of unemployment benefits, and the knock

on unemployment effects in the area. This aspect is often only mentioned in passing but it is important that the community is made fully aware of these costs if it is to be drawn fully into the campaign.’

(extract from letter from S S Hughes to Councillor J S Cummings 18.01.84)

His letter goes on to explain how the area needed to overcome the problem of pessimism about jobs if it was to succeed in the campaign.

‘Many miners seem to have accepted the fate of the pits in the Easington area. It is clear that Ian MacGregor plays at psychology in his approach to closures. He picks off pits one by one, area by area, having usually paved the way by convincing the workforce over a period of time that their pit is a loss maker, that reserves the men might have thought worth developing would be uneconomical and that the workforce would be better off accepting either their redundancy or guaranteed transfer to more productive pits with high bonus payment perhaps only a few miles away. We saw it in Consett when, over a period of years the community was convinced that the Steel Works had no future, so when it came to the fight the community took the view that it was a lost cause.’

(Extract from a letter from S S Hughes to Councillor J S Cummings 18.01.84)

The campaign gathered momentum during the first few weeks but, as if acting as a forecast of the inter factual trouble that lay ahead, there were disputes between various parties. Allegations of non support by the Durham Area NUM appeared in the Northern Echo on 25 January 1984. The papers report alleged that

‘three Durham officials Tom Callan, Harold Mitchell and Jimmy Inskip are not showing more support for the campaign.’

(*Northern Echo* 25.01.84)

In their defence Durham Area NUM President Harold Mitchell stated that

‘there was good reason why none of the three had yet been to Easington. We were out somewhere else. We were at meetings and that is why we didn’t show up.’

(*Northern Echo* 25.01.84)

However Alan Barker, Secretary to the SEAM campaign wrote to the paper accusing it of misrepresenting the relationship between SEAM and the Durham

Area NUM.

The first major activity of the campaign was the March and Rally in Easington on 23 February 1984. The principal speaker was to be Neil Kinnock, along with the newly elected NUM Secretary Peter Heathfield and Easington MP Jack Dormand.

The day was a great success, as Alan Barker comments in his Certificate of Industrial Relations thesis,

‘It was a day when the ‘Big Meeting’ came to Easington. Never before had the village or colliery had so much attention. It was the first time a positive response, publicly campaigning for coal had occurred in the Durham coalfield. Durham Area Unions had finally got off their backsides. It caught the imagination of the community, but would it motivate them into action? SEAM campaigners hoped it would.’

(Alan Barker 1985)

The speeches were made at the Miners Welfare Hall and Club in Easington. Neil Kinnock spoke with suitable socialist rhetoric expressing his concern for mining communities and its mining industry. But as the audience began to clap and respond to every point made in the speeches, they were unaware of the storm that was about to break as the miners struck on 12 March 1984.

## CONCLUSION

What this chapter has shown are there are three major points which need to be understood so that the 1984/85 miners’ strike can be put into its historical context. Firstly we have the history and people’s experiences combining to create a myth as to how important the Durham coalfield was in the past. Secondly the history and experience combined with loyalty to one’s own class and mistrust for the upper classes. Thirdly the realisation that the future of the Durham coalfield was in doubt, plus the move to the ‘left’ of the Area NUM gave necessary conditions for a strike.

Though cursory the historical overview identifies communities with a solid labourist leadership that were in many ways set apart from wider patterns of

social change in British society. They were not, at least by the 1980's the archetypal mining community of sociological analysis (see Warwick and Littlejohn 1992). The mining villages of East Durham have changed considerably since World War 2. As with mining villages in Yorkshire there is universal migration and social changes. As Colls (1995) noted the political and industrial institutionalisation of their lifestyle had also changed profoundly.

'Out of the culture our new community is ready to develop and, in the struggle of struggles for living together that are to come, we will need every cultural resources we can muster'.

(Robert Colls 1995 p 26)

The tragedy is that miners themselves underestimated the extent of the change.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANTICIPATION

'Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under conditions of their own choosing.'

(K Marx The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonnapart)

This chapter will look at the beginnings of the strike, the feelings and anticipation felt by the miners and various other groups within the communities. It examines the anxiety felt by some people about the legality of the strike, the question mark hanging over the necessity for a ballot and the expectation of what the strike would entail.

It is important to understand the concerns within the mining communities over the necessity for a strike, especially one held without a national ballot. The greatest concern was over what would happen if the government was allowed to implement its pit closure plan with only token resistance from the mining unions or communities. Given the 'positions' of the main actors it was almost inevitable that some strike action of some sort would take place. What actually happened was that the players from Thatcher to Scargill downwards got sucked into a spiral of events over which they had no definite degree of control, or any firm idea of how events would turn out. Also sucked into this spiral were the lesser players, some of whom gained their 'five minutes of fame', others whose lives were altered for ever by events, and those who, once sucked in, soon wished they could get out as quickly as possible.

These actors came from all groups, from all sections of the community, from the police services, local businessmen, wives and mothers, local council members and Members of Parliament. History lined up the actors, but did not explain to them their role.

Of the two underlying themes, betrayal and legality, betrayal is the easiest to understand in that it was arguably the most frequently used phase in the strike, especially by Arthur Scargill. Yet all groups could justifiably claim to have been betrayed by one or more of the other groups.

For example, my research has shown that many Senior Police Officers felt that their role was being betrayed by the Government in that they were being used to police what developed into an increasingly political strike. For the local 'bobby' policing the strike, there came a sense of betraying those people in the community who he knew to be fighting for their jobs, families, and the very communities themselves. For the community there was a deep felt sense of resentment that the local police to whom they once afforded a measure of respect and trust were arresting people, many of whom were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Sections of the Labour Party, its leaders, and the TUC had cause to feel betrayed because they felt that Scargill was acting without reference to the TUC, or making private deals with other unions behind the TUC's back. They would argue, too, that Scargill's actions were a betrayal of the position many of the unions found themselves in. With a Labour Party whose morale was just starting to recover from an all time low, a Labour Party that was recovering from a humiliating General Election defeat only months previously and with a new and 'untried' leader in Neil Kinnock, the last thing wanted was a strike of this magnitude.

Likewise for the TUC, suffering from falling membership, and attacked by the Conservatives employment legislation, they did not need a miners' strike signalling a return to times of poor industrial relations which would encourage the government to bring in further anti-union legislation.

For many miners, the question of whether or not there should have been a national ballot was an issue which spans both themes; legality and betrayal. Many felt that their Lodge, Area, and National committees had betrayed them by not holding a national ballot over strike action. Indeed

Nottinghamshire and other Midlands pits felt that the whole democratic process of the NUM had been betrayed, 'voted' with their feet, crossed the often violent picket lines and kept working. Andrew Richards (1996) provides a deeper insight into the strike in Nottinghamshire, where he examines the subject from the viewpoint of both striking and non striking miners through the context of class consciousness, the basis and idea of solidarity within the Nottinghamshire coalfield and the problems of union membership.

Conversely many miners loyal to their union at whatever level felt betrayed by those men who kept working, although many would now confess to having some regard for them for sticking up for their principles, crossing hostile picket lines and enduring intimidation in the communities which they lived. However for the militant majority there was no regard and those that worked were scabs, betraying the long history of the miners in their previous dispute with the mine owners.

For the NUM leader, Arthur Scargill, the word 'betrayed' was never far from his lips, or far from the themes of his speeches during the strike. Scargill accused every group of not supporting the NUM. The steelworkers, who with the railwaymen and the miners formed a Triple Alliance going back to the early years of the century, were accused by Scargill as being

'a disgrace to the very concept of the Triple Alliance and all it was supposed to do'  
(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p 139)

He blamed the TUC for failing to instruct union members not to cross picket lines. He blamed the deputies' union NACODS representing those men who ensure the pit is safe for other groups to work in, for not carrying out their threat to strike and finally he blamed Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party for not giving him the total support he thought he deserved. In short, Scargill blamed everyone apart from himself and the miners for their defeat.

## THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONTEXT

The theme of legality is the less obvious theme that runs through the events of the miners' strike. It was much more than just a question of whether the strike was legal or illegal within the eyes of the prevailing industrial relations law, because as early as 15 May 1984 the High Court made a decision that secured in Nottinghamshire the illegality of the strike. Rather it was a question of whether the strike was legal within the view of those groups involved. This conflict of opinion and interests led to considerable ambiguity about where actions related to the strike stood within the letter of the law and the procedure of the criminal justice system.

The background to the legality, or otherwise, of the strike can be found in the employment legislation introduced by the Conservative Government in both their first and second terms in office from 1979-83 and 1983-1989 respectively. This legislation was designed to curb the power of the Trade Unions, initiating the outlawing of secondary picketing.

Under the 1980 Employment Act, employers were given the right to take legal action against secondary picketing and most kinds of secondary action such as 'blacking'. All new 'closed shops' had to be approved by four fifths of those people affected and public funds were to be made available to encourage unions to hold postal ballots. These measures introduced by James Prior the Secretary of State for Employment were somewhat less robust than the Conservative party realised at the time.

More hard hitting were the measures introduced in 1982 by Prior's successor at the Department of Employment, the right wing Norman Tebbit. The 1982 Employment Act laid down that no closed shop should be enforceable unless it had been agreed by an overwhelming majority of the employees concerned in a secret ballot. It provided compensation,

from public funds, to people dismissed from closed shops, and made contracts stipulating union labour only illegal. More importantly trade unions also became liable for damages if they were the cause of unlawful industrial action.

Finally, it gave employers the right to take legal action against parties engaged in industrial disputes where no dispute existed between them and their own employees, or where the action was not wholly or mainly about employment matters. Under this heading came those strikes which could be considered political.

Despite these measures the unions still retained the right and power to picket and the closed shop had not been entirely outlawed.

Jim Prior's 1980 Employment Act repealed most of Labour's pre-union 1975 Employment Protection Act and specifically the right of secondary picketing. Trade Union officials could only attend picket lines of their members at or near their place of work. The role of the picket had been reduced to peacefully passing information on to try and persuade a person not to work. Not surprisingly the NUM at its annual conference in July 1980 voted

‘unanimously to defy Jim Prior’s Employment Act. Scargill warned that “if this woman in Number 10 wants a fight it will be of her own choosing not the miners”.’  
(Routledge 1993 p 103)

When the TUC refused to support the National Graphical Association when their funds were sequestrated, under the legislation introduced by Tebbit, Scargill accused Len Murray and the TUC of

‘the biggest act of betrayal in the history of our movement.’  
(Routledge 1993 p 135)

But Scargill was watching this case with more than academic interest, and when it became clear that the TUC would not support any union

defying employment laws he began plans to move NUM funds into areas where they could not be sequestered.

Although the government action against the trade union movement and, one could argue, especially the miners, was seen as taking revenge for 1974, and secondly reducing union power, there is a third reason, that of attempting to cut expenditure to nationalised industries. Coal, the government argued, should be left to find its own price in the market place.

Arthur Scargill's views were those of the left wing groups within the working class, many of whom considered that many of the laws limiting the powers of trade unions were merely an instrument of the ruling classes, designed to be used when the working classes became or threatened to become too powerful. In view of the above legislation, the most obvious threat to union power was that which made miners' picketing illegal. Ever since the scenes at Saltley Gate in the 1972 miners' strike, where miners' 'flying pickets' led by Scargill, and with the support of ten thousand striking engineering workers, closed the Saltley Gate coke depot in Birmingham and ensured the strike victory, Conservative thinking on industrial disputes had been designed to prevent a recurrence of incidents like that; hence the use of mass picketing had become illegal. However to the NUM leadership, and a majority of striking miners, mass picketing was not considered illegal. What was illegal to them was the use of the police in an increasingly political role by the Establishment.

The way that groups managed the question of legality varied from group to group. For the local Police, the question must be asked if they ever really managed to completely detach themselves from what was happening on their local 'patch'. For Police from outside the area, the task was easier; they could depoliticise the strike and distance themselves from what was going on. After all, it was not their home

ground, and with a bit of luck they would not be coming back to Easington, Murton or anywhere else in County Durham. Many hid behind the facade of 'doing their duty' and for many it was a means to an end: the chance to pay off debts, buy a new car and a promise of a holiday in the sun when it was all over. Some must have been completely taken aback by the reaction of the communities. Police forces, used to some degree of public support, suddenly found there was little or no support for their actions, rather open hostility from people of all ages.

For one Nottinghamshire miner separating duty from what was happening was even more difficult. Police Constable Mick Graham was a NUM member until he joined Nottinghamshire Constabulary in 1974. In the BBC2 series *Coppers* and in the *Times Magazine* he recalled how the pickets used to shout.

'Its about time you got that hat off, put your pit hat on and get over here where you belong.'  
(*Times Magazine* 21 August 1999)

Other groups within the legal process too had to come to terms with this ambiguity. For magistrates it really was about enforcing the law and being seen to be fair. For one prosecuting solicitor it was simply a case of 'doing one's job'. He argued that no matter where, or in what circumstances the offences took place the rule of law had to be obeyed. The circumstances of the strike made no difference to him at all.

For some striking miners, too, there was ambiguity over the legality of the strike, which was managed in different ways. Some left the industry and found other jobs, often in different parts of the country to avoid charges of 'scab' and to escape the intimidation that would surely follow. Some took redundancy, for the older miners a generous package. Adney and Lloyd (1986) quote amounts of £22,000 for a married man aged 50 with 30 years service. Others stayed at home tended their gardens or allotments and watched events on the television news, and refused to get

involved. But for the majority, there was no ambiguity, and no one was going to convince them that the strike, or their actions were illegal. A small minority who because of their fundamental belief in the principle of democracy and the right to work challenged the legality of the strike in the High Court, and won. But even these legal rulings failed to bring to an end the mass picketing, violence and intimidation.

In the communities the majority of people were not concerned about the legality, or otherwise, of their actions. Try telling a family, whose state welfare benefit had been cut, whose only meals came from the Miners' Welfare soup kitchen and under threat of losing their house and having their gas and electricity cut off, that the very action of the husband taking part in a mass picket is illegal. History has made much of the suffering of the miners during almost two centuries of disputes with the mine owners. Miners have a great love of history, and to them the struggles of their forefathers are something to be respected, worshipped almost. Many lived up to their reputation of being in the vanguard of trade union militancy and considered the unofficial strike as being part of their historic duty to stand up for their right much as their fathers and grandfathers had done in previous unofficial disputes.

Nowhere was this love of history more apparent than in the homes of those miners that I interviewed. There was the inevitable 'Davy Lamp', not an imitation but a real one, photographs and paintings of the pit where they had worked and of their 'marras'. Many of these houses seemed to be a shrine to a religion that took place underground and which had now ceased to be worshipped, except in memory.

## THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The possibility of a dispute within the coal industry became more likely after the election of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and the election of Arthur Scargill as President of the

NUM in 1981. Both were politically poles apart, Thatcher spoke of the free market economy, of privatisation of nationalised industries and of less government. Scargill spoke of further subsidies for nationalised industries. For Thatcher pits could be closed on economic grounds, for Scargill the only reason to close a pit was exhaustion, when there was no more coal to mine.

There were two further political decisions, which led to the miners' strike. Firstly the climb down by the government in 1981, and secondly the appointment of Ian MacGregor as Chairman of the National Coal Board in 1983. Both of these two decisions need further explanations to place them in the overall context of the 1984/84 strike.

In 1981 the government decided that it wanted to reduce annual coal production by four million tonnes. The reasons being that the board had around twenty one million tonnes of unsold coal and that its customers' stocks were also high. At a meeting with the NUM the Coal Board Chairman Derrick Ezra estimated that 20 to 50 pits would have to close within five years. The estimated job losses would be around 30,000 with half of this being by natural wastage. The NUM reacted furiously and unofficial strikes started in many areas. The government suddenly found itself in a position it could not win. Even cautious union officials were talking about a 90% majority for strike action. The Steelworkers and Railway workers, partners in the historic 'Triple Alliance' had initiated their support.

The government climbed down. The Ridley Plan, discussed in greater detail on pages 63 and 64, had yet to be implemented fully; indeed the coal stock piling programme at power stations did not commence until June 1981. The Department of Energy had on February 16,

'been forced to look over the abyss and had recoiled'.  
(Thatcher 1993 p140)

The list of pits to be closed was withdrawn. But the climb down was seen in two different ways by two very different people. For Margaret Thatcher the confrontation had only been postponed to a time of her choosing when conditions were more favourable. And for Arthur Scargill a repeat of the confrontation became the catalyst with which he believed he could lead the miners into action against the government.

However, the media saw her climb down as a 'U-turn' and the *Daily Mail* wrote,

'Mr Gormley and the miners have dealt the most damaging blow to her [Mrs Thatcher's] authority that she has suffered in nearly two years of government.'  
(Powell 1993 p216)

But the truth was somewhat different and the humiliation merely resolved the government to settle the miners once and for all, but at a time of its own choosing. As Mick McGahey, NUM Vice President commented

'it was not so much a U turn, more a body swerve.'  
(Milne 1994 p 7)

Of the appointment of Ian MacGregor as Chairman of British Coal Tommy Callan, Secretary of Durham Area NUM said,

'That was a bad day for the coal industry and I felt the worst for the future. And we saw in a very short time that he had plans for all Britain's pits. ... I mean we had pits in Durham staggering along, old mines. But MacGregor went straight for Cortonwood in Yorkshire. A deliberate ploy. ... When they went for Cortonwood it was planned. ... We didn't need a man from America coming here, 71 years old, breaking our traditions that we had cherished since 1948. There were better men surely in our own country that understood and could work with the miners' representatives. We had good relations with the Coal Board, until that Thatcher government came in determined to crush the miners.'  
(Interview with Tommy Callan)

Tommy Callan had the right to be fearful for the future of the coal industry if MacGregor's plans for the National Coal Board (NCB) were the same as he had implemented at British Steel. When MacGregor was appointed Chairman of the British Steel Corporations (BSC) in 1980 what he inherited was an industry which had never recovered from a bitter strike, its traditional customers were obtaining steel from elsewhere and BSC's losses were running at a rate of two million pounds a day. The transformation MacGregor made was amazing. Within a year losses were virtually halved, and sales had increased. But at a cost, Consett Steelworks was closed, and steel making capacity nationally was brought into line with demand. However the price was the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. In this he was fortunate. The unions were badly weakened by the long strike and the previous BSC Chairman Sir Charles Villiers had arranged most of the slimming down process, all MacGregor had to do was implement this. Rumours of MacGregor's appointment as Chairman of the NCB caused Scargill to promise mayhem in the coal industry if he was appointed.

From the election of Arthur Scargill to the overtime ban in October 1983, and through to the start of the strike in March 1984, a 'phoney war' existed between the government and NUM. Nothing seemed to happen except that each side criticised the other and the leaders continually stated their positions.

The rhetoric increased, and when there were unofficial strikes in South Wales in 1981 Scargill said,

'Mrs Thatcher has been out to get the miners since 1972 and 1974. If she throws down the gauntlet, I can assure her of one thing we will pick it up.'

(Routledge 1993 p103)

After the 1983 General Election victory by the Conservatives the rhetoric continued. Scargill argued that the election result was 'undemocratic'

since it was achieved from a minority of the electorate. While Hugo Young described it as being, for Arthur Scargill,

‘the worst national disaster for a 100 years.’  
(Young 1989 p367)

However not all agreed with Scargill’s ideas, his threat of extra parliamentary action was dismissed by the General Secretary of the TUC, Len Murray, as daft.

But if Scargill was looking forward to a confrontation with the government, then the government was not exactly running scared from Scargill. There was to be no repeat of the ‘body swerve’ of 1981, the government was better prepared. When Margaret Thatcher was appointed leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 she appointed Lord Carrington to head an investigation into why the Heath government had been brought down by the miners. What emerged was a document, by a group of Conservative backbenchers, chaired by Nicholas Ridley, then a right-wing backbencher. It was leaked to the *‘Economist’* and appeared as its lead story on 27 May 1978, and when it appeared Ridley himself saw it as being likened to a

‘direct attack on the poor downtrodden miners’  
(Ridley 1991 p67)

The ‘Ridley Plan’, as it came to be known, argued that five major conditions would need to be met before the government could confidently ‘take on’ the miners in a major industrial battle.

Firstly stockpiles of coal had to be built up and sources of coal available for import needed to be identified. Secondly a minimum of one year’s supply of coal to be stockpiled at all coal-burning power stations. Thirdly haulage firms should be encouraged to employ non-union drivers to help move coal when necessary. Fourthly, the police should be organised on a special mobile basis to meet the challenge of ‘flying pickets’. Finally,

and what was possibly the greatest deterrent to any strike, the withdrawal of social security benefits from striking families. In short, cut off the money to the strikers and make the union provide financial support.

Ridley's view was that, while a strike would attempt to give an appearance of industrial action it would in fact be,

'a political attempt to humiliate and perhaps destroy the Government outside the Parliamentary process.'  
(Routledge 1993 p129)

There is a question over whether the contents of the Ridley Plan were understood by the leadership of the NUM, the TUC, or the Labour Party. Published over 5 years before the strike started, there was plenty of time for those groups to digest its contents and to make their own plans to combat the governments 'blueprint' for victory. This failure to produce a 'counter-plan' raises the argument that the Trade Union movement and the Labour Party were unprepared for the events of 1984. Scargill believed he could get backing from the Labour Party and the TUC because he thought that they fully understood the government's play to run down the British coal industry and even if the TUC would not call for an all out General Strike then certain unions such as those of the Triple Alliance and the powerworkers would give enough support to ensure victory.

So the stage was set, all it needed was a trigger point, and this turned out to be the proposed closure of a pit in Scargill's 'back yard', Cortonwood.

The proposed closure of Cortonwood was either an economic decision, as the Coal Board would argue, a tool to get Arthur Scargill to call a strike, or an incident which gave Scargill the excuse he needed to call a strike.

## THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In Durham the call for a strike was received in different ways by different groups. Even the different mining unions had different views over the way the strike was called.

The different mining unions were organised to manage their relationships with the same employer but they approached the task in different ways. These differences became crucial during the strike and afterwards, leading to real divisions and conflict. Moreover, there were different political factions within the different unions which affected how the events of the strike were interpreted. Debate about ballots have to be understood against this complexity.

At Easington the NUM Lodge met on 10 March 1984 and decided to recommend to the men that the Lodge

‘Support the NEC resolution and Special Conference decision, and we strike from Sunday night 11 March 1984 in support of Herrington and Sacriston collieries, and any other Durham pit threatened with closure.’  
(Extract from Minutes of Easington NUM Lodge)

However while the Easington men supported this they also requested a second motion that,

‘We seek a coalfield conference to request our Area to instruct the NEC to call a National Ballot on the issue of pit closures.’  
(Extract from Minutes of Easington NUM Lodge)

This feeling of unease and uncertainty over the legality of a strike without a ballot continued at the Lodge meeting on 13 March, the minutes record that,

‘we re-confirm the decision taken at the special coalfield conference on Friday 9 March, and we again urge a National Ballot to be held on this issue of pit closures.’  
(Extract from Easington Lodge Minutes)

If the Easington NUM members were uneasy about a strike the reactions to the strike call from other mining unions varied, as did the response from various NUM members. For Billy Stobbs, Chairman of NUM's Easington Lodge

'It was hard to tell how one felt, I knew that when we came out that it was going to be a long hard battle with the Tory government .... I don't think any of the NUM wanted to come out on strike to save our jobs but it was something we had to do'  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

For Tommy Callan, the Durham Area NUM's leader the strike was

'Necessary, totally necessary, because MacGregor, a 71 year old from America came over here with plans to shut pits'  
(Interview with Tommy Callan)

The reactions of some of the ordinary NUM members that I interviewed were that they were against the strike. Mick Brown, a miner from Dawdon, when he heard there was going to be a strike,

'[I] wasn't very happy. I mean Dawdon colliery when we heard we had a meeting and we voted to go to work, to carry on working, but we were picketed out. So we had no say in the matter.

The vast majority of the men wanted to carry on working. The only way we would have come out on strike was if we had held a ballot, you know a National Ballot. But we had no choice in the matter.'  
(Interview with Mick Brown)

What needs to be understood is that the status of the miner had dramatically altered, for the better, since the last great strike of 1926. True they will still regard themselves as working class and took pride in that fact but there was a now larger degree of affluence and materialism within their lives. Many were homeowners; many had working wives reflecting the changing position of women in mining communities since 1926. No longer were the wives of miners prepared to stay at home in order to look after their husbands many had their own jobs and careers which they had before and were continuing to pursue after marriage.

Since 1945, and mainly because of the Second World War, women's place in British Society had changed, although by 1961 while women numbered 32.4% of the employed workforce the presence of women in public life, the law, and the Civil Service was a limited one.

The presence of women in full time or part time employment affected those numbers involved in the Women's Support Groups that were formed during the strike. Because striking miners were receiving little or no money the role of provider fell more on these women because some husbands wanted little or nothing to do with the strike. For many working women it was the defence of their lifestyle rather than the community, which was the more important factor during the strike.

David Temple of the Durham Mechanics Lodge at Murton when asked how he felt personally about the strike, replied

'I was elated. We were going to take a stand. I had worked hard for it [the strike] over a period of time.'  
(Interview with David Temple)

I asked him if he thought there should have been a ballot.

'I was opposed to a ballot, because I thought a ballot was inherently undemocratic. It was an enormous contradiction in terms. In fact if you have a ballot under normal circumstances everybody votes their legal vote, everybody's voted for the same thing, you have either voted for Mr A to get in or Mr B to get in or Mr C to get in. If I was to say to you if you vote for Mr A I will give you £100, if you vote for Mr B you get nothing, and if you vote for Mr C you have to pay me £100 and that's the rules of the game. And in these circumstances it was exactly that. A man who was 50 was going to get a lot of money thousands and thousands of pounds. A man who was 21 was going to get nothing. And a man who was in a what could be considered as a safe pit was going to keep his job; a man who was in an unsafe pit was going to lose his job. So it was equal, it was a level playing field. There was a lot argued that it should be done on a more democratic process. I was opposed to a ballot me.'  
(Interview with David Temple)

This is clearly the voice of a militant, but it cannot simply be dismissed for that. David Temple is here revealing the complexity over the issue of

the ballot. The formal position in law seems at first obvious : a ballot was needed and justifiable. When the law is set against the substantive context of history and labour relations, its obvious rational becomes much less clear and contested.

Fred Grievess, also in the Durham Mechanics Union but a member of the Lodge at Dawdon, felt the opposite to David Temple.

‘It was terrible, I mean we didn’t get a vote for it at the time. Scargill held a strike without a ballot and some of my work mates didn’t come out on strike at all’

(Interview with Fred Grievess)

I asked him about the lack of a National Ballot and whether the NUM should have called for a strike ballot,

‘Yes I think so, and I think it would have been against him .... But if the vote had have been ‘yes’ then the government would have had to negotiate with him [Scargill] because we would have backed him’

(Interview with Fred Grievess)

The Durham Enginemen Association members were also unhappy about the lack of a ballot, and Jimmy Mouter from Eppleton pit thought that there was a political dimension to this strike. I asked him how he felt about the strike.

‘Wasn’t very pleased, the previous strike in 1974 we won, but the majority of the lads thought this was political. And I wasn’t very happy about it.’

(Interview with Jimmy Mouter)

He too felt strongly about the lack of a ballot,

‘The majority of the lads thought that if there had been a ballot the strike would have been over by June, possibly July at the latest. ... If Scargill had have said ‘right there’s your ballot’ we would have abided by the decision. Because, the way the lads were talking it would have

been everybody out. The way it was there were about four or five unions and everyone had a different policy.’

(Interview with Jimmy Mouter)

The Deputies' Unions NACODS, who as events unfolded during the Summer of 1984, could have brought the government to the negotiating table by their own strike action also had strong views about the strike, and the lack of a ballot. They were also convinced that when Scargill was elected NUM President there was going to be a battle with the Government. I put the question of whether there would be a strike to Joe Mouter a Deputy at Herrington. His reply was straight to the point.

'Certainly. ... But I thought he was shoved into a corner where he couldn't really sort of get out of it. ... When the NUM had a strike it always started in November. The cold weather. But to have a strike in March was unheard of.'

(Interview with Joe Mouter)

I put the same question to Joe Benham a member of NACODS NEC at the time of the strike. His reply is critical of Scargill as NUM leader.

'From the very moment he was elected President there was a different atmosphere. Indeed there was a different attitude in the run up to the election. ... In my opinion the mining industry was doomed when Arthur Scargill became NUM President. It was doomed, we could never win.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

Ronnie Dixon a Deputy at Murton also had little time for Scargill and his tactics especially over the ballot, or lack of one.

'He [Scargill] jumped the gun. But he's another leader that would not take any notice of the voices of the miners. He was a boss Arthur Scargill; he was a dictator, that was the top and bottom of it.'

There would have been a 'Yes' vote, yes. There would definitely have been a 'Yes' vote. But it would have been legal then you see. I mean, they took it to the law courts during the strike and made it illegal, the whole strike was illegal at the finish wasn't it. But if he had that vote he would have gotten a 'Yes' vote and it would have been classed as a legal strike.'

(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

I asked Joe Mouter how he felt when he knew there was going to be a

strike especially as he had one brother who was also a Deputy and one who was in the NUM and a fourth brother Jimmy (who I have also interviewed) who was an Enginemen.

'I knew there was going to be bother, not with me personally like, but I knew there would be bother with some of the lads. ... I never really had any hassle, just at the pit when they used to scream at you. But then again you were in a car going through the picket lines, and all the police were there. If the police hadn't have been there we wouldn't have got in. No way.'

(Interview with Joe Mouter)

I asked him if he discussed the fact that he was working with his two brothers that were on strike.

'No it was never really discussed. I was a Deputy and my union said we had to go to work. That's all there was to it. And Charlie the other brother who was a Deputy was the same; he was going to work. He had to report for work. It was as simple as that.'

(Interview with Joe Mouter)

I put the question to Joe Benham about how he felt when he knew there was going to be a strike.

'As a union we were very upset about it all. ... There was no way we wanted to see a strike, we were worried the pits would close forever, because Scargill had no intention of putting safetymen into the pit and, bear in mind, the Deputies role by law is that he is there to safeguard the people that work there.

Personally I was extremely upset. It was one of the most unpleasant times in my life. It was devastating to say the least.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

When the announcement over pit closures was made on 6 March 1984, the NCB's refusal to state which pits were to shut was a psychological mistake. The NCB created a situation in which all vulnerable pits in every area prepared for the worst; attitudes hardened, especially among the militants, and men and communities mentally at least prepared themselves for some form of action.

Had the NCB named those pits that were to shut then the situation would have been clearer, and those areas who had no pits affected by the closures may have followed Nottinghamshire's eventual example and refused to come out on strike. This situation could have failed to have the desired effect on the government whose plan was, arguably, to cause a widespread strike at a time of their choosing, preferably the spring which was the wrong time for the NUM.

If the miners were surprised that the strike lasted so long as it did, so too were other groups. I asked Neil Stephenson, a Police constable with Durham Police at the time of the strike – and still with the force – if he thought Durham Constabulary was prepared for the strike.

'No definitely not. I don't think anybody anticipated it would go on that long and I think they really hadn't really expected it to take place in Durham at all. I don't know why they thought that because Durham is a mining area, but no, very badly organised from our side.

I mean we had no protective clothing. I think they just brought in helmets that had an extra layer of protection in them. Not a riot helmet but just an ordinary day to day police helmet.'  
(Interview with Neil Stephenson)

His sentiments were echoed by Stan Davidson again who was, and still is, a Police Constable with Durham Constabulary.

'We were short of everything. Today the police on the PSU's [Police Support Units] are issued with a NATO helmet. A lot of lads only had their ordinary helmets with the straps under the chin. I had a NATO helmet, as I was the driver of the First Aid [Police] Officers, but it had no fire retardant liner, and I carried the old fashioned Army first aid satchel bag which had a red cross on it.

Some of the lads had long shields, but none had shin guards, thigh guards or armour whatsoever.'  
(Interview with Stan Davidson)

Another Police Constable, Gary Stanger, also considered the Durham Police to be poorly equipped and trained, but had a good idea over what the best weapon was that the police had in their armoury.

'We had the pointed hat, ... we had a box, an ordinary cricket box. We had ordinary gloves. We had our truncheons, we had our handcuffs and that was it. As it went on we were given shields and they actually brought out some of the riot gear. We did riot training maybe once every three months. And when we tried to put it into effect, it was ineffective. You had 20 to 30 coppers against 200 to 300 miners. It didn't work. The best equipment we turned out with was your rapport and your ability to communicate with them.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

With the strike of 1972 and 1974 still fresh in the minds of the miners, the communities and their inhabitants, it was clear that comparisons between those two disputes and the one that was just starting would be made. However the fundamental difference between them was that the disputes of 1972 and 1974 were about wages and conditions, whereas the 1984/85 dispute was about the future of the British Coal Industry and the communities that the pits dominated.

The 1972 strike was about wages, conditions, and restoring miners to the top of the wages league from the lowly position of seventeenth to which they had slipped during the 1960s. Although the majority for strike action was only just over the required 55%, the strike was solid from day one. All 289 pits were idle, all 280,000 miners struck to a man. No pits needed picketing, so the miners were free to engage in secondary picketing elsewhere.

This strike made Arthur Scargill a national figure. When the dispute started few people outside of his native Yorkshire had heard of him, yet, when the strike finished after a little more than six weeks, he had become the man credited with inventing the 'flying pickets', the technique of mass picketing and whose name would become synonymous with militancy. But all of this was achieved through one action, the picketing of Saltley Gate Coke Depot, which forced the Police to close it and prevented coke being collected and distributed to industry.

By the time of the 1974 dispute Scargill had been elected as President of the NUM in Yorkshire, by an overwhelming majority. The strike itself

lasted just four weeks and ended two days after Ted Heath failed to form a coalition with Liberals and Harold Wilson entered 10 Downing Street. Credited with bringing down the Heath government miners leader Joe Gormley responded to that allegation by saying,

‘It was a strike that should never have happened. As far as we were concerned it was not a political strike but an industrial one. It was not the miners but Ted Heath who brought himself down. He didn’t need to call a General Election.’  
(Routledge 1993 p 95)

Many of those that I interviewed, both miners and from other groups such as the police were also drawing parallels to the two disputes in the 1970s.

Bill Brennan, then a Police Sergeant, in 1974, recalls that,

‘I thought it would be violent particularly after 1972 ... I was working at Easington at the time. I was a Police Constable down there, and we were getting the Deputies out at night. The entrance was, as it was during the 1984/85 strike, there was about 300 miners standing about the entrance, all packed tightly together. We were taking the Deputies out a few at a time; we literally had to push our way through. As we were taking them through they were trying to get the Deputies, but of course they were between us, and we were getting kicked. When I got back my legs were black and blue. ... We learned from our mistakes and had more police down there and therefore not the same amount of violence. The pickets, they also seemed to take more notice of the Police then, not like the 1984/85 dispute.’  
(Interview with Bill Brennan)

Peter Griffiths, a Durham constabulary police inspector at the time of the strike, and now retired, recalls that

‘Yes, I took part in the first miners’ strike. I was on the picket line at Wingate. It was a really mild affair compared to the miners’ strike of 1984/85.’  
(Interview with Peter Griffiths)

Police Constable Stan Davidson believed that Scargill

‘thought that he could do in 1984 what they [the miners] had done in 1972 and 1974 when they brought the government down’.  
(Interview with Stan Davidson)

Joe Benham who in 1972 was the Area President of NACODS recalls that,

'the issues in 1972 was about wages and NACODS was quite happy with their deal with the Coal Board. We had a ballot; the members accepted the wages. The NUM also had a ballot didn't accept the wages and consequently went on strike. I can remember Scargill coming down to my pit Westerhope, leading his flying pickets. He chose to come to my pit so that if he could get the Deputies at Westerhope out, he could then get the rest of the Deputies out at the other collieries. And that is why we weren't on strike in 1972.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

I asked him about the difference between 1972 and 1974.

'Well the 1974 strike was much like the 1972 strike. We agreed to accept the wages after a ballot and so it was pointless for us to ask our members to strike, just because 'big brother' had disagreed with their wages.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

Of the ordinary miners David Aston, from Easington thought that,

'in 1972 and 1974 we had more public sympathy. I think bringing down the Heath government made people less sympathetic to us in 1984. But 1972 and 1974 were about wages 1984 was about jobs.'

(Interview with David Aston)

Ronnie Dixon, who was a Deputy at Murton in 1984, but who was a NUM member in both the 1972 and 1974 strikes remembers that,

'there wasn't the violence in those two strikes. We were all mates and the strikes were treated very light heartedly.'

(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

Fred Grieves, a member of the Mechanics Union from Dawdon, gave his opinion on the difference between the strike of 1972 and 1974 and that of 1984/85.

‘The last strike Maggie Thatcher was in charge. I mean she was a hard woman, she would never go back on her word. She was out to break the miners, and she did. I mean Heath he was a more placid man, not that woman. ... Oh yes. She had it in for us. We brought the Conservative Government down before that and she had it in for us. She wasn’t going to be beat. ... It was just a question of time, she knew it was a question of time. She dug her heels in. I mean like, we were nearly back to the 1930s after nine or ten months.’  
(Interview with Fred Grieves)

This question is an example of how individuals personalised the strike. Throughout the course of my research I found a number of phrases ran through what I was being told. For example ‘Thatcher was out to get us’, ‘It was like the Depression again’, ‘It was a police state, all the police were out to get us, and ‘The government would have brought the country to its knees rather than give in’. These phrases owe much to the historical imaging of how previous disputes were perceived and it was as though this dispute had a set of criteria governing hardship that had to be lived up to.

People from the local communities also drew comparisons about the strikes. The Reverend Tony Hodgeson, vicar of Easington, thought that the timing of the strike was part of the government’s plans to trap the NUM.

‘and Scargill walked into it. It was a government trap. ... They had really planned, laid down such things like a heavily manned police force, ... they used scab lorry drivers – and I’m sorry to use such language but I can’t help it – to transport coal. It was never going to be a rerun of 1974. No quite frankly we were ambushed by the government.’  
(Interview with The Reverend Hodgeson)

He continued to talk about the differences, especially regarding policing.

‘The miners talked about how there was a better attitude from the police. I mean they were playing football matches in 1974. It was said that the police and the miners had always had a good relationship in the mining communities and the pit strike ruined that.’  
(Interview with Reverend Hodgeson)

Putting aside the questions of violence, policing and the use of 'flying pickets', the basic difference between those short sharp strikes of the 1970s and the long drawn out battle of 1984/85 was that in 1972 and 1974 the communities themselves did not feel threatened, and there was no need for the huge welfare exercise that took place in 1984/85. The Labour Party and the remainder of the trade union movement were more strongly aligned with the miners, although with the effects of power cuts and the three day week, it was arguable if there was the degree of public support that some groups would argue they had.

Despite this prevailing perception of state preparedness for action and that the strike was at a time of the government's choosing, the police forces in mining areas did not see themselves as ready to take on the miners. Peter Griffiths also admitted that Durham police were unprepared, but offered this explanation.

'They [Durham Police] followed a National Training Package for Public Disorder. So we had trained Police Support Units, fully equipped, we had vehicles, but we probably did not have the right equipment. But we were trained to levels 3 and 2. Level 1 training would be given to say the type of officer working in Brixton or Toxteth. We don't have those sort of places in County Durham, and I think preparation for the miners' strike was limited because we are a quiet county in that respect.'

(Interview with Peter Griffiths)

A now retired Sergeant with Durham Constabulary, at the time of the strike explained about contingency plans.

'Well there would be contingency plans but at my level, where I was at the time we did not have access to any plans. They would be held at HQ. Certainly locally there were none.'

(Interview with Bill Brennan)

If the miners themselves and the police seemed, in their own way, to be ill prepared for a strike how did the communities feel, had they made any preparations over the idea of a strike turning into a reality?

The SEAM campaign turned its focus from being reactive to proactive, because here was the very threat that they had been campaigning about. The minutes of SEAM meeting held on 4 April 1984 record that

‘It was agreed we explore ways and means of helping miners families during the current strike. Hardship could be shared by:-

- a) Appealing to other working communities for assistance
- b) Collecting tin food
- c) Setting up a relief centre
- d) Distribution of news bulletins
- e) Workers in other industries – ie electricity workers and gas, should be contacted and assurances sought that essential supplies would not be disconnected from striking miners homes.

It was generally felt that miners should not be starved back to work.’

(Extract from SEAM minutes 4 April 1984)

It should not be seen as strange that the question of the miners’ ‘being starved back to work’ was raised so quickly... This has been almost a traditional way of mine owners bringing a strike to an end throughout the history of the Durham coalfield. The soup kitchen was a strong memory of the older generations when the events of the 1921 lock-out, the 1926 General Strike and lock-out were discussed. Then as in 1984 local tradesmen, the church and other organisations donated foodstuffs and other necessities. There must have been some businesses whose father and grandfathers had donated goods in the past and whose children were carrying out the same charitable work. SEAM’s response to this historic threat was to set up the Easington Relief Café. It was set up in order to provide at least one hot meal a day for striking miners and their families. By 23 May 13 Relief Cafes were operating in areas defined by local Government ward. The Relief Cafes raised their own money locally and were helped out in cases of financial difficulty from SEAM’s central funds.

The success of these modern day soup kitchens could only be achieved with the help of local shopkeepers and traders. The minutes of the SEAM meeting on 23 April 1984 record that,

'Members expressed their gratitude to the Miners' Welfare Club and to the Chamber of Trade members who were donating cash and foodstuff, as well as doing some cooking.'

(Extract from SEAM minutes 25 April 1984)

However the SEAM campaign was not the only one to support the miners once the strike started. In June 1984 a fund was started to help miners who were in great need. The foundation of this fund was a donation of £100 from a Quaker, sent to help miners families. The fund, known as the NIM Hardship Fund, rules stated that financial help could only be given to families on the recommendations of a clergyman or minister, or someone of standing within the community. The initial donation was followed by further donations mainly because of a letter from the original Quaker appeared in '*The Friend*' stating that Stephen Kendall, then Industrial Chaplain in the North East Coalfield, would be happy to accept donations. The first donations of £50 were made to the number of centres set up to provide meals for the striking miners.

As we have seen, there was considerable disarray amongst the miners union. Many unions resented the lack of a National Ballot and even members of the NUM felt that the strike had lost some of its credibility because, nationally they had not been given the chance to vote, Alan Cummings, Secretary of the NUM's Easington Lodge gave a very full and clear picture of how he sensed the mood at Easington.

His first comments clarify well the tensions within the Easington NUM over the ballot question:

'Well we had a big meeting; a special meeting at the Welfare Hall on the Saturday morning to make sure it was well attended. Maybe about 1,800 members in our own branch at Easington at the time which excluded the mechanics and engine men and other NUM groups. So the meeting was packed. There was a lot of apprehension in the pit before the meeting and the sort of mood I got was that a lot of people weren't in favour of a strike. Also the rumours were that there was not going to be a National secret ballot which had been normal in our industry since time immemorial. Any major issue had always been done with a secret

ballot. And there was talk of people in the Union trying to circumvent procedure. So all the guys were talking before the meeting started, Bill Stobbs gave a run down on what was happening nationally. British coal had announced five colliery closures, indeed, two in this area, which was Sacriston and Herrington at the time, only small pits but it was the sort of stepping stone that British Coal would close these and come back for more. That wouldn't be the end of it.

He went on to explain that there were disagreement's among older and younger miners to accommodate.

I gave a run down on what could happen at our pit, we'd been losing money and trying to frame the meeting that way because the work force at the pit was very young. You were talking about a majority of the work force in their early or mid 30s, a lot to lose. But as the meeting went on there was one or two of the older people there saying, look what have we got to loose by having a ballot, we understand the threat to the industry, to our colliery, why aren't we having a national ballot? So obviously it was going to be hard to get a vote through there, to go on strike under Rule 41. Under National Rule 41, pits could go out on strike as long as they had the authority of the Area and the National Union to do that. And that's the way the strike was going to be organised.

He then explains how these disagreements were temporarily resolved with a compromise.

So the motion that was put at the end was that we would take strike action, we would go on strike from the following Sunday night at 11 o'clock, the first shift that was due in on the clear proviso that we would be asking for a National Ballot to be held on that issue. That was the only way that vote was carried.'  
(Interview with Alan Cummings)

I asked him how he felt about Peter Heathfield stating that the union were not going to be 'constitutionalised' out of a strike, and that areas that were relatively safe should not vote against a strike when there were areas that were under threat.

'I can see where that argument was coming from. If you were voting for a wage issue, the wage issue effected everybody nationally, because we had a national wage structure. Feeling was that in some areas, ie Selby, parts of the National Coal Field, they had a young industry virtually, they had pits that might have been saved, and them should have a vote. But I think traditionally, even at that time, I still didn't feel that it was right in my mind that we were going to fetch the men out on

strike without a secret ballot vote. Because it had always been done, I mean we elect our officials locally, area, and nationally before we changed there had always been a secret ballot vote. Always a high turnout by a virtual captive voice from the pit. It was traditional and it was the right kind of democracy and everybody had been brought through that in the industry and we took pride in it, every issue was on a ballot vote. And that was always going to be a stumbling block because areas like Notts area had already held a area vote and decided not to come out on strike, under Rule 41.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

I asked why the NUM members at Easington who were against the strike, or against the thought of a strike without a ballot, didn't continue to work and defy the strike call.

'My thought is that Easington Colliery in particular the miners leaders have always had a name for being a militant pit, well before our Secretary, it traditionally was a militant Colliery as such, and it was well re-knowned for people taking action in the pit, walking off face etc with disputes. And I think that had a lot to do with the walkout that day. I mean there's people voted at the special meeting for strike action, and at the time I was proud because it was the argument of the lodge officials to take strike action, under Rule 41, and they came out, out to a man and there was never a problem after that certainly after the first few weeks. My personal opinion was I don't think we would have carried the strike vote, in a secret pithead vote, had there been a ballot in the first two weeks of the strike. I don't think they would have carried one nationally, but certainly I would think that they would have carried the vote maybe in April when they had been out on strike for over a month. There's no question about that. But that has always been a Achilles' heel as far as the Union was concerned.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

The question of a ballot and whether or not one should have been held, tends to depend on your position within the NUM, your political perspective, or if one belonged to another union within the mining industry. As we have seen for some Durham Area NUM Officials the strike was inevitable, some rank and file NUM members would argue that there should have been a ballot. Members in other unions, as we have seen were less than enthusiastic about being picketed out, in a dispute that was not of their making. Set against the circumstances of the industry, the anxiety of key groups of whether, the prevailing sense of a threat to the communities and the politics of the NUM, it is clear that the issue of a ballot is not a formal technical question of legality but a political issue of

real substance and passion. The rules of normal industrial relations were overtaken by the force of a political ideology.

I questioned Ray Pye of the Colliery Officials and Staff Association (COSA) if there should have been a ballot,

‘Yes certainly. If they had had a ballot at the beginning they would certainly have carried it. I think they would have carried a ballot up until September ...

All the union said there should have been a ballot. I can only speak from experience about my own colliery Dawdon, and we said we were not coming out, we want a ballot. We were assured by an NEC member Billy Stobbs from Easington that he would get the Executive to order a National Ballot. And it was on this understanding that we would come out on strike. Until that was done we had no sympathy, but we were actually picketed out three days into the strike, it was on the Wednesday night by [miners from] Wearmouth and Westhoe.’

(Interview with Ray Pye)

Billy Stobbs still did not think there should have been a ballot when I interviewed him 13 years after the strike. But, with the benefit of hindsight he qualified his answers.

‘Looking back now one could say yes we should have. But when you look back at what the strike was for, it wasn’t for money, it wasn’t for wages, it wasn’t for conditions it was to save our jobs. Easington pit could have gone on, and it did go on, it was second off last pit to close in Durham, so we were fairly safe. But I think we felt for the rest of the area. And that’s one of the reasons why Easington came out on strike first. Our communities. And I think everybody knew that.’

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Certainly the answer to the question of would Durham have voted for strike action had there have been a ballot is unclear. But with Durham’s reputation for obeying the NUM’s instruction there is a strong possibility that Durham would have voted ‘Yes’. As we have seen other unions were also confident that the NUM would have obtained a ‘Yes’ vote, in some cases their members being more confident as to the result than some local NUM members.

## THE STRIKE IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

The lack of a ballot resulted in the Nottinghamshire Area NUM continuing to work in defiance of the strike call for the duration of the strike. Nottinghamshire's refusal to strike did much to undermine the NUM credibility. The Labour movement, when asked for support, could reply, 'why should we support you when you cannot get a large number of your members out on strike?' There was also the fact that a number of power stations had been built close to the Nottinghamshire coalfield and, providing the coal could be moved to those power stations, their electricity could continue to be generated and power supplies maintained. A psychological advantage to the NCB and the government.

The question of a ballot became a very emotive issue for the Nottinghamshire miners and their leaders. Henry Richardson, NUM area General Secretary, argued that with 20,000 of the 27,000 men working, it showed that the Nottinghamshire miners were not going to do anything without a ballot. He added that those on strike were achieving nothing and getting nothing out of the strike. The Nottinghamshire area President, Ray Chadburn announced that many of the 20,000 men who were working wanted to get out of the union. He argues that,

[he did not] want Spencerism, but the men want a ballot.'  
(Ottey 1985 pp 104-105)

Henry Richardson, who initially was a Scargill loyalist, complained that he had been verbally abused by working miners lobbying his office. He argued that miners from outside the area calling Nottinghamshire miners 'scabs' would not help; he had been called a scab by working Nottinghamshire miners. He warned other areas that,

'if Notts are 'scabs' before we start, Notts will become 'scabs''.  
(Routledge 1993 p 144)

The second reason for the Nottinghamshire miners' refusal to obey the strike call was the action of the 'flying pickets' from Yorkshire. These men were mostly from the always militant Doncaster branches like Hatfield Main and Armthorpe. The tactics of the 'flying pickets' in 1984 followed their strategy of the 1970's, only this time their targets were not coking plants, docks of powerstations, but fellow miners.

The first target of the flying pickets was the village of Harworth. Violence also took place in Ollerton where a 24 year old picket from Yorkshire, David Jones was killed, and Cresswell. Far from preventing miners going to work, the actions of the flying pickets hardened many Nottinghamshire miners' attitudes and made them more determined to defy the 'Yorkshire mob' and continue working. Although the flying pickets had some success, Harworth colliery was closed for a week and Shirebrook was closed until July, it soon became clear to the leaders of the Nottinghamshire miners that unless there was a ballot, and a 'yes' vote for a strike, then their members would continue to work.

The President of the Yorkshire miners, Jack Taylor, was warned by Henry Richardson, to,

'get your men off the Notts mens' back. ... You cannot win a strike if you haven't got the men with you. You cannot force them out.'  
(Wilshire, Macintyre & Jones 1985 p 57-58)

Taylor's reply was if Nottinghamshire voted for a ballot then the pickets would be back to change their minds. Richardson's response to that threat was that the violence in Cresswell where a thousand Yorkshire miners had gone on the rampage had lost all the support he had for the strike in one hour.

#### THE LENGTH OF THE STRIKE – HOW LONG?

If there was uncertainty about a ballot, the question over how long the strike would last also brought a variety of answers, again depending on

which perspective the strike was being viewed from. I asked Alan Cummings if he thought that the strike would last as long as it did,

‘I didn’t think that the strike would last as long as it did when we first came out on strike. But certainly by, I would say July and reading comments in the newspapers, I think it was the *Observer* that quoted Mrs Thatcher as saying ‘No victory for Scargill’. I knew then there was no way Thatcher was going to back down. I knew it was going to be a long strike in the end, because we’d been out since March.’  
(Interview with Alan Cummings)

I put the same question to Billy Stobbs.

‘Well no I didn’t, no, no I thought maybe three or four months at the most, never a year. ... I knew that the strike wouldn’t cave in, from the history of the NUM. I thought with the help of other organisations, which you have to have, I thought the Government would have given a little bit, because at that time they were not that popular.’  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Other NUM members were equally certain that the strike would not last as long as it did.

‘Oh well when we first came out nobody could visualise that it was going to be as long. Well everybody came out in high spirits, we’d sharp get it over with, going off the 70’s strikes which only lasted about six weeks, I pictured six to eight weeks at the most.’  
(Interview with Jimmy Patterson)

Members of the other unions were equally convinced that the strike would not last as long. I put the question to Ronnie Dixon of the Deputies Union (NACODS) at Murton.

‘Nobody did, no. I definitely thought the Government would give in. The longest strike that had been on before had been about six weeks. I didn’t think the miners could last out that long. I didn’t know the NUM were financially sufficient to uphold all the extra outlay that they had for the strike.’  
(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

A miner’s wife whose husband worked at Easington and who did not wish to be identified remembers the first few days of the strike.

'I was very apprehensive when the strike started. I mean you didn't know what would happen, but we made our decision, there was no turning back.'

'One of the first things I did was fill out the Social Security forms and send them off. They came back, "you're not entitled to any benefit you'll get strike pay". But we got nothing from the NUM.'

'But I was glad when it started. There was a feeling of elation, that we would win. I didn't think it would last a year, that would have been a very silly thing to say.'

Arguably the theory that the vast majority of miners were not at work because of 'bully boy' tactics is too simplistic. It fails to take into account, or even try to understand, factors such as working class solidarity, the fear of the pit closing, the fear of joining the ever increasing ranks of the unemployed and what it means to miners to cross a picket line, to become the lowest of low a 'scab' or 'blackleg'. Mining communities and the interrelationships within them revolve around words like tradition, class and loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

There was no definitive answer to the question 'why are you on strike?' When asked the question answers varied from 'this is a class war', through 'I want to save my job' – and variations on that theme such as communities and jobs for future generations – to 'I don't dare go in'. This last answer or, again variations on it, was one of the great weaknesses of the strike.

From the NUM's prospective and that of the majority of striking miners the strike started over a decision to close five uneconomic pits and developed into a dispute about the future of the British coal industry, the pits and the communities. While from the government's and NCB's perspective, it became a dispute over curbing the power of the Trade Union movement so that it would not hinder its policies to introduce a free market economy into Britain.

The stakes were high for each group involved. None could foresee how the events of the strike would unfold or how the interpretation of these events – by miners, the Coal Board and the government – would change. It is clear, however, that the key actors in the dispute showed from the beginning the stakes were high and that the outcomes for whoever lost would be serious. This is a feature of the dispute that renders it unique in the politics of British industrial relations.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE ACTIONS OF THE POLICE DURING THE 1984/85 MINERS' STRIKE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of the police and their tactics during the strike. In this chapter the account focuses directly on events and issues that can be conceptually grasped within the overall theme of legality that is so crucial to this study. This chapter is divided into six sections.

- Violent strikes and historical memory
- The politics of policing the miners' strike
- Policing the strike at Easington – The Wilkinson Affair
- Criticisms over policing and questions over police behaviour
- Dealing with arrested miners – The judicial system at work
- Covert policing – Fact or fiction

Each of these sections is important in its own right. The strike needs to be put into the historical context of previous disputes, while an in depth investigation into the violence at Easington is necessary for it shows the power of the police. This section also features Paul Wilkinson's only interview that he has given since the strike which gives him the opportunity to put his side of the story. The section on the judicial system at work takes us beyond the violence and arrests and shows how those miners charged with criminal offences were treated by courts. Finally the section on covert policing seeks to illustrate the forces that the state could, and did, bring to bear on the striking miners and their leaders.

The 1984/85 miners strike was undoubtedly one of the most violent industrial and political strikes seen in Great Britain in the twentieth century. The statistics

collated from a number of sources make astonishing reading. The number of hours worked by the police totalled 40 million from the 42 forces employed. The average police deployment was 3000 a day rising to 8000 a day at the height of the strike, 12 forces requested aid, 32 forces provided it. Police injuries were 1392; the majority needed hospital treatment of which 85 were serious cases. There were 9810 arrests, 5633 cases came to court and there were 4318 convictions including 3 charges of murder and 39 of assault causing grievous bodily harm. The cost of policing was £200,000,000. It was also the climax of a series of industrial disputes starting in the early 1970s. These disputes became increasingly violent as groups of workers attempted to use force to secure increased wage demands and, what they would argue, were better working conditions. The tone was set by striking miners in 1972 during incidents such as that at Saltley Gate coke works and continued through the miners' strike in 1974, the Grunwick strike in 1976, the strike by British Steel workers in 1981 and the dispute involving the Stockport Messenger Group and the National Graphical Association. The Labour government was brought down in 1979, and a Conservative government elected, due partly, to the strike actions of militant workers during the infamous 'Winter of Discontent'.

The Thatcher government had in 1983 been re-elected, with an increased majority, having fought the campaign on a manifesto which included more privatisation and more trade union legislation, but two factors gave them the confidence to carry out these policies: firstly, the country had utterly rejected the socialist manifesto of the Labour party and, secondly, Britain's re-emergence on the world stage after the Falklands War. For Arthur Scargill, the oil crisis of the early 1970s and 80s suggested that with immense coal reserves Britain was foolish to place too much reliance on oil, and any contraction of the coal industry, except through pits becoming exhausted, was equally foolhardy. The Conservative government's attitude to the trade unions came as a shock to the TUC. Used to "late night beer and sandwiches" at Number 10, the collapse of

corporatism signalled the beginning of the end of the traditional role and power of the unions.

The size of the dispute saw the police deployed in numbers greater than ever before. The police who had perfected their riot control techniques on the streets of Handsworth, Brixton and Toxteth, outside steel plants and the works of the '*Stockport Messenger*' were always superior to a force of pickets who were never properly organised as a fighting force. As the strike entered its final months the battles between police and striking miners became even more brutal. Pickets used all types of weapons and as they were pursued, police discipline frequently broke down. This chapter will show that the image of the police during the strike of 1984/85 was one staged by the broader political context, by memories of the role of the police in other strikes and by the logic of the situation in which pickets and police confronted one another. The media created a stage of combat which called up its own performances. The government pitted the police into a role they were reluctant at first to play, and the NUM legitimised strong picketing by encouraging their members to see the strike as a political strike.

## VIOLENT STRIKES AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

Industrial disputes are not a new phenomenon, but when they occur the charge is made that, 'this sort of thing never happened in the good old days'. However, British industrial history is littered with disputes and actions by the ruling classes designed to keep organised labour in its place. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 made almost all trade unionism and certainly strike action illegal. These Acts were passed at a time when other authoritarian measures such as imprisonment without trial, and attacks on press freedom were introduced. But the acts had the opposite effect. Workers became more organised, often

covertly, and industrial unrest, such as that by Lancashire cotton weavers in 1808 continued.

Miners, more than any other groups of workers, cling to the “good old days” theory. However, they also cling to a perception that they are the most exploited group of workers in British industrial history. The miners see themselves as different to other members of the working class, they would argue that they have led the fight against the capitalist classes for centuries, they have experienced betrayal, they have been evicted and starved back to work. As Williamson explains

‘The miners played on an image of themselves as the most violently oppressed members of the working class. The bitterness of their memories of the 1920’s shaped their understanding of the pit closures and redundancies of the 1980’s’. (Williamson quoted in Colls-Lancaster 1992 p154)

They refer back to the strikes and lock-outs of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and, as they see it, betrayal by the TUC during the 1926 General Strike. All of these incidents they see as prime examples not only of the oppression caused by the ruling classes, but also as oppression by the state against a powerful section of the organised working classes. The memory of such events, held together by stories passed from one generation to the next as a template against which contemporary politics are interpreted. The past becomes, in a real sense, the present providing a powerful interpretative framework for current experiences.

The story of the strike is summed up in short phrases, ‘the iron lady’, ‘the old American’ (MacGregor). The narrative of these stories sets out to give sympathy for the miners’ cause. The 1984/85 strike provided material for new stories about the oppression and betrayal of the miners. In Easington, rumours abounded about police waving £5 notes at pickets; of soldiers dressed in police uniform on picket lines, and of the sinister involvement of secret organisations

such as MI5. These stories are essential to explain what is happening when there is no other credible explanation for events.

Neither is violence in disputes involving miners or in the mining communities themselves a phenomenon of the 1970s and 80s. In 1750 Keelmen working on the River Tyne blockaded the river during a dispute. But persecution by the authorities, hunger and the army drove them back to work after seventeen weeks, having gained nothing from the blockade. The Durham coalfields had numerous incidents of violence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1815 Keelmen destroyed the coal staithes at Sunderland Docks on the River Wear, and were not dispersed until a party of Dragoons arrived from Newcastle. Troops were also deployed during the Great Strike of 1831 in the Durham pit village of Hetton. They were ordered to remain billeted there during the dispute which affected collieries in that area.

During the General Election of 1874 there was violence on a national scale. In the Durham coalfield feelings were running high because of Lord Londonderry's, a powerful local mine owner, attitude towards the 1872 Mines Act, and trade unionism in general. On polling day violence took place all over the County, but especially in Hetton. Here the local police station was attacked and order was only restored after the arrival of troops. However not all violent disputes were initiated by miners. The Featherstone Massacre of 1893 saw the Riot Act read to miners and when they refused to disperse troops opened fire killing two miners.

The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw violence in Britain's mining communities. Some of the most infamous clashes between strikers and police took place in South Wales during the strike action by miners employed by Cambrian collieries in 1910. It was during this dispute that the then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, sent troops to protect the collieries from the

striking miners. Due to serious rioting in Tonypandy the troops were used against the striking miners in November 1910. This led to the creation of a legend in class warfare which carried on until the end of the 1984/85 strike when Mardy colliery, known as 'little Moscow' and for generations a symbol of resistance against both the colliery owners and the state, workforce went back to work. The 753 strong workforce who had remained solidly behind the strike until the end, marched back to work behind their banner and with their band playing, a symbol of an honourable surrender.

In 1910 on General Election day there was violence in the Durham pit village of Horden. The recently built Workingman's Club was burnt to the ground and the Conservative Party's committee rooms were stoned. The police responded with baton charges against the rioters and police reinforcements were sent from Sunderland. In the Durham coalfields in 1912 arrangements were made for 5,000 troops to be stationed at Darlington during the coal strike of that year. However, the strike was a peaceful affair in Durham.

Despite the Government agreeing to some of the miners' demands after the 1912 strike, it knew, via the Cabinet Ministers and senior Civil Servants, that it had to prepare for a threat against its authority. The Government's response was to pass the Emergency Powers Act of 1920.

If the South Wales coalfield had its 'little Moscow' in Mardy, the Durham coalfields equivalent 'little Moscow' was Chopwell, a community whose colliery was owned by the Consett Iron Company. The village had a strong reputation for militancy. Its banner unfurled in 1924 depicted images of Marx, Lenin and Keir Hardie. Its streets, named by Blaydon Council, after revolutionary figures, were called Marx Terrace, Engels Terrace and Lenin Terrace, and gave support to the notion that Chopwell was the 'reddest' village in England. However not all residents of Chopwell liked its form of revolutionary politics. When the pit

banner was first unfurled some women threw stones at it, and on Gala Day 1924 soot was thrown at the banner as it passed through the village to the railway station. In 1924 police from North Wales and Nottinghamshire were drafted into Chopwell to prevent violence to black-leg labour.

Even after the failure of the General Strike and the end of the miners lock-out which followed, the government did not feel free from the threat of industrial disputes. In the 1930s there were indications of surviving union power together with a background of frustrated class consciousness amongst the workers.

The miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974 were the first national strikes since the General Strike and the lock-out of 1926. However, neither strike saw the large scale violence that had been seen in previous miners' strikes, or what would be seen in 1984/85. But there were outbreaks of violence. Saltley Gate coke works was closed after violence between the police and an estimated fifteen thousand pickets including 'flying pickets' from other parts of the country. The actions of the pickets proved too much for the police who closed the coke works in order to protect public safety. For the miners, their victory gave them the confidence to take on the Heath government in 1974 over their wage demands. Although there were no major disputes in the coal industry until 1984, the defeat of the Heath government became a symbol of their industrial power. It was the use of this power that Arthur Scargill planned to use in an industrial dispute arguably designed to bring down the Thatcher government and to restore socialist policies to Great Britain.

#### THE POLITICS OF POLICING THE COAL STRIKE

The year long dispute was the longest national strike ever by a trade union in British history. Peter Hain, (1986) in his book, *Political Strikes*, states that it was also a classical political strike. He gives two reasons for this. Firstly, the

Thatcher government tricked the miners into striking at a time and in circumstances unfavourable to them. Secondly, the government were single minded in their determination to defeat the miners no matter what the social, economic or financial cost to the nation. Therefore the dispute was not just fought on an industrial battle ground, but also on a political one.

The political background to the strike was complex. One key feature of it concerned law and order and the politics of policing the forms of industrial conflict the mining industry had experienced in the past decade. The issue of the legality of the strike touched in a number of ways on the role of law enforcement officers. What the oral historical record shows, though it is contradictory and inevitably confused – and, of course now re-interpreted – is that strikes, police officer's and members of mining communities, each saw the other, and their actions in highly political terms.

If public opinion was taken into consideration then the strike would almost without question be seen as political. In the middle of the dispute 73% of people questioned said as much. A further poll showed that 61% of the trade unionists interviewed thought that the miners leaders were politically motivated. The term 'political strike' was also given to any disputes by other trade unions which were seen as giving support to the miners. In November 1984 the annual conference of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) condemned,

“irresponsible political strikes led by politically motivated trade union leaders”  
(Hain 1986 p 11)

The dispute also took on a war like quality with the miners being called the 'enemy within' by Margaret Thatcher when she paralleled the dispute with the Falklands War two years earlier, while *The Times* reported that Arthur Scargill had 'declared war' on British society. All of these references to war, battlefields and the enemy took the dispute into a new area and gave the impression that the

dispute was 'un-British' and had acquired a subversive and sinister overtone.

The language of the strike took on an military feeling with miners referring to each other as 'comrades', the violence between police and pickets being referred to as a 'battle' all of which brought recollections of the military metaphors used in Paul Fussell's (1975) works on the Great War of 1914-18.

In the majority of industrial disputes trade unions seldom have the luxury of picking the time of their actions. In the majority of cases they have to react to decisions made by employers, or in this case the government. If they fail to react then their position and credibility is undermined. In this dispute any plans that the NUM leaders had for stepping up their overtime ban or by calling a strike ballot at a time favourable to themselves was pre-empted by the government's announcement of a pit closure programme in March 1993. Although seen as 'Scargill's strike' all the NUM leadership were doing was responding to pressure for a strike from local NUM activists. If the union had not stood up and fought against the pit closure programme then its credibility as a union would have been lost as pit after pit closed.

Those members of left wing organisations who supported the strike would argue that the strike itself, and the actions of the NUM, had the effect of holding the fate of the entire organised labour and working class movements. Those same left wing supporters would argue that the containerisation of the docks and the 'defeat' of the trade unions at British Leyland in the 1970s were examples of the failure of the whole trade union movement to unite behind groups of threatened workers. However, the 1970s were a period of relatively high employment and it was not until the nationalisation of the steel industry in the early 1980s that the threat to the working classes from the Government became clear.

Police control of strikers came under severe pressure in the 1970s with the increased use of pickets in industrial disputes. The 1970s also saw the appearance of 'flying pickets' whose use during the Grunwick dispute caused Lord Denning to comment that,

"Our laws are being disregarded right and left. The mobs are out. The Police are being subjected to violence. I take no part in the rights and wrongs of these disputes but I do know intimidation and violence are contrary to the law of the land."

(Beynon 1985 p 102)

Public order disturbances were the most dramatic policing issue of the 1980s. The urban riots of 1980s and 1981 were almost without parallel in modern British policing history. Robert Reiner (1991) interviewed one Chief Constable for his book '*Chief Constables*' who saw the miners strike as,

"a big setback to the image of police ... We were seen once again in the Tonyandy role, or back to Peterloo, or even worse"

(Reiner 1985 p 183)

The 1980 Employment Act and 1982 Employment Act placed tighter restrictions on the use of pickets during an industrial dispute. To give more guidance the government produced a Code of Practice on Picketing in which paragraph 31 stated that 'Pickets and their organisers should ensure that in general the number of pickets does not exceed six at an entrance'. However far from being enthusiastic about the restrictions these Acts placed on pickets, the police were less than wholehearted in their response. The Police Federation wanted greater power via criminal law regulations, while the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) questioned whether the new laws would achieve what they set out to do, and expressed concern about being drawn in to civil law enforcement. Considering the lengths that police had to go to in order to maintain law and order during the Brixton and Toxteth riots of 1981, the police's response was somewhat surprising.

By 1984 the police had been through a period of considerable change. The riots in Brixton and Toxteth had shown the police to be ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with riot situations. The government's response was to re-equip many of the police forces, but not Durhams, with riot control equipment. The police budget for England and Wales was increased by 5% in real terms during Mrs Thatcher's first term in office.

The policing of the miners' strike brought to the public's attention the wide range of discretionary powers that the police are able to call upon. The first few weeks of the dispute saw the greatest thrust of policing being directed at the pickets in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Right from the start of the dispute the police were controlled from the National Reporting Centre (NRC) in Scotland Yard. The NRC was founded in 1972 to help prevent a repeat of the picketing at Saltley Gate, and was created after discussions between the Home Office and ACPO. Its existence was virtually unknown to the general public until its controller made a public statement about his role in the strike on 18 March 1984.

The following day The Times reported that the NRC had been used during the Brixton and Toxteth riots and on a number of other unspecified occasions. The *Sunday Times* of 20 May 1984 gave a description of its organisation.

"Right along one wall are charts and lists of police support unit deployments and the latest situation in the coal fields. At a glance it is possible to see not only who has sent how many units to whom but also how many injuries and arrests there have been in each area. A separate chart logs the number of pickets. Another table lists special demands on police manpower throughout the country. In the ten weeks of the dispute a total of 220,000 assignments around the country have been covered."

(*Sunday Times* 20. 5.1984)

Evidence of how well the NRC worked can be judged by the fact that within a few hours of the start of the picketing in Nottinghamshire one thousand police were involved. Within a few days eight thousand police were involved and after

the first week twenty thousand police from forty three different forces were available to confront the pickets and patrol Nottinghamshire's mining communities. This control of policing by the NRC gave support to the argument that the miners were now being confronted by what was in effect a national police force, rather than the forty three local constabularies in England and Wales.

However, the use of police from other areas to assist in mining communities was not new. The Metropolitan police from London were used extensively in the South Wales valleys during the early years of the century. On 10 May 1926 when there was interference with road traffic in County Durham the local constabulary borrowed 125 policemen from the West Riding of Yorkshire, 50 from Lincolnshire and 47 from Norfolk.

In Durham the local police freely admit that they would not have been able to police the picketing without the help from other forces co-ordinated by the NRC. As one former policeman told me,

'We would have been absolutely lost if we hadn't had them. ... We could never have coped. We didn't have enough men to cope.'

'We definitely could not have managed. If we had been left with a build up of a large number of pickets we could not have coped with them and carried on the day to day policing. We would have failed badly. We were grateful to see the police from other areas.'

(Interview with Bill Brennan)

However these police forces from outside of County Durham arguably caused more trouble than they prevented. All seemed to be totally unsympathetic in policing in an area that was totally dominated by one industry and whose communities were almost completely behind the striking miners no matter what arguments were raised over legality or what offences the miners were allegedly committing. The local miners had little time for these outside police forces.

'Of course the Met police weren't good. I mean they were so far removed from the situation they didn't care a jot. They had the attitude you paid me mortgage because of the money we're making out of overtime.'

(Interview with Jimmy Patterson)

Fred Grieves remembers how the Metropolitan Police used to get him through the picket lines.

'We used to go to Houghton Fire Station and get in one of the vans with all the steel mesh on and we would drive through the picket lines. I mean we used to get some abuse, they would be banging and knocking and what not. They [the police] used to escort us down to wagon shops and stay with us. They would make tea, play cards and stuff like that. They were a different breed to us and then they would escort us down to Houghton.'

(Interview with Fred Grieves)

The NACODS members who were still working also had to thank the police for getting them through the picket lines unharmed. But Ronnie Dixon a member of the union still vividly remembers what it was like to walk through a picket line, police, or no police.

'You couldn't sleep for thinking about it. ... It was like walking into battle. Sometimes you would get in OK. Other times you would be stoned, heckled and spat on. Mind don't forget we are talking about getting out as well as in. Aye they were all there when we were coming out. And we got called the queerest names. It made you think that the job simply wasn't worth it.'

(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

Joe Moutter another NACODS member also remembers the frightening experience of crossing picket lines

'Before the men were going back to work if you turned up and somebody started to shout at you, you just went home. But when the men came back to work then you were under more pressure. But one day we turned up at the pit and we used to go in cars, we would drive, and there was about four of us in this car and the men had gone back, there was men back at the pit, and we turned up in the car and the driver got threatened, in the car, what they were going to do. So the driver turned round and went home, and he took me home as well. Well the next day the call round was 'well you soft buggars, what did you not come through

for', and we just said 'bollocks to you'. And the driver said 'hey I got threatened and I went home'. And the next day we went it was sort of 'you went home yesterday, you will go home today', but the driver didn't this time, he went through. So if he went through, well he took us through with him. If they had got his back up again and come home, then we would have had to come home again. But that's was then, it was better when we were back at work.'  
(Interview with Joe Moutter)

Some of the local police also did not have a very high opinion of the outside police forces.

'There was a bit of confrontation between the Welsh police, the Met police and the local 'bobbies'. Because as local 'bobbies' we knew we had to go back and work with them when the strike would eventually finish.'  
(Interview with Gary Stanger)

I asked him if he thought that some of the problems were caused by the difference in culture between the areas these forces were used to policing and the mining communities of East Durham.

'Well Wales is very similar to the North East. They have big mining communities down there. And we thought they would have been the same. But there were one or two of the police, you know, through all the forces we met; they tended to take it personally. And I found that a majority of the local lads, people like ourselves, a lot of the local 'coppers' had families and that who were miners or were involved in the pits.'  
(Interview with Gary Stanger)

I questioned him further on how the outside forces handled policing the picketing compared to the Durham police

'The Kent 'bobbies' were pretty good, because the Kent coalfield was like ours. But they were a small force and more used to talking to the miners. What we found when it was cold we would work the night shift, and like I say we used to have a brazier going and everyone was round the brazier and we would share our food with them and they would share their food with us. Some of the Welsh lads would as well. There was one group came up from Wales that we didn't get on with. But a majority of the Welsh lads were pretty good. And then during the day time you would get the Met, the Midlands and they would come up and they would be pushing and shoving, right lads bugger off you're not coming over here, you can't come up our end. The majority of our lot, I think

they coped quite well with it.’  
(Interview with Gary Stranger)

PC Neil Stephenson however did not think that the cause of the trouble was the unsympathetic policing by forces like the Metropolitan police

‘I don’t know whether that would be the whole cause of the trouble. My understanding of it was the frustration of the pickets. They could see that in their eyes we were letting people through to work. We were stopping their industrial action by escorting people in. The pickets didn’t succeed as fully as they had hoped. It was basically a lot of the blame was put on our shoulders. Certain actions by certain visiting forces wouldn’t have helped, it definitely wouldn’t have helped, and we could see that. It was fairly obvious that they were winding people up. It was hard to do anything about but it actually did go on.’

(Interview with Neil Stephenson)

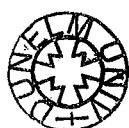
The action of the Metropolitan police during the miners strike is another area which has an air of mystery about it, and about which a number of myths and legends have evolved.

Certainly the Met’s reputation went before it. For example Graef (1989) cites an incident where Metropolitan police officers toured Brixton shouting

‘Oi! Oi! Nigger, and pounding on the side of the van challenging black youths to come out and fight.’  
(Graef 1989 p119)

Graef also reveals that a sergeant from the Met commented on their handling of the strike thus,

‘The Met used to bundle out of the van putting bits of uniform on. We were the scruffiest units up there. But at the end of the day, when it came to actually doing anything, the other forces just waited for orders, whereas we waded in and dealt with it.’  
(Graef 1989 p68)



The sergeant went on to comment about the reputation that the Met had gained during the strike.

'Half way through the strike you might go to a pit which hadn't been policed by the Met before. You'd get there [at] 3.00 or 4.00 am Monday morning and the pickets would all turn up expecting what they had last time. From that morning on there'd be no body up there for the rest of the week. We liked our reputation – I'm not sure if it was 100% justified but that's what happened.'  
(Graef 1989 p66)

A Chief Inspector experienced the reputation of the Met at first hand,

'One Met support unit developed a special technique where any picket got shoved in at the end of the line. This was in broad daylight two lines of ten policemen, six feet tall; ... These blokes would stagger out the other end punch drunk but not a mark on them. They didn't know what had happened to them, and they sure didn't want it again. All the other forces there were talking about it ... When you've got serious public order problems, though that's when you need the morals of the Met. They don't take any nonsense.'  
(Graef 1989 p69)

The interim report of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) into the strike is critical of the Metropolitan police. It alleges that the behaviour of the Metropolitan Police 'mocks' police culture, and the behaviour of some of its officers had tarnished the reputation of the police as a whole.

PC Stan Davidson also remembers that some outside police forces were not made welcome.

'Some of them, how should I say, were totally bloody loutfull. Without naming any forces there was one particular Southern force that came up and I think they were politely asked to go back very quickly. Basically because they had the public order sorted out, they knew how to do that all right, but they didn't understand the miner or the culture. It was totally different; they were not part of it. ... the Southern forces caused us problems from week one.'  
(Interview with Stan Davidson)

As mentioned earlier the miners strike brought home both to the striking miners and the general public the full range of police powers. These were seen during

the police operation in the Nottingham coalfields.

Firstly the Kent police mounted an operation during March when they stopped anyone who appeared to be a miner from crossing the Thames either by the Dartford Tunnel, Blackwall Tunnel or the Rotherhithe Tunnel. Basically the police tactics were to inform miners that, if they left the County of Kent, they would be arrested on the grounds that the police suspected that the miners' future actions would constitute a breach of the peace. These were challenged by the National Council for Civil Liberties as being illegal. At the same time Nottinghamshire police, reinforced by a large number of police officers drafted in from other sources, sealed off the county on its Northern border with Yorkshire and its Western border with Derbyshire, while road blocks around pit villages also made it difficult for local people to move freely.

Many police had no concerns over some of the tactics used by police forces:

‘Indeed they failed to understand why anyone should object to actions designed to head off violence’.  
(Graef 1989 p60)

These tactics were extremely successful in stopping pickets from reaching their intended destinations. The road blocks in Kent and Nottinghamshire cut off the supply of pickets at source, and Nottinghamshire's Chief Constable, Charles McLaclan, estimated that 164,500 potential pickets were prevented from entering the county during the first twenty seven weeks of the strike. McLaclan, who admitted to *The Sunday Times* on 25 November 1984 that he was having talks with the Home Office,

“weeks before the strike began ... to discuss public order problems”  
(Goodman 1985 p 119)

defended his action of setting up road blocks, which effectively made

Nottinghamshire a 'no-go' area by saying,

"I'm only a hard liner on the violent and the fanatical. I believe in freedom from fear in your own community"

(Goodman 1985 p 119)

Not only was McLaclan Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire, but he was also chairman of ACPO and commander of the NRC. He always denied being anti-union and in a BBC 2 television programme in November 1984 he explained his role in this way.

"You see a greater part of miners in Nottinghamshire are working and our job has been to protect them and ensure they can go about their business as far as possible in peace. They think we are doing a grand job. ... If thousands of people had stopped people from going to work what would they have said to us? They'd had said you've failed the community, the whole community, not the little one, the whole community."

(Goodman 1985 p 119)

The basis for the police tactics in the strike was set out in the Public Order Manual produced in the Summer of 1983. The manual with its introduction by the then President of ACPO and Chief Constable of Merseyside, Kenneth Oxford, emphasised that it had been produced with Home Office support. In short, the manual set out a detailed national response to riots, a response that carried the full approval of the government. But it was not intended for general publication, not even within the police service. Nobody below Assistant Chief Constable was authorised to read it. Even the Home Secretary, himself a Privy Councillor, was told that he could not read it. However, the contents became public at the 'Orgreave Riot' trial. The instructions in the manual officially sanctioned three of the most controversial tactics used in policing the strike. These are,

- (i) "the instruction to short shield officers to disperse and/or incapacitate demonstrators;

(ii) the instruction that long shield officers should give a show of force by making a formidable appearance;

(iii) the stated objective of using police horses to create fear among a crowd".  
(Norham 1988 p 52)

However, the sections that were read out in court had been edited to eliminate any passages that would have caused even greater criticism of police tactics.

The manual lays down the advantages of the three tactics listed above. Firstly those policemen armed with short shields provided a first aggressive force whose psychological effect on a crowd will probably cause them to disperse. They are also seen as providing a distraction to allow arrest teams to move in.

For those officers equipped with long shields the advantages are seen as discouraging riotous behaviour and bolstering the morale of officers in close contact with the crowd.

The advantages in using mounted police is simply that it is an effective method of dispersing a crowd in extreme situations.

All three of the above tactics were used by police during the violence at the Orgreave coke depot. The extract quoted below is from a *Guardian* article by Gareth Pearce, a solicitor acting for miners in the 'Orgreave Riot' trial.

'Suddenly the ranks of long shield officers, 13 deep open up and horses gallop through the densely packed crowd. This manoeuvre repeats itself. In one of these charges you see a man being trampled by a police horse and brought back through the lines as a captive to be charged with riot. You see companies of infantry. ... with helmets and visors, round shields and overalls .... Run after the cavalry and begin truncheoning pickets who have been slow to escape.'  
(Northam 1988 p54).

The manual also encourages the use of battle cries and the Zulu like rhythmic beating of riot shields. This is seen as a way of acting as a,

‘morale booster prior to deployment and also serve to release stress in police officers.’  
(Northam 1986 p889)

This tactic was criticised as intimidatory and was interpreted by some as illustrating a lack of police discipline.

### POLICING THE STRIKE AT EASINGTON : THE WILKINSON AFFAIR

In East Durham there had been outbreaks of violence at several pits, including Murton, before the area’s main outbreak of violence during the whole of the strike at Easington Colliery. It revolved around to return to work of one man; Paul Wilkinson. His return, the methods which the police used to get him back to work, the violence of both police and striking miners and the communities reaction to the violence, is a microcosm of the broader picture of how the miners’ strike was policed at national level, and as such is worthy of an in-depth study.

Easington colliery was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The village was developed on what would now be called a green field site, and was a community whose life and inhabitants revolved around working down the pit. The colliery houses were built almost on top of the colliery shaft, providing accommodation for the miners who were described as:

‘fodder to be housed and sent down that bloody shaft.’  
(Beynon 1994 p113)

Easington was no longer a pure industrial community although in 1984 its attitude was still somewhat inward looking. Even the intake of men from other

pits which had closed had done little to alter the culture and attitude which remained largely the same. The strike had remained solid at Easington until August when the NCB made its second attempt to persuade men to return to work. The colliery manager, Peter Farrage, assured the local NUM that any miner returning to work at Easington would have to enter the colliery yard through the main gate on foot. The local NUM took the manager at his word and on 19<sup>th</sup> August pickets barricaded the main gate to the colliery confident that no one was going to try and return to work on Monday 20 August, the day that the NCB had arranged for pit buses to bring any miners to the pit.

Billy Stobbs describes what the situation was like at Easington up until that point.

‘We had Easington [pit] blocked off, then we started to get requests to go out to other places, you know like the Nottingham coalfield, which we did. We used to send bus loads away every week, ... The strike was 100% solid. No problem in Easington itself. We used to have just six pickets on the gate and that was it.’  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Billy Stobbs agrees that what Mr Farrage said about miners only returning to work through the main entrance is correct.

‘Well we had a promise from the manager Mr Farrage, Peter Farrage and he said “I hope nobody comes, but if they come I’ll guarantee you they come through the main entrance and nowhere else”.’  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

However Mr Farrage’s promise was overruled by the NCB Area Management, and Wilkinson was smuggled in through the pithead baths.

Who then was Paul Wilkinson and why did he decide to return to work?

Paul Wilkinson worked at Easington for about 20 months, having transferred from East Hetton when that pit closed in 1983. Living in Bowburn, Wilkinson was a single parent with two young children, who admitted in his interview that he did not want to get involved in picketing and stated that he was never asked to go picketing. He also admitted that he was unhappy with the lack of a national ballot and stated that he told the Easington Lodge Committee that,

‘if they didn’t get a ballot I would be back at work as soon as I can.’

‘Because my opinions have always been the same, I have always been a strong union man, but you have got to stick by the union rules you cannot just call a strike when you feel like it. You have got to have a ballot.’

‘If there had been a national ballot I would have stuck it out with the rest of them [but] I would have thought that Easington would have voted 2-1 against.’  
(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

Paul Wilkinson also gave the fact that he was a single parent trying to bring up two children and needed the money as a reason to return to work. But Billy Stobbs remembers that the union was helping him along with the rest of the striking miners.

‘The day before he went back to work he took a carrier bag of food back home to Bowburn where he lived’.  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Alan Cummings recalls that the union made sure he could go on picket duty, because as a single man, he was not entitled to any benefit from the DSS.

‘He could go on picket duty and get £3.00 maybe £4.00 a day. If he went 5 days a week that’s £10 or £20 which was enough for him to survive on. As for his kids, I believe he wasn’t looking after his kids, his kids were with his wife, he was living on his own. There were pictures of Paul taken with his kids on Tyne Tees Television, having this horrible sob story and its not true the kids weren’t with him on a regular basis’.  
(Interview with Alan Cummings)

However their claims are rejected by Wilkinson who stated that he never went picketing, was never asked to do so.

‘In fact the Labour Party when they were giving the food parcels out, well they eventually got round to me six months later. And they apologised and said that they didn’t know that I ever existed because I was never on the picket line.  
(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

The press quoted him as saying that he thought that the strike had gone on far too long and that the NUM leaders were just a bunch of thugs. However, the official reasons for his return to work are listed in the writ that he issued between himself, The Executive Committee of the Durham Area Union of the National Union of Mineworkers (First Defendant), The Members of the Durham Area Council of the National Union of Mineworkers (Second Defendant), The National Union of Mineworkers (Third Defendant) and The National Union of Mineworkers (Durham Area) Fourth Defendant). The writ was issued on 25 October 1984 in the High Court of Justice Queens Bench Division in the Manchester District Registry (1984 – W – No 7216).

Section 5 of the writ states that,

‘The stoppage of work called for and/or taking place in the constitutional Area Union of the NUM is taking place as part of a single countrywide campaign in relation to the same issue. As such, it amounts to national action.’

‘Rule 43 of the National Rules provides that no national strike shall take place without the prior approval of a national ballot of all members of the NUM.’

‘No such ballot has taken place, notwithstanding a resolution of the National Delegate Conference of the NUM held in July 1983, that the National Executive Committee (the NEC) of the NUM should arrange such a ballot.’  
(Extract from writ 1984-W-No-7216).

This is the reason that Paul Wilkinson returned to work. As section 9 of the writ states,

‘the strike call by their area unions and the NUM were not official or bidding upon members of the NUM.’

(Extract from writ 1984-W-No-7216).

The writ also goes on to accuse the defendants of not taking reasonable steps with their power to prevent the violence and intimidation, both on the picket lines and at his home, directed at Paul Wilkinson.

Section 10 of the writ deals with the matter of his alleged expulsion from the Durham Area Union. The writ states that,

‘Since the Plaintiff returned to work, he has been orally informed by one Callan .... That he has been expelled from the Durham Area Union and/or his union membership is likely to be threatened by reason of him continuing to work or having crossed a picket line.’

(Extract from writ 1984-W-No-7216).

The Durham Area NUM respond to this legal action by issuing a letter to all Area Lodge Secretaries. It states,

‘Proceedings have been started by Paul Wilkinson alleging that he has been intimidated at his home and place of work. The proceedings are being defended but we wish to make it clear that this union never has and never will support or encourage any intimidation of any member of the union.

Members will know that the Rules of the Union provide a procedure for disciplining members and any action to be taken against Paul Wilkinson will be pursued through the rules, and in no other way!’

‘... The Executive Committee wishes to remind members that they are instructed not to use threats or force or otherwise intimidate scabs or strike breakers!’

(Extract from letter to all Lodge Secretaries dated 13 September 1984 and signed by Tom Callan, General Secretary).

One of the defendants named in the Writ was Alan Cummings, then Secretary of the Easington Lodge. His opinion of the Writ was that:

‘As far as we were concerned he was a non-member. I mean what a piece of paper said in a court didn’t mean anything to the Easington Miners Lodge members; he wasn’t a member of the Lodge’.

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

Tommy Callan also treated the writ with some disdain

‘Oh god aye. It wasn’t worth the paper it was written on. They couldn’t pick me out, they thought they were going to beat me, but it was a waste of time.’

(Interview with Tommy Callan)

I asked him if there was any particular incident that made him decide to return to work.

‘There was an old man turned round to me in the street and said it was about time you lot went back to work and stopped being idiots. And that, you know, really got me down because here was I being starving, feeding the kids on I think it was £18.00 a week it worked out at and I had just had enough I was getting depressed. I took my children to school and I walked to Easington and went in and saw the manager I said I’d come into work and he said “Oh my God we’ve got no way to protect you or nothing”. I said I would be back as soon as they could lay a bus on. And the following week there was a bus laid on.’

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

I asked him if he was scared, or if he thought he was betraying the other members of his union. His reply was a definite,

‘No I’d done nothing wrong.’

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

and on the question of betrayal

‘In a way yes, but in a way I was fighting for the rights of a union an all,

because under Rule 31 you can't have a strike without a ballot, which nobody was ever offered.

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

I continued by asking how he felt when he got on the bus that first morning.

'A few people shouting in each village, you know like they were waiting for the bus because they knew what time the bus was coming. When it pulled into the top of Easington the bus driver started having kittens and I said all you have to do is drop us off and I'll walk up to them.'

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

I confirmed that he would have actually walked up to and through the picket line.

'Yes. And the Police Chief Inspector jumped on and said "do you want to go into work?" and said "yes please". So he said "go and stand in between them six lads", six police, and he said "we are going to wait here until we get enough reinforcements to try and get you in".'

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

He admitted that he did not get into work that day but the next day.

'I came down to the bus stand by myself again and there was about 50 pickets there, two PS (Police Support) units, four motor bikes, two police cars waiting for me. I got on the bus and we drove to a little village on the outskirts of Easington and the Police Inspector got on his radio and the whole place lit up with blue light. They kept doing this for weeks, you know, going different ways, different vans.'

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

The reaction to the news that Wilkinson had been smuggled in was a near riot. The fence at the edge of the pit yard was pulled down and striking miners got into the pit yard. Cars were overturned, windows were smashed, stones and bricks thrown at police and fire extinguishers set off at police as they pursued the miners back across the pit yard.



Image-13 (7821226256.jpg)

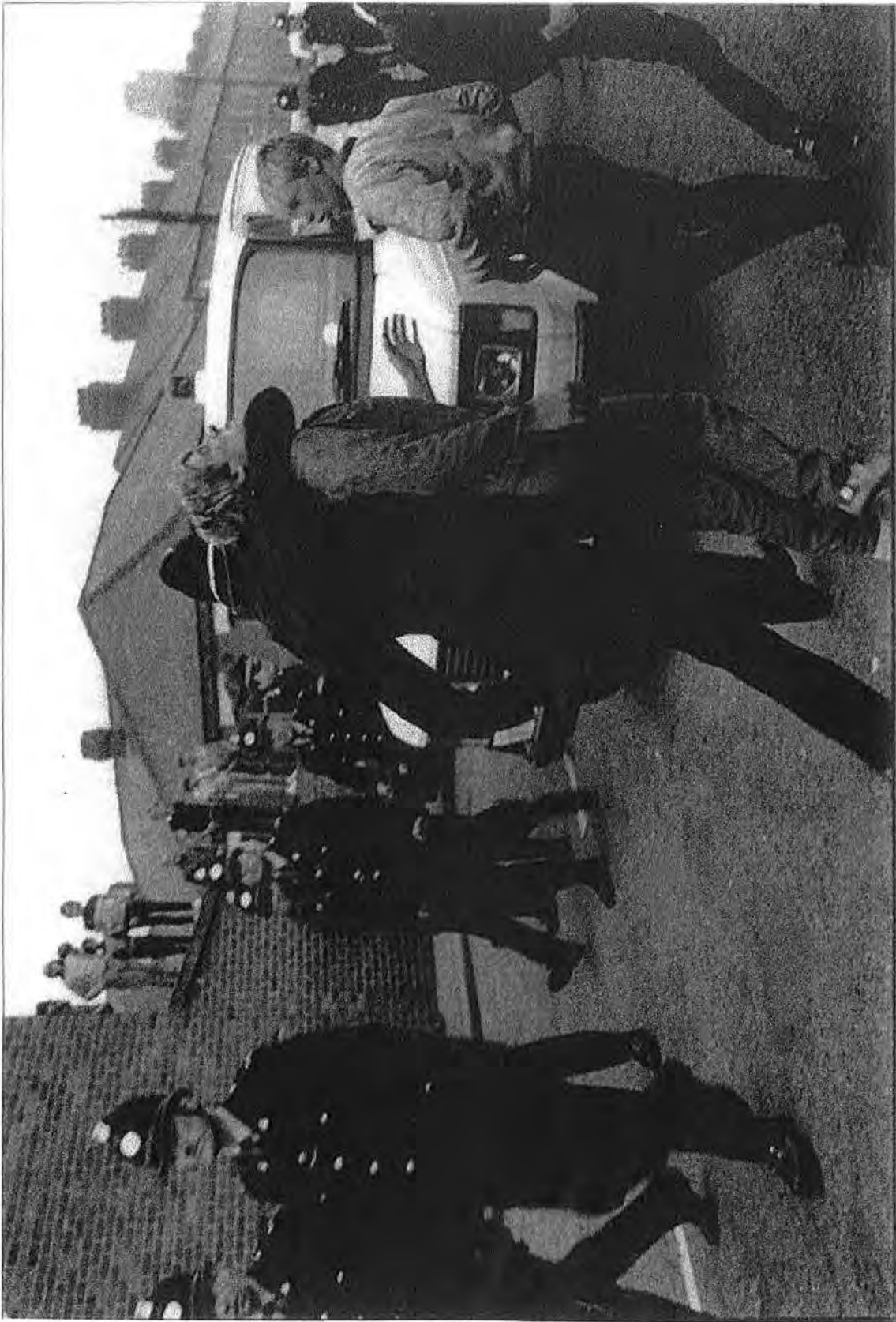


Students at the school assembly.



Image-12 (76x1220x256 (80))





1980. 04. 02. 01. 01. 01. 01.

Again Billy Stobbs remembers the whole day very vividly

'Well of course word got around the Colliery and other places and we put a demonstration on to try and stop anyone else coming in, which was a success. But one morning the morning of the big disaster Jack Dorman come down and Tom Callan and the police would not let us talk and we were inside. We had meetings with the Coal Board officials and this police inspector just listened to us and outside while we were talking you could hear this chanting and sensing the atmosphere something was going to happen.'

'After two or three hours it was obvious the Coal Board would not even let us talk to him and their men wouldn't go over and tell Paul Wilkinson how the feeling was. And this police inspector said 'just come with me Mr Stobbs' and Jack Dorman our MP went into another room where he went on the phone to another place down London, after about 10 minutes he said 'It's alright you people sitting down there, I'm here on the ground and I'm telling you now there's going to be trouble, I can feel it.' Anyway he came off the phone and he apologised he said 'I'm sorry Mr Stobbs but he's staying' Dorman said 'What are you going to do now Bill?' I said 'Well I'm just going to go out and tell the lads, we've tried our best, but if he's not coming out we cannot talk to him.' Before I went out Pete Young the treasurer, I'll always remember said, 'Billy, whatever you do just tell them we at Durham have done our best.' I said 'Pete there's only one thing I can tell them, that he's not coming out, he's staying.' I said "at the end of the day he staying in" And I got up on the steps and of course all the lads surged forward and I told them we had been talking to Jack Dorman, Coal Board officials, and the police inspector. They just went, you know you couldn't stop them, they had been out on strike a few months then and they just went into the pit yard and I went back into the office, and I have never seen anything like it. They just, and I wouldn't say it was all Easington lads because by that time there were bus loads from other collieries come in. At the end of the day it was frustration and it was all young lads, the cars were just over turned and smashed.'

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

But there was to be no repeat performance. The village was partly closed off with road blocks, people were stopped and questioned for no reason and accusations of police intimidation were made. When asked if the police over reacted Billy Stobbs, then Chairman of Easington Lodge thought that they did. Easington became for a time a community under siege. The police changed their tactics; reinforcements in riot gear gave notice of a much tougher approach to

the pickets.

‘Well they stopped the buses at Easington Village. ... They wouldn’t let any ordinary bus come down the main street or through Horden. They had both ends of Easington Colliery blocked off. ... In fact they were stopping all cars, they were searching all cars and they stopped Tommy Callan, and they would not let Tommy Callan come down. You know the General Secretary of the Durham miners.’

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

It is clear from an interview with one police officer that Durham Constabulary had no plan to get Wilkinson through the picket lines safely. On the Monday and Tuesday they had failed and on Wednesday afternoon this particular police officer was summoned to the Command Room to see the Superintendent.

‘I though I was in trouble. But the Chief had insisted that we come up with a plan to get Wilkinson into work. He had been trying since Monday, it was Wednesday afternoon and by Friday we had to have a plan to get him in. At that time the front gate of the colliery was all barricaded and the miners from Easington were in control of it. On three occasions Wilkinson had been unable to get in, so we formulated a plan that afternoon. The only reason why I had been called in was I had worked at Easington for years and I came from Easington and I had to get him in’.

(Interview with Bill Brennan).

I then asked how did they actually get him in.

‘Well what we decided at first was we could try to get him in through the main entrance, but that would mean getting rid of the barricade by going in during the middle of the night to take command of the barricade whilst there was few miners there. However, would there have been plenty of time to move it? It would probably cause a lot more trouble if we had tried this, and then when the rest of the miners turned up later on in the morning there would have been even more confrontation than normal. We thought that if we got him in another way, and the miners realised we had succeeded in getting him in, they would just accept the fact and leave him alone. There were numerous ways we could have got him in but we opted for the pit baths entrance. So, we went down the top of Tower Street and parked there, and eight of us (one PSU team) were to get him in.’

(Interview with Bill Brennan).

The police officer then went on to describe what it was like to bring Wilkinson

through the picket lines.

‘We would normally come through from Bowburn at about 6.00 am .... We would be in contact with whoever was in charge at Easington, and we would always have the Pandas out and the patrol cars driving around to see where the miners were congregating. This particular day we had been round Blackhall, Middle Street and there was a petrol bomb. Luckily whoever had thrown it was not a good thrower because it burst into flames just as the bus was going over it!’

‘I think the only time you were frightened was when the missiles were coming over. Then you were a bit worried.’

‘I remember we were going down Seaside Lane when we got ambushed. Suddenly a shower of missiles came across and a window was broken. The vehicle had reinforced mesh up the side. When we got into the pit that morning we found wedged into the mesh a ball bearing. It must have been fired from a very strong catapult. Somebody could have been killed or seriously injured.’  
(Interview with Bill Brennan).

Another police officer thought that Easington saw the worst violence in the area but thought that,

‘If there had been no flying pickets and no outside police support units the tension on the pickets would have been reduced. If they had had local police officers with local men, some of whom they had known for years, some who they were related to, then a lot of friction would have gone. I was always aware when an outside picket came in, or a Police Support Unit came from an area a long long way from the North East, they did not seem to fit.’  
(Interview with Peter Griffiths).

The police’s response to allegations of intimidation is firstly one of concern.

‘I was very conscious of that [possible intimidation] I can’t say I saw anything of that and I was always very comfortable to have police officers whose fathers and brothers were in fact miners. I can’t say I saw anything, but I was aware of all the rumours’.  
(Interview with Peter Griffiths).

However when pressed over the fact that these allegations had actually been printed and a direct quote from the leader of Easington Council John Cummings (no relation to Alan Cummings) about the behaviour of the police appeared in Martin Adeney and John Lloyds book "*The Miners Strike 1984-5 Loss Without Limits*" (1986), he replied that

'I cannot agree or disagree, you will have to ask John Cummings about that now won't you.'

(Interview with Peter Griffiths)

A second police officer was actually accused of having men under his command intimidate striking miners. His denial is categoric.

'I have heard things like this five pound note stuck through the windows of the vehicles and all that. One of the police vehicles involved was supposed to have been Wilkinson's .... It was supposedly the van I was in, and I had been sat at the back of the van. If it had happened that day I would have seen it. It was lies, rubbish. It was hearsay.'

(Interview with Bill Brennan).

However one police officer that I interviewed confirmed that it did happen,

'there were incidents as you were driving past the pickets, they would be shown fivers and tenners at the windows and have [holiday] brochures waved at them, ... However I was present when it happened and they were quickly told to pack it in, it was ridiculous.'

(Interview with PC Stan Davidson)

PC Davidson's admittance of the intimidation of striking miners is confirmed by PC Gary Stanger,

'Yeah there were them that waved fivers and tenners through the window. They used to wind the miners up. ... But that was just human nature.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

He went on to try and justify these actions, saying,

'It was their way of getting their own back for all the shouting and cat calls, the pushing and shoving, the digs and kicks when you were on the picket line, the stone throwing, because we were not allowed to throw stones back.'

(Interview with PC Gary Stanger)

PC Neil Stephenson admitted that he had heard the same sort of rumours,

'and to be quite honest the rumour that I heard all referred to officers from other forces who were actually up here for the week, and decided to make something of the week, if you understand what I mean. They wanted a little bit of action.'

(Interview with PC Neil Stephenson)

I asked if he regretted the violence that he caused, and he replied he thought that,

'They brought it on themselves, ... I expected some [violence] against me but they seemed to go haywire with themselves really.'

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

He also admitted that even if the police had refused to help get him in, or withdrawn the protection he would have continued to go in,

'No matter what the consequences.'

(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

## MONITORING THE POLICE

The idea to form a local Police Watch was moved at the meeting of the Save Easington Area Mines campaign (SEAM) held on 20 June 1984, before Paul Wilkinson returned to work. The idea was raised by Mr Albert Nugent, and the SEAM minutes for that meeting state that,

‘Mr A Nugent expressed his concern about the way police were treating miners and other groups who organised demonstrations. He spoke about his experience of the organisation – Police Watch and the work they were undertaking.’  
(SEAM Minutes 20 June 1984)

Mr Nugent contacted two members of the Sheffield Police Watch, Jenny Owen and Pat Stubbs who addressed the SEAM meeting on 8 August 1984. The minutes of this meeting record that,

‘The speakers spoke at length on the work they were undertaking as independent observers on the picket lines, and the way they executed their duties. Advice was given on the equipment which was needed – ie camera, tape recorder and note book. ... They related many examples of police activity and incidents they had recorded.’  
(SEAM Minutes 8 August 1984)

Sheffield Police Watch had logged numerous cases of unprovoked violence by the police during a six month period.

Despite all the talk about setting up a Police Watch, nothing happened until after the violence and allegations of police intimidation and criticism of their tactics following the return to work of Paul Wilkinson at Easington on 24 August 1984. The decision to take action followed a lengthy debate about the actions of the police in County Durham at the SEAM meeting on 12 September 1984. The minutes record that,

Mr A Nugent and other members expressed their concern about the massive police presence of other police forces in Durham during this dispute. It was suggested that a petition should be started asking non County Durham police to leave the county. Other items of concern were:-

Were they police or members of the armed forces. Police numbers were seen to be depleted now that the NATO exercise were being carried out.

Police had been seen urinating in the back streets of Easington.

Police were swearing at members of the public.

Women had had handbags snatched.

People had been ordered off buses.

Cars were being refused entry into Easington.

Police had been making gestures to children.

Children were stopped and eight year olds questioned by police – parents not notified.

Arising from these complaints it was agreed to support the setting up of Police Watch!

(SEAM Minutes 12 September 1984)

These complaints allegedly showed those police forces employed in Easington in a poor light. However the first complaint could be dismissed on the grounds that by the time of the meeting (12 September 1984), the worst of the trouble had passed, Paul Wilkinson had returned to work, the police had plans to get him in and out and, arguably the pickets knew that they had lost. Hence further violence was futile, and police numbers could be reduced. The question of troops in police uniforms is one of the great myths of the strike and is mentioned elsewhere in this chapter.

So did Police Watch achieve its aims, did it provide evidence of police wrong doing and excess violence? To answer this question I am indebted to Mr Nugent for the chance to view his video tapes which he took at various locations in County Durham.

Almost all the filming was shot at ground level, which contrasts with TV footage which always appeared to be shot from a height this giving a broader picture of events as they unfolded. However what Mr Nugent's footage portrayed was a sense of confusion. People, police, pickets and onlookers seemed to be milling

about in all directions. There seemed to be little evidence of the organised tactics of either police or pickets. Much of the filming seemed to be of women and children shouting 'Scab' at the buses as they took miners through the picket line. There were also snatches of conversation, not normally picked up by television sound recordists, such as 'I know him', 'he's gone in before', 'smash the bloody windows' (shouted by a woman as a picket threw a brick at one of the buses) and 'go on lads don't let the buggers catch you' as pickets ran from police attempting to arrest them. Police were filmed forcibly dragging pickets away, few pickets went quietly and there was considerable footage of the pushing and shoving. What this home video showed was that at Easington the police kept the pickets well back as the buses and police escort went in to the pit yard and, secondly at no time was there any footage of police in any form of riot gear, carrying shields, or wielding their truncheons against the pickets.

Two pieces of film are worthy of individual comment.

Firstly, at the picket line at the NCB Workshops at Philadelphia a picket was seen being taken away in an Ambulance apparently having been knocked unconscious by the police. And while Mr Nugent was filming police came and deliberately stood in front of the camera to prevent filming continuing.

Secondly, at Easington Mr Nugent videoed police videoing him, women were videoed complaining that the police were stopping them going to the shops. Quite a long sequence was devoted to filming the road leading to the colliery while a discussion was held by a number of pickets, off camera, as to 'which way they'll bring the bugger in today'. A single miner walked through the picket lines with a police escort and although there was much shouting there was little pushing and shoving to try and get to him. A comment off camera remarked that 'It's Dennis. He always goes in alone'. This comment indicates that the video was made after Paul Wilkinson had returned to work and at a time when other

miners had also decided to return to work. Further investigation found that 'Dennis' was a Deputy, not a returning miner.

Much of the conflict between the striking miners and the police concerned the use of forces, usually from areas that had little idea about the culture of mining communities or did not appreciate the feelings that the striking miners had, feelings that ran through the whole of the mining communities. Many forces were unprepared for the strike and lacked the necessary riot gear that soon became required in many areas. One police officer alleges that County Durham Police were, in the main, completely inexperienced in that kind of work, while another states that there were no local plans to combat violent picketing. However, both admitted that Durham Constabulary would not have coped without reinforcements.

'We would have been absolutely lost if we hadn't had them. It was the same with the other forces, South Yorkshire; for instance, if they had not had the help from other police forces we would have lost it. We could never have coped. We didn't have enough men to cope.'

'You had to bring in officers from the outside. We just did not have the man power in this force. If you take Durham the total manpower is 1558 and that includes every rank. We still had to do normal policing of the rest of the county so manpower wise we just could not cope. Especially down at Easington, we needed about 300 men just for Easington.'  
(Interview with Bill Brennan).

It would appear from the above that the operation to get Wilkinson to work was both complex and costly, both in terms of manpower and cost. The comment from a resident that all the trouble was for 'one bloody man' seems to sum up the community's feelings towards the operation. However, the police's side of the operation will be explored in the next section.

## CRITICISM OF POLICING AND QUESTIONS OVER POLICE BEHAVIOUR

The National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) report criticises the use of what they call disproportionate policing, using enormous police resources to get one man into work. The report uses Cortonwood as an example where, on 9 November 1984, up to 2,000 police officers were deployed just to get one miner across the picket line. However this example could just as easily have been Easington, and the resources required to get Wilkinson into work.

Their criticism over the excessive use of what they see as scarce police resources are that it promotes disharmony and discontent amongst the pickets which can lead to further violence. Miners crossing the picket line can become a symbol to both sides, a symbol of the enforcement of law and order and on the other side, a symbol to encourage other miners to cross the picket lines an action which again could lead to further violence.

The NCCL report concludes that the use of police resources to enable people to go to work is a legitimate one, but not at any cost. However the police themselves had differing opinions over the legality of the operation to get Wilkinson safely into work. Bill Brennan saw it that

‘if someone wants to go to work, they have a right to go to work. Yet if someone tries to pursue them peacefully that is all right. But if they try to prevent this by mere intimidation and mass picketing this is not right. ... Certainly violence and intimidation should never be used.’  
(Interview with Bill Brennan)

Peter Griffiths too thought that the police had a duty to get Wilkinson back to work, and that he had a right to expect it.

‘Well it was my duty to protect property and preserve the peace. ... I mean when you have a picket situation and you don’t have some sort of control at the workers site there is a potential for damage being caused to property, and there

is the potential for intimidation for anybody who wishes to go to work. ... Our role was to be there for those wishing to go to work, allowing them to do so in a peaceful environment.'

'It was not a particularly complicated operation but I thought it was rather risky. One day we were on duty taking him North on the A19 and we received information that there was a mass of pickets coming in at that point. Before we knew where we were we were part of a picket convoy carrying the one working miner amongst us. I don't think they knew to this day what the situation was. It was so risky at time.'

(Interview with Peter Griffiths)

However some other police involved in getting Wilkinson back to work did not share either Brennan's, or Griffith's opinion.

'We are supposed to keep the streets free. ... You're not supposed to be governed or restricted by somebody else's wishes. Me, personally, I thought it was a waste of time and money because it did cause quite a bit of bother. ... We knew him through his past, and, to coin a phrase he wasn't 'a full shilling'. ... Me, personally, if I was the boss I would have said 'well just one man, you are just going to have to sit it out.' I wouldn't have let him go through.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

PC Neil Stephenson also shared Gary Stanger's opinion.

'I couldn't understand why they allowed that one man to go back in, because at the end of the day he wasn't going to make the colliery function. A lot of lads were feeling exactly the same, I mean it's hard to remember figures now but there was in excess of a hundred police officers on that site, just to get that man in. And the convoy to bring him in involved these on four vans two coaches and a mini bus. It just seemed a total waste of time and money for whatever the benefit was going to be. Personally I couldn't see the sense in it at all.'

(Interview with Neil Stephenson)

PC Stan Davidson tried to de politicise the situation by his explanation that

'Personal freedom is what it boils down to. He had a choice, to be on strike or not to be on strike, it was his choice. ... It's the point of where you say the mob rules or the rule of law rules. Common sense dictates that if a man makes a choice he should be allowed to live with that choice and go about his lawful business. And that's what it boiled down to as far as I was concerned.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

The robust police tactics in dealing with picket line violence came in for heavy criticism not only from, the NUM, the trade union movement, civil liberties groups and as we have seen, members of the public, but also from certain council Police Committees. Certain members of these mainly Labour controlled committees argued that much of the violence was due to police tactics such as cavalry charges by mounted police into pickets, indiscriminate use of the truncheon and the Zulu like tactics of beating their riot shields. These tactics they argued were intimidatory and unnecessary.

A number of television programmes were devoted to the legality or otherwise of police tactics. The Channel Four programme *'The Battle for Orgreave'* in the *'Person to Person'* series made a number of allegations against the police. Amongst these were that it was the police, not the miners that rioted that day, with amateur video footage showing police using truncheons against defenceless pickets and mounted police galloping at pickets. Another Channel Four programme *'What Side Are You On'* featured photographs of police at Armthorpe in Yorkshire carrying baseball bats, and a quote from a miner who alleged he was told by the police 'if you get rid of our government, we'll be your next government'. There were further photographs of police wearing black uniforms with no markings, giving rise to the allegation that they were really soldiers.

It was also inevitable that violence on the picket lines would spill over into local communities. In Nottinghamshire there were many documented reports of police breaking into houses in pursuit of pickets. These reports document not only breaking into houses, damaging property and assaulting and intimidating residents, but also accused them of harassment. To be known to the police as a strike activist resulted in constant harassment, possibly assault by the police and

the eventual inevitable arrest. As a deputy chief constable told *The Labour Weekly*,

‘We can do all sorts of things, and the legality of them can be sorted out later.’  
(Beynon 1985 p110)

And as *The Observer* reported,

‘When the miner demanded to know what law gave the [police] officer the right to stop him going home the officer pointed at his blue uniform and said, ‘this law’.’  
(*Observer* 24.6.84)

Some police seemed to be keen to get ‘stuck in’ and the miners strike meant that, free from the confines of the local environment they could get ‘stuck in’ with the backing of the government, if not the local community. Much of the violence was ritualised. One Chief Inspector comments that,

‘the Superintendent at our pit used to go up to the pickets and say “Right lads five minutes, they’re on their way. Now we are going to have a good clean push, no fighting, I don’t want to see anyone hurt.” The police would march out about two minutes before the buses came. As soon as they arrived there was a shout of PUSH!! And it was a rugby scrum ... if anyone broke through they’d run round and get in the back again. It was absolutely amazing.’  
(Graef 1989 p63)

Gary Stanger has vivid memories of policing the picketing.

‘There was one very nasty piece of violence down at Easington. ... There were four sets of us, four sets of ten and we just got out of the vans and there was a right old rumpus. We set about the miners and there was quite a bit of retribution, because there was a few police who had been beaten up when they had been on the night shift, ... After that they used to clear the streets because they realised that we had had enough of the intimidation. ... But what some of the coppers did, there was no excuse for some of it. But that was just human nature.’  
(Interview with Gary Stanger)

He went on to explain that many of the police, he included, were not afraid of getting stuck in to the miners when the chance arose.

'I was never afraid of going in amongst anybody, six foot two, and at the time of the miners' strike I was eighteen stones. I was just over 30, and I was playing rugby. ... I was reasonably fit, but I could also go in and talk to anybody, but I had also done a bit of boxing, and I had to go in and talk to them. But I used to have a drawing pin in my glove, and I used to poke them in the chest 'that's enough from you, you'd better behave'. And the drawing pin used to stick in their chests and they used to wonder what it was.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

However he also told me how he was quite prepared to take on a miner one to one without the 'protection' of the police uniform.

'We were on one side of the yard and the miners were on the other. And Joe said 'come on I'll fight the biggest of yours', and I came out. I mean I drink with Joe in the club and I backed him towards the wall, and I took off my helmet and coat off, threw my cuffs and stick on the floor and I put my fist up and said 'come on Willis I'll have you any day'. And he turned round and said 'I'll not fight with you Stanger, you bought us a drink on Sunday'. Certain things like that defused it. Where the Met and the likes of that didn't have the rapport with the miners. They were just a different social background to what we were anyway. They used to incite the lads(!).'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

None of the other police I interviewed were as 'up-front' as to the tactics that the police used or openly admitted that not all policing was carried out strictly 'by the book'. What however became clear from these interviews was that much of the confrontation between police and pickets was two minutes of highly ritualised rioting.

These observations are based upon access to BBC newsreel film of the violence at Easington and other sites during the 1984/85 miners strike, as well as interviews with a number of police officers who took part in picket line duties during the strike.

The first observation was that in the first days of the picket line violence at Easington the police were dressed in normal police uniforms, short jackets, pointed hats, as if they were on 'the beat' or on duty at a football match. Likewise the pickets were mostly in trainers, jogging bottoms or jeans and T-shirts.

What quickly became apparent was that the police looked very self conscious, almost out of place. They would get out of their vans and immediately pull down their jackets, pull down their hat chinstraps and look round. They would then form up and march off to their allotted positions. All this would be carried out to the chants of, normally, 'Here we go, here we go, here we go' from the assembled pickets.

Most of the time the violence was restricted to a couple of minutes pushing and shoving as the returning miners crossed the picket lines either into or out of the pit. Again these actions were accompanied by shouts of 'scab' as the miners passed. Once they were safely in or out of the pit the pushing stopped the two sides disengaged, clothing or uniforms straightened out, any arrested pickets taken away along with any injured police or pickets. On many picket lines these actions would quickly be followed by a game of football or cricket between the two parties until the next shift entered or left the pit.

'In a lot of cases it was exactly like that. I mean from personal experience, and this is just to show how good humoured it was at times, the lads would say, or the pickets would say 'right when the next set of wagons comes through we'll push for a couple of minutes, you push us back and then we'll ease off'. Now that was what it was like at times.'

(Interview with Neil Stephenson)

During the interview with PC Davidson he recalled one incident in which he was involved.

'I wouldn't say it was all violence, it was quite humorous at times. There was one incident at Tow Law where we noticed that every time we turned up the miners would all congregate in front of us, because we were a traffic contingent. We said to them this day, 'Why do you always come up where we are?' Why are you always pushing us? "The thing is lads you're only wearing shoes and you only have jackets on, You're not dressed like them. We think they are soldiers because they had big boots on". "No, they're just police as well". "No, no, we think they're much harder than you lads, you've only got soft shoes on, you can't hurt us". And that was one of the reasons they used to come and stand next to us. They knew that we were more mature, more controlled, experienced, call it what you will. But they used to come and stand next to us. It was noticeable. And there was one incident where Doddsie tried to take his heavy loader out and we finished up pushing, they were pushing into us, we were pushing into them, and it was just like a rugby scrum. And I looked up and I realised that I had moved around from my position at 3 o'clock around to 9 o'clock and I was now looking backwards. I was actually now trying to push the miners into the yard. And I started laughing and one or two of the lads had their heads down and they said 'what are you laughing at' I said 'look up and see where you are man'. He said, 'Oh Hell, we're trying to keep you out of the miners yard, and you're trying to push us in.' I said, 'exactly' and it was just one of those stupid things that happened.'

(Interview with PC Stan Davidson)

PC Gary Stanger also recalled that for the majority of the time picketing was a boring duty.

'The majority of people that came down to the picket lines were miners. At first it was good banter between everybody you know, as it got on it got a bit more bitter. Up in the North East it wasn't too bad, we didn't have too much bother with the 'flying pickets' they were all local lads and we tended to look after each other. When it was cold we used to have a brazier going and we shared it with them .... they used to go and pinch a bit of coal, as we used to turn a blind eye to it.'

(Interview with Gary Stanger)

However, as the violence became more bitter, especially at places like Orgreave the police began to equip themselves with riot gear. Out went the traditional appearance of the police to be replaced by men in anonymous black tunics, crash hats with visors, carrying long shields and wielding batons. The tactics too had changed on both sides. The pushing and shoving was replaced by the throwing

of bricks and other missiles by the pickets, while the police answered the pickets change in tactics with baton wielding cavalry charges by mounted police and with the indiscriminate 'clubbing' of pickets by truncheon wielding police. However despite the increased bitterness of the violence there was still some friendship between the pickets and the police. PC Gary Stanger recalls an experience at Orgreave.

'There was a load of bother. There was a few charges from picket lines and there was a lot of injuries that day. When it was all finished there was about 50 odd wagons came out and we just told everybody that we had to get them out. When they did get out we were sitting down; we had packed lunches coming round. We had orange juice, tins of pop, and we were talking to some of the lads from Glasgow. Glaswegian miners, these lads were, they had come all the way down, been promised a fiver, been on the bus for about five hours to get there. They had been pushing and shoving which was part of the course, they obviously wanted to stop the wagons from getting out, and they had had bugger all. They had nothing to drink, nothing to eat, so we just shared our stuff with them. I had no problems with them.'

(Interview with PC Gary Stanger)

Arguably a hard core of miners tried to push the police into violence in order to solidify the strike. The legality of all the actions associated with the strike – picketing, policing, movement control within communities, the role of the courts – is something different groups contested, their judgement being dependent on their political perception of events. Encounters on the picket line became part of an evolving interpretation in which both sides – police and pickets – demoralised one another. There was, however, a ritual aspect to this that, free from the glare of TV, both sides could manage often in a relatively friendly manner. Many police officers described to Graef (1989) how a core of pickets toured the mining communities transforming what had been a peaceful picket line into a violent mob. Arguably the police became a symbol of the government and the NCB, just as they had become a symbol of the 'haves' and against the 'have nots' during the inner city riots, of the early 1980s.

The activities of police harassment extended well beyond the picket lines and mining communities. By the end of 1984 several hundred members of miners support groups had been arrested while collecting money for the strike. This type of harassment did little to endear the police to working miners or members of the public. One sergeant from a large southern force commented.

‘Now you’ve got 120,000 anti police people just on the mining side. Then you’ve got their wives and families. We’ve got enough enemies out there now ... we don’t need the working men’  
(Graef 1989 p60)

The public’s perception of the police as the ‘thin blue line’ was replaced with one of anonymous figures in black seemingly unconcerned about the tactics they were using and the injuries they were inflicting. The police were no longer an emergency service, rather they were seen as a macho paramilitary force with riot gear and shields.

Despite all the criticism over the police tactics, the criminal courts did not act to curb the police actions; rather they supported them and gave them legitimacy. By December 1985 8731 arrests had been made, but around 1000 of these had not been charged. A call for an enquiry into police behaviour from Gerald Kaufman, Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary at the time, was rejected by Douglas Hurd who argued that the proper procedure was via the Police Complaints Board. Hurd went on to defend the police and their tactics, accusing the pickets of violence and mass intimidation.

#### DEALING WITH ARRESTED MINERS – THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AT WORK

The dispute between the government and the striking miners was very one sided. The government had the backing of the media proprietors, and Energy Secretary Peter Walker had regular weekend briefings with influential journalists. He was

also friends with a number of editors including Sir David English of the *Daily Mail*, Andrew Neil of the *Sunday Times*, and Rupert Murdoch owner of the *Times*, *Sun* and *News of the World* was an acquaintance. As Adney and Lloyd (1986) point out,

‘It was a formidable list of connections, and not left to gather dust’. As one associate put it, “It was marvellous. Here was a man who could spring from his seat and ring a friend in the cause”.

(Adney and Lloyd 1986 P244)

Adney and Lloyd also note that Robert Maxwell who had earlier in the dispute offered help to Scargill later became a friend of Peter Walker. Examples of Walker’s influence noted by Adney and Lloyd include a story in the *Daily Express* about a new boiler which could switch from fuel to fuel was dropped because it might indicate a concern over coal stocks.

In addition to the co-operation with the media it also had virtually unlimited financial resources to call upon, and, at the front line the police to carry out its policies and the courts to uphold the police’ actions. One journalist who acknowledged that there were two sides to the violence was Paul Routledge, the Labour editor of *The Times*. In the January 1985 edition of *The Red Tape* (the civil service union paper) he wrote,

‘it ought to be stopped [picket line violence]. All of it, the stone throwing by miners and the baton charging by policemen who actually seem to enjoy a week away from home for a pityard punch-up. And don’t tell me they don’t because I’ve seen them at it.’

(Hollingsworth 1986 p266)

The media gave the actions of the police a certain amount of legitimacy by their coverage of the dispute. Television cameras showed the miners hurling bricks and other weapons and attacking the police. What the cameras did not show was the police provocation which provoked their actions. Because of the biased

nature of the reporting of the strike by the media, NUM leaders were therefore wary in their dealings with the media.

One paper that could have been expected to give support to the miners' cause was the *Daily Mirror*, but like some sectors of the labour movement it appeared disinterested. *The Sun* however was prepared to use almost anything to put Scargill in a bad light, including the infamous picture of him with his right arm raised as if giving a Nazi salute.

The NUM could not match the Coal Board's press office. The NUM had only one press officer Nell Myers who was frequently not available to speak to journalists. This lack of resources meant that statements from the Coal Board about coal stocks, pits working and number of returning miners were not challenged convincingly.

In contrast the police were helpful. They would provide reporters with information as to the likely locations of picket line violence. This gave strength to the argument that this information was being obtained from the tapped telephone lines of NUM officials and strike activists. At the majority of locations the police insisted that the media were behind police lines for 'safety'. This led to claims that the general public only saw events from a police perspective.

The actions of certain police forces and the cost of the strike came in for severe criticisms from certain Police committees. Relationships between these two factions had in some areas been on the decline for a number of years. Kenneth Oxford, Chief Constable of Merseyside had experienced relationship problems with his Police Authority over his handling of the Toxteth riots, especially the use of CS Gas. In 1983 the then Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, James Anderton, made the decision to arm certain police officers without

consulting his police committee. When questioned by the Committee, his reply was,

‘The policies were mine, the responsibility mine and not yours’.  
(Coulter, Miller & Walker 1984 p53)

Frank Taylor, the Chairman of Nottinghamshire Police Committee, found that the Chief Constable had considerable autonomy when it came to policing. Even though Nottinghamshire was paying half the cost of policing the miners strike the Police Committee could not actually interfere with the policing of the dispute, or with the costs entailed. It is estimated that some Metropolitan police officers earned £2,000 a month in overtime while policing in Nottinghamshire, with the whole police operation in the Midlands cost an estimated £2 million a day.

Supporters of the strike blamed many Labour councils for failing to curb their police forces’ powers, and for allowing the police to be organised from a national centre which destroyed, according to George Moores, Chairman of South Yorkshire Police Committee,

‘Something that we have worked hard for in South Yorkshire – full consultation, policing by consent’.  
(Coulter, Miller & Walker 1984 p54)

In the face of such hostile police actions it is understandable that picket line violence was inevitable. It is also understandable that the NUM leadership were reluctant to publicly criticise their members who were on the receiving end of brutal police tactics that the public never saw due to biased media coverage. Arguably Scargill who felt his members were under enough pressure, refused to criticise pickets feeling that strong leadership and total support for the actions of his members was more advantageous than criticism or condemnation. By not publicly condemning violence the NUM leadership gave the violence both on and

off the picket lines a degree of legitimacy.

For the police the conditions under which they were serving were a poor preparation for remaining calm and composed while on the picket lines. Some men were on duty for up to 16 hours a day, billeted in poor accommodation and even the huge sums of overtime payments were little reward for the conditions under which they were carrying out their duties. As one police officer from Durham Constabulary explained to me in an interview,

'The problem was mainly lack of sleep. I was exhausted. Some days I was working 14-16 hours. I was getting back home at 8.00 pm, having something to eat, going to bed and I was up again at 4.00 in the morning, because I had to be at HQ at 4.45'.

(Interview with Bill Brennan)

As the strike progressed the police became more and more bitter about the role they were being expected to play. As Inspector Ronald Carroll of West Yorkshire Police put it,

'The police were used by the Coal Board to do all their dirty work. Instead of seeking remedies under the existing civil law, they relied completely on the police to solve their problems by implementing criminal law'.

(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p100)

While a letter of *The Guardian* on 6 June 1984 from a police inspector accused the government of,

'using the 'thin blue line' as its battering ram against Arthur Scargill in an attempt to deliver the 'coup de grace' to the trade union movement as a whole'.

(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p100)

Police tactics prevented the NUM leadership from achieving its desired objectives of stopping coal production in all areas. It was only a massive police presence in the Nottinghamshire coalfield that kept the pits open. Although

production was down, during the first five weeks of the strike Nottinghamshire produced around 900,000 tonnes.

The police and pickets played a 'cat and mouse' game with each other trying to get pickets to places where the strength of the police was weak. In Scotland the strikers outmanoeuvred the police making them think that mass picketing would take place at Ravenscraig Steel Works, when in fact it took place at Hunterston Ore Terminal on the coast. But the pickets were then tricked by the police into

thinking that the convoy of lorries would enter Ravenscraig by the main gate when in fact they used a back entrance.

Many miners did not take the decision to picket lightly. Many were out of their depth having never been involved in this type of action before. The main reason why they made the decision to take this type of action was that they felt threatened, they saw the results of large-scale closures in other industries and felt that their communities were being threatened too. The actions of the government had politicised them.

The BBC's legal affairs correspondent, Joshua Rozenberg, wrote in *The Listener* on 7 March 1985 that,

'The miners' strike made a deep impact on both the criminal law and the civil law. But it was in the grey area where both these aspects of our legal system overlap that the impact was the greatest of all. Before the miners' strike mass picketing – although a civil wrong - was not in itself thought to be a criminal offence. Now, to all intents and purposes it is'.  
(Goodman 1986 p124)

With every major legal issue during the strike the judiciary appeared to be either reinterpreting the law or inventing new ones. For example Mr Justice Scott declared on 11 February 1985 that any more than six pickets in one place would

be deemed a 'mass picket' and therefore would be a civil offence. He also declared that mass picketing was a crime under section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875 because it intimidated working miners. The 1980 Employment Act gave an 'illustrative' figure of six pickets. But this was not specified in the legislation, yet has become an accepted figure in law as a result of Mr Justice Scott's interpretation of the figure. Chief Constable, Peter Wright of South Yorkshire Constabulary admits that his officers imposed a limit of six on the picket lines. But he admitted that,

'It's not a matter of law. It's a practice. Six is a nice round number'.  
(Goodman 1986 p127)

The use of road blocks by the police was not a new tactic. Their use was ordered by the then Home Secretary James Callaghan in 1968 during the anti Vietnam War demonstrations and again during the steel strike of 1980. Then the Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers stated that the police had the powers to turn back buses of striking steel workers en route to picketing other places of work. Road blocks were also used during the National Graphical Association dispute to prevent vehicles from entering the Warrington area.

Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party commissioned a report by the MP and former Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees which concluded that,

'There was violence in some areas emanating sometimes from pickets, sometimes from the police, sometimes from both. It was not revolutionary but part of a broader trend which can be seen more clearly since 1979 as more generally law and order in this country has steadily deteriorated. The miners strike was not a thing apart.'  
(Goodman 1986 p129)

The report also said that the economic decline in older industrial areas, the ever wider effect of unemployment and the divided society which it created had contributed to the Brixton and Toxteth riots. The same was true of the miners'

strike. The report called for an enquiry on picket line violence similar to that produced by Lord Scarman on the inner city riots. But the government rejected the proposal.

The actions of the police had much to do with their perception of how the policing should be carried out. Some police forces had become impatient about having, as they saw it, their hands 'tied'. Their attitude was that they had been given a job to do, namely preventing pickets stopping miners from working, and they wanted the freedom to be allowed to get on with it.

After the miners' strike the police found that their attitude to the job had changed. While the humiliation of their failure to keep, or restore, law and order during the inner city riots had, to a certain extent, been expunged; policemen had become suspicious aggressive men rather than the local friendly bobby. Many of the problems associated with picket line violence came from police forces sent from outside mining areas. They had a much harder attitude to the violence, with some officers from the cities regarded themselves as an elite, while portraying officers from the County police forces as 'straw chewing bumpkins'. The NCCL report acknowledges that many favourable reports had been received about some police forces drafted in to mining areas, despite the adverse comments about these outside forces.

A senior officer of the Metropolitan police thought that,

'Politics and politicians had polarised society and the police were left in the void. The miners strike and the printer's dispute at Wapping had brought the police into the firing line and damaged the debatable notion that the police serve the people rather than the strike. The miners strike hurt; the police cannot afford to be seen as a tool of the Government which was how they were portrayed ... but he had no doubt that the police had a duty to restrain strikers who threatened intimidation'.  
(Chesshyre 1989 p149)

Another Metropolitan police officer stated that the police had been asked to behave as soldiers. He argued that the coaches leaving on a Sunday to take police officers to the coalfields was like watching,

‘an embarkation for war. While the army would call them platoons ACPO calls them Police Support Units’.  
(Northam 1988 p52)

During the miners’ strike the police role became reactive rather than proactive, and more routine police duties suffered. In Manchester the Chairman of the Greater Manchester Police Authority announced after the strike that, at times, the uniformed police cover was only 64% of any seasonably adjusted figure in the forces’ area.

Local police were more concerned as to the consequences of police action once the strike was over. Despite the use of police from forces outside the local area, the local police became indispensable for their local knowledge of the communities and its people. Some police forces tried to convince local people that they were not part of the violence, had officers from mining families and were sympathetic to the strikers. However, this was not accepted by many local people. The strike gave the police a bad name and officers involved with policing a demonstration by nurses after the miners strike had to endure the demonstrators chanting ‘Mrs Thatcher’s bootboys’ at them.

Not surprisingly the criminal justice system also comes in for allegations of unfair practice. Alan Cummings suggests that Magistrates Courts should have been renamed ‘Police courts’. He is highly critical of the Chairman of the Magistrates and the actions of Sunderland Magistrates’ Court.

‘What this Police Inspector who had been arresting pickets, asked of the Magistrates was absolutely scandalous. I mean we had lads incarcerated in Durham Jail through the Magistrate down there with the policeman’s support. “Breach of the peace” he said, “I believe if Union pickets are released today

then they will reoffend before their case is heard. I want them remanded in custody". So they were. He said that two or three times. It took our solicitor to go down to London one Saturday afternoon to get a judge out of his house to send instructions to the Sunderland Magistrates Chairman that he had to cease what he was doing. He was amazed that this Magistrate was using these judicial powers to incarcerate people in Durham Jail.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

The actions of Sunderland Magistrates' Courts resulted in pickets who had previously been arrested being jailed in Durham Prison for offences, which even if they were found guilty, would not carry a prison sentence.

The actions of the Sunderland Magistrates were also witnessed by a then Solicitor, Nancy Bone who was working for Thompsons, a firm of solicitors in Newcastle, who were well known for their links with the trade union movements and who were retained by the NUM, during the duration of the strike.

'The main difficulty before you ever got to the trial was the bail conditions not to enter National Coal Board (NCB) property. These were ludicrous when you consider that a lot of the people still lived in NCB houses. The other condition was not to go within so many miles of the pit which was again ludicrous as in many villages the pit is in the centre of the village.'

(Interview with Nancy Bone)

However before the defendants were actually charged they had the right to see a solicitor, and this according to Nancy Bone caused a problem in that

'unless you knew who was being held the police would not let you in the cells to see them. You had to know who was there. Of course in the melee, it was quite difficult to establish who had been arrested, so we used to liaise with Branch officials of the NUM.

(Interview with Nancy Bone)

Nancy Bone also makes three points about the treatment of miners by the courts which she considered has been underplayed.

Firstly there is the average age as being of those involved in the picketing. She

calculated that the average as less than 30 as many of the older miners had taken redundancy or retired.

‘So obviously you get the young male phenomenon, you know the football hooligan thing. I am not saying they were all football hooligans, but you do tend to get more of that happening in that age groups.’

(Interview with Nancy Bone)

The second point concerns the fact that people were being charged with Public Order Offences which she saw as being quite trivial, and

‘If they happened on a Saturday night down Newcastle, or at a football match they would never have even got to court.’

(Interview with Nancy Bone)

The third point concerns the Magistrates and the Clerks to the Magistrates themselves. She points out that

‘they [the clerks] could contest who was sitting and they are the people who interpret the law and tell them [the Magistrates] at the end of the day ‘you have to convict’ even if they [the Magistrates] don’t want to convict. The Magistrates do rely on their clerks to tell them what to do.’

‘Much of the evidence did not hold up. The Orgreave Riot trial collapsed when the prosecution evidence was shown to be fabricated. Basically what happened was that one statement setting out the facts of the riot was put together and that was distributed to various officers. In one particular case the signature on it was not the signature of the officer. The court adjourned for lunch, and the officer lost his statement and the case collapsed.’

(Interview with Nancy Bone)

Nancy Bone presents a view of the whole judicial system, from the police upwards, as being biased against the striking miners. However a then prosecuting solicitor employed by the local police authority in the North East and who wished to remain anonymous painted a rather different picture. I asked him if he was ever under pressure to seek prosecutions when the evidence clearly was not going to stand up. He replied that

'My role at the time was purely an advisory role to the police. I could only advise the police, I could not tell the police what to do. If the police wanted a prosecution to proceed then that prosecution would proceed ... as far as I was concerned personally I certainly never presented a case where I didn't think the evidence was not there to substantiate the charge.'

I then questioned him on the question of the sentences and bail conditions laid down by Magistrates. His reply indicated that:

'upon conviction the sentence for a Public Order Act Offence, or an Obstruction of the Highway offence were certainly in keeping with Magistrate sentencing guidelines. So the fact that it was a miner who was here made no difference. As to the bail conditions again as I recall it, if bail conditions were attached during the course of a case going through the courts, they weren't in any way steeper or more onerous. I suppose the only condition that I can think of that perhaps was set on occasions was that he didn't join another picket line.'

I asked him if the bail conditions included not going near NCB property. His reply was that he could not remember. But,

'in keeping with the conviction nothing out of the ordinary would be set by the Magistrates either by way of conviction or bail conditions'.

I pressured him on the point of fairness of treatment comparing some of the offences to those which happened on a Saturday night in Newcastle. His reply to the question of were they treated any differently was:

'certainly not.'

On the question of the police being over zealous with their evidence that they produced in court, and that they were charging miners on very flimsy evidence hoping that they could get convictions, he answered.

'Well again, going by my experience of every case that I prosecuted, I was satisfied that the evidence that I was presenting to court. I would call X number of police officers who would say I was there, and so and so, that man over there,

shouted such and such, encouraged such and such, or what ever it was to constitute the offence. And in the cases that I prosecuted I was quite satisfied that that was proper evidence.'

When I questioned him on the reliability of the evidence he replied,

'Now if you ask me the question whether or not they were truthful in the sense that they always were saying exactly what they saw, as opposed to what somebody else might have told then, that's not for me to try and go behind that. So whether they were over zealous in the way in which they gathered their evidence I could not say. But certainly from the point of view of prosecuting, every case that I prosecuted witnesses came along and said I saw so and so do this, or that, or the other. At the end of the day if they said that in any way shape or form then it resulted in a conviction.'

Finally after Nancy Bone's criticism of Magistrates Courts and in particular Sunderland, I asked him if he thought that Sunderland Magistrates Court was particularly tough on miners. Sunderland Magistrates Court refused legal aid to many miners pleading not guilty to offences, whereas other Magistrate Courts in the same police division were granting legal aid to miners pleading not guilty to the same offences. His comment was that

'Sunderland Magistrates Court is quite a tough bench of Magistrates. Traditionally always has been. But it would be too difficult for me to comment on.'

Once again, like so many of the issues in the miners' strike, there is a dispute over what exactly took place. On one hand a defending solicitor criticises the system from being able to have access to the defendants, right through to the actions of the Magistrates themselves and their Clerks. She is also highly critical of the way that the police presented their evidence and is critical of their actions, arguing that they

'they had a piece of legislation, which was restricting secondary picketing and they took advantage'.  
(Interview with Nancy Bone)

On the other hand we have a former prosecuting solicitor who has stated that he had no doubts over the validity of the cases he was asked to prosecute or any doubts over the evidence that he was asked to present. For him it would appear that the convictions arising from the strike were just cases to be dealt with and he saw no particular need for them to be treated as special cases.

‘What ever pressures there may have been, there certainly weren’t any pressures on me at all. I mean one hears there were all sorts of political pressures floating around at that time. But certainly my knowledge is that there was no pressure brought to bear!’

There is an element of similarity between the treatment of pickets by magistrates during the strike, and the treatment of striking miners at Chopwell in 1926. Here the pickets were tried by a magistrate who was himself financially interested in the coal trade. A protest to the Home Office about the magistrate, Sir Arthur Palmer, was rejected.

It is not surprising that the magistrates in the mining communities became closely involved with the strikers, simply because they came from the very communities where the pits were being picketed, and where miners were being arrested. I was fortunate to interview two magistrates, one admitted that he was a trade unionist, had a great deal of sympathy for the miners, had been a Labour Party member since he was sixteen, and admitted that the working pattern of the area was reflected on the bench. The second magistrate admitted, that he voted Conservative – and always had done – and,

‘I did not have a great deal of sympathy with the miners. That comes about because my feeling is that the grip that the miners have on the Labour Party in this area and the local Councils in this area has served as a great ‘retarder’ for this area. In the same way that the Conservatives were in power too long, I always thought that the Labour Party in this area, and the miners in particular, had been in control too long, to the detriment of everything else. And of course as soon as the mines have gone we are now starting to get other industries in

which we should have been trying to attract before then so to that extent I didn't have much sympathy with their cause. It's a different matter when you ask did I have sympathy for their plight. Because yes some of them did put everything on the line and they were in stricken circumstances. So I had sympathy for the person but not the cause if you like.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

In view of the conflict of evidence given by Nancy Bone and the prosecuting solicitor, I decided to question the two magistrates on a number of subjects. Firstly that legality of the evidence presented by the police. Secondly, the dispute over whether the miners were treated fairly by the legal system and, thirdly if as magistrates they saw themselves as impartial.

I asked Bill Brown if he ever had reason to doubt some of the evidence put before him.

'It was the norm to find the policemen in court, it was the norm to have policemen prosecuting and giving evidence. I can't think of a case where we doubted to the extent that we actually threw the case out. Most cases you are balancing one person's opinion against another person's opinion, you are making a valued judgement as to what they are as witnesses. My feeling would be that, no, I was going to say the feeling of the bench but that's not really right. It would be my interpretation of what I think had happened was what we were actually dealing with these people as fairly standard criminals before the Court. The reason why they were before the Court you tried to put out of your mind.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

Like the police his answer attempts to de-politicise the issue by retreating behind the cover of 'just doing one's job'. Having been fairly firm in his opinion I asked him if he thought that the police asked for harsh and unnecessary bail conditions, or if indeed the police appeared to be under some form of pressure to obtain prosecutions.

'Even today, the prosecutor would suggest what they think are sensible bail conditions. It was up to the bench, and that has always been part of my training, that it's up to the bench to decide on the day given the evidence put before them what they think is sensible. You have got to come to a judgement as to how likely that person is to commit a further offence. Certainly we were

imposing conditions which said they must keep away from picketing areas, they were not allowed to take part in the pickets. I don't think there were any sort of cruel or unusual punishment that was removing people, we would do the same today if somebody was causing a disturbance by drinking we would ban them from pubs. I don't think it was any different from that.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

Again he tries to present the 'thinking' of the bench as dealing with everyday non-political cases, which clearly these were not, in a further attempt to remove any form of political context from the proceedings.

And on the point about pressure being put on police to obtain prosecutions.

'I have no way of knowing. As a Magistrate with fairly limited experience at the time then you were very careful about trying to form an opinion. You don't rush in, you watch other people, you're listening intently. You are not a chairman you just have to sit and listen and then when you retire you offer your opinion. So I was sitting there trying to take it all in. I certainly didn't get the impression that there was a large number of frivolous prosecutions, if any. Even today some of them you think 'good God what they need is their heads banging together, not to be prosecuted' I am sure there would have been a small percentage that went through like that. But in the main, no, I didn't get the impression that the police were putting forward prosecutions simply because they were playing some sort of numbers games.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

I put the same three questions to Bill Horsfield, the self confessed supporter of the miners and their cause. On the question about the legality of the evidence presented by the police he agreed with Bill Brown, but gave a more qualified answer.

'It all came down to the defendant, if he agreed he had done that. But with the emphasis placed on the action by police. I don't know whether you understand me, the amount of the damage or the action that resulted in the charge of the public order act, the seriousness of it, the actions and other senses and circumstances, from which the police would be, being his job, shouldn't consider himself at risk under a public order act from being called a 'Fucking Wanker' for instance. Not now a days, not even in the 80s, but that was the kind of thing that was being brought before us.'

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

I asked him if a case like that should have been dismissed?

‘In my view with people with a mild case it would have been dismissed, but if you have been as I mentioned earlier, it depends on the composition at the time and the emphasis placed upon those words and actions. The miners going to say ‘Yes, I did say that, that’s what I felt about him’ but if you meant have you got the right defence people, you had people round here, and I can name a couple that would tell you that a policeman should not be offended and shouldn’t feel himself unsafe or unsecure. And that’s my view too.’

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

However on the second question regarding bail conditions he totally disagrees.

‘There were a lot of first time offenders, in fact I would think that about 95% were first time offenders, they weren’t criminals. As far as they saw it they were exercising union rights. Some of the restrictions that we were asked to impose on them and the bail we were giving them was ludicrous. ... We were requested to put on conditions as you may recall, you will have read about them yourself, where they were to not go anywhere near the mines.’

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

From his reply it is arguable that he had some difficulty in coping with what, I contend, is a contradiction whereby he is having to punish people with whom he has admitted he has great sympathy for. But he still has to uphold the law and unlike his colleagues has difficulty in de-politicising the situation.

Again on the third question, that the police pressure to obtain prosecutions, he is at odds with Bill Brown.

‘It’s a personal view coming here and again I believe it is so. I believe there was a national strategy, not that the magistrates themselves were involved in, naturally they can’t do that, but I think there was a national strategy as far as the police were concerned. Using Home Office guidelines, I think. But that is a personal opinion.’

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

The second major question follows on from that of police pressure to obtain

prosecutions and deals with the allegations made earlier by Nancy Bone that the legal system did not treat the miners fairly.

'The difficulties with the Magistrates' Court system is that you are insular in that each petty session division can set its own 'norms' set its own standards. It's a lot less insular these days than it was, I think then. And that's to do with how you can transmit information. We have a much more active Magistrate's Association, we have bench 'norms' published which we can adopt or not, there are national 'norms'. I think undoubtedly the answer to that has to be the judicial system did not serve the miners very well in some cases. But in percentage terms I would have to say that it served society well enough and the miners are part of society. So I think they were served by the judicial system in that respect.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

'In this area it did. I remember one of my colleagues, it was him and I that went on that Bank Holiday Monday to find the court full of strange policemen and many miners, every one of them got bail. Although the applications were for every one of them to be kept in custody. Every one of them got bail because the alleged offences in our opinion didn't necessitate remand in custody.'

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

The two magistrates opinions mirror that of the prosecuting solicitor, although not actually saying, as he did, that they were dealt with just as another group of law breakers.

Once again on the question of impartiality both magistrates are in agreement. Both agree that the system was not too harsh on the miners which again goes against Nancy Bone's argument, but supports that of the prosecuting solicitor. Firstly Bill Horsfield's answer to the question

'No I think the system was impartial, it could have been the people dealing with it, it's the people not the system. And remember that same system remains in place today, especially with the public order acts, they didn't introduce any new laws, as far as I am aware they didn't. I mean the public order act that is in four sections and that was in then and it is still in at the moment.'

(Interview with Bill Horsfield)

and Bill Brown's answer is in two parts. Firstly,

'My recollection is that we were just dealing with them in exactly the same, unbiased fashion, trying not to let the days events impinge upon us, we are supposed to reflect the society that we live in, that's the "orderly" society that we live in. And the saying is that hard cases make bad law, and we weren't in the business of changing any rules for these very hard cases.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

and secondly where again his strategy for de-politicising the situation comes into play

'To be honest I can't really remember a huge number of miners, I say, they were just defendants. So if they had been thieving, they were thieving because they were thieves rather than because they were miners. And I have no great recollection that they were characterised in my mind at that time as these are "miners" thieves and therefore I should deal with them differently as opposed to "shoplifting" thieves. They were stealing for gain rather than to put food in their children's bellies. I don't think I came across anybody where they were stealing actually to put food into children's bellies.'

(Interview with Bill Brown)

Norman Tebbit suggested after the strike that the pace of the courts in convicting and sentencing offenders was too slow. This he argues gave the impression to the Government that violence by striking miners would pay. However, he had some sympathy for local Magistrates who had to live and work in mining areas.

Tebbit's sympathy was not misplaced, Bill Brown recalls that there was one occasion when he actually had a feeling of fear while he was in court.

'The only time that I felt threatened wasn't a physical threat at all it was just a feeling. And that was one day when we could not come into Court from the Court corridor the door from the corridor to the Court was locked, the key was not available, and that was I think in a policeman's hands somewhere. So we actually had to walk around to the front of the building coming through the public entrance. So the Clerks and the Magistrates had to walk through the Court, all the time everybody standing, the Court was jammed packed with people who did not want to be there and you got this awful feeling of hatred coming across. It was a potable feeling going to Court that day. And it was

probably one of the first times I actually felt that awful feeling, awful as in awesomeness of what you are actually doing to people, your fellow man; you actually are Judge and Jury over them. And in some ways it was a disturbing feeling, but because it's a salutary lesson for me as a Magistrate to realise that it doesn't matter if it is a drunk and disorderly or its attempted rape. You know the person you are dealing with has a right to be dealt with in a fair and honest manner. So it wasn't a threat where someone had said I'll punch your lights out, but it was a feeling that these people were 'agin me'.  
(Interview with Bill Brown)

The two magistrates interviewed proved what difficulties they faced in trying to impartially enforce the rule of law, and punish offenders.

Not only was criminal law used against striking miners, but civil law was used against the NUM and its leaders. Civil law was used by working miners during the early months of the strike to protect them against disciplinary action by the NUM and to help give their actions legitimacy. A number of judgements stating that the strike was unofficial helped portray the striking miners as the guilty party and prompted those miners who were wavering to go back to work. It was the actions of two South Yorkshire miners from Manton Colliery, Robert Taylor and Ken Foulstone who began a process that eventually led to the formation of the National Working Miners Committee. This committee was advised by supporters of Margaret Thatcher and her government such as David Hart, Saatchi and Saatchi director Tim Bell and Derbyshire solicitor David Negus.

Negus was firmly opposed to the strike and a supporter of Margaret Thatcher's policies. His opinion was that,

'Individual rights are being trampled on. It is the role of the courts to stop powerful interests stepping on those rights and in the twentieth century these powerful groups tend to be trade unions.'  
(Beynon 1985 p117)

Civil law was used to sequester the assets of the NUM and Arthur Scargill personally for contempt of interim injunctions declaring the strike unlawful. As the NUM remained defiant, its assets were sequestered. But the NUM had pre-empted this move and its funds had been moved out of Britain. This prompted Negus to begin an action to remove control of all NUM assets from the union trustees and place them in the hands of the receiver. Despite leading officials of the union agreeing to co-operate with the courts, Mr Justice Mervyn Davis refused to accept the climbdown unless the NUM agreed to abide by all past orders against it. The NUM's approach to the TUC General Council was rejected as unions were afraid of offering help of services that might leave them in contempt of court. On 14 November 1984 it tendered 'the apology of the NUM for the contempt and request that the writ of sequestration be lifted.'

#### COVERT POLICING – FACT OR FICTION?

One aspect of the policing of the miners strike which is still surrounded in mystery and, because of the 30 and 100 Year Rule on the release of official government documents, is likely to remain so, is the covert operation against the miners carried out by the police and other 'intelligence gathering' apparatus of the state.

Nevertheless, the widespread belief among miners, particularly activists, that the security services were involved in supporting the police – a proposition vehemently denied, as one might expect by operational officers – became part of the reality of the strike. This further compounded its political and legal complexity.

Allegations about the involvement of MI5 agents in both a mass surveillance operation and as Agents Provocateurs against the striking miners have been made, which Seamus Milne in his book *The Enemy Within* (1994), alleges that

Margaret Thatcher personally ordered a 'Get Scargill' campaign both during the strike and afterwards. This he alleges was run by MI5, and GCHQ was used to spy on the activities of NUM officials and also the movement of NUM funds around the European banking system. This operation was run by, Stella Rimmington, who as head of MI5's F2 Section at the time of the strike, had overall control of all operations against the miners and allegedly reported regularly to the government. With the Prime Minister's authorisation, MI5's remit was expanded during the strike. Special Branch Police allegedly penetrated picket lines dressed as striking miners' while their informers in the mining communities passed back 'information' in return for cash payment.

By the time of the 1984/85 strike the Government counter – subversion machine was at full strength. Scargill and McGahey had been under surveillance for years and anyone close to them was also watched. During the strike MI5 leased the building opposite the NUM's headquarters in Sheffield and every branch and lodge secretary had his phone tapped. In 1983 Michael Bellamy, a former MI5 Officer told his solicitor, Sara Burton of Seifert Sedley and Williams, who also represented the NUM, that MI5 had planted an agent high up in the union's headquarters. Although Bellamy did not know the agent's name, Sarah Burton passed the information back to Scargill.

Overall the scale of the covert operation against the miners and their leader, from the use of spy satellites, and a huge telephone tapping operation through to the use of agents on the ground to destabilise the strike and unions from within, was unique.

However, a policeman interviewed by myself, stated that he had no idea that the police were receiving any help from organisations outside the police. He admitted that the police did have an intelligence gathering service, but stated that,

'it is usually gathered by police officers, I know of nobody else other than police officers during the miners strike taking photographs or trying to build up a picture of what may occur ...'  
(Interview with Peter Griffith).

The police were also accused of using covert tactics against striking miners during the dispute, with Special Branch using their own 'dirty tricks' campaign especially on the picket lines. On 7 June 1984 a miner in Nottinghamshire claimed he had recognised two plain clothes policemen posing as pickets and inciting others to throw stones. On 18 June 1984 a further two plain clothes policemen were found posing as miners at the Cresswell Strike Centre in Derbyshire. Both officers, PC Stevens and Sergeant Monk were identified by a reporter from the local paper, *The Worksop Guardian*. The paper carried the story on its first page; Fleet Street did not carry the story. Policemen dressed as pickets were accused of singling out miners for arrest or for provoking pickets into violent action while even police dogs were alleged to be from the army.

The question of police and soldiers posing as pickets is one that I raised with two of the policemen I interviewed. The first answered that,

'[He] would love to meet the miner. I wish he would come forth and identify himself, put his name down identify his brother and let us get to the bottom of this, because I have no knowledge at all of soldiers wearing police uniforms during the miners strike.'  
(Interview with Peter Griffiths).

The second replied that,

'I've heard that one as well, I think everybody had heard that one. That's rubbish as well. There was one person, he claimed on TV that he saw somebody that he knew to be in the army from Easington [and] that he was dressed in a policeman's uniform. The next question that should have been asked was, 'Well who was it?' But it was not. So it was obvious that he could not name that man.'  
(Interview with Bill Brennan).

There were also allegations of phone tapping. But because of its nature, and the government's interest in keeping it secret it would be virtually impossible to prove. However, two prominent NUM members in County Durham, Dave Hopper, now Secretary of the Durham Area NUM and Allan Cummings, the NUM Lodge Secretary at Easington, were convinced that their telephones were being tapped during the dispute.

'Mine was tapped there's no question about that ... We had arranged to send a couple of bus loads of pickets down to Leicester, and I had a one to one conversation with the Treasurer who organised the buses with a firm called Fosters who were across the road from where he lived ... No one else knew about it, and before the Treasurer could get across the road there had been a police car there with a couple of detectives asking him how many people he was transporting down to Leicester. Fred Foster said "what are you talking about, I haven't made any agreement with the NUM regarding taking buses out of the county". The detective told him "you will be".'

(Interview with Alan Cummings).

Alan Cummings accusations about phone tapping is supported by Milne (1994), who alleges that every single NUM Branch and Lodge secretary had his telephone monitored, as did the entire national leadership of the NUM. In addition any group, trade union or individual sympathetic to the miners' cause also had their telephone monitored. The size of the monitoring operation was so large that on one occasion the system ground to a halt when the stock of recording tapes became exhausted.

Accusations of military involvement in the policing of the dispute have also been alleged. Accusations have been made that riot control groups such as the Metropolitan Police's Internal Response Unit are regularly trained by the army in the tactics and use of weapons of a military nature. Specific allegations of military involvement include a striking Welsh miner coming face to face with his Welsh Guardsman son while picketing at Birch Coppice Colliery in the Midlands. There is also an allegation by a coach driver from Brighton that he

drove members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Parachute Regiment to the Midlands coalfield. An NUM official said that he had seen police officers with no numbers on their uniforms at Dawmill Colliery, again in the Midlands coalfield.

I put the question about the use of troops to PC Gary Stanger, and his reply is an emphatic no.

'It's a load of rubbish ... I was on the picket lines and we never saw any soldiers or anybody. We had lads in the force who were army trained, but if there were any army lads on the picket lines, we didn't know them.'  
(Interview with PC Gary Stanger)

I asked PC Neil Stephenson for his thoughts on the subject

'Yes funny enough I was talking to a picket at South Hetton and he said to me "do you know they [the police] are using soldiers, because I've got a pal whose convinced he's seen his cousin in police uniform, and he's definitely in the army". And I was saying well it's not possible for it to happen because to wear the uniform you have got to be sworn in as a police officer. Nobody would allow that. But he just couldn't believe it wasn't happening.'  
(Interview with PC Neil Stephenson)

And on the subject of covert intelligence gathering by groups such as MI5, or other intelligence gathering networks.

'Well I certainly didn't come across anything like that during the strike. Certainly there was evidence gatherers at the scenes, but they were all police officers. Certainly the ones I saw with the video cameras were definitely police officers. We knew, well certainly had a good idea when pickets were going to turn up. So where that information came from I don't know.'  
(Interview with PC Neil Stephenson)

PC Stan Davidson is adamant that neither the army or MI5 were involved on the picket lines.

'I have no doubt whatsoever that I would have heard, or someone would have pointed out that someone was not "kosher".'  
(Interview with PC Stan Davidson)

He goes on to argue that it was the fact that the police marched into position coupled with the fact that they had riot gear and NATO style helmets that gave the impression that there was a military 'element' in their ranks. This he explains was exploited by the police.

'And of course once the lads clicked on that some of the miners actually believed this [that there were soldiers in the police ranks] they started referring to one another as Corporal, Lance Corporal "Where's the RSM gone?" they were just taking the mick, it was a wind up. Rightly or wrongly, I mean, I did hear that going on, in fact I admit to doing it myself.'  
(Interview with PC Stan Davidson)

Stuart (1998) suggests that any police that had no identification numbers on their uniforms,

'were police officers drafted in from other forces across the country'.  
(Stuart 1998 P129)

and refuted Tony Benn's claim that army officers were regularly used, as Benn can only provide vague evidence to support his claims.

Allegations of informers in pit villages were also made. These informers were said to be earning regular wages supplying the police with information, gossip and reporting any incidents. Money to informers was paid out of the Police Informers 'Fund. The police were also alleged to have placed informers into the cells in police stations where striking miners were being held. The purpose of this was to obtain information which could then be used by police, when they questioned the arrested men.

There are a number of other allegations that have been made which fall into this category of 'covert operations'.

Firstly there is the question of miners being paid by 'right wing' organisations to return to work. During my investigations I could find no evidence of this.

Paul Wilkinson told me that he had not received any money to return to work, in fact quite the opposite as a local Labour councillor offered him money to stay on strike. Neither did he receive any help to pursue his case against the NUM through the courts after the strike.

Secondly there is the allegation of pro-government newspapers and media owners using their resources to obtain information for the government. Parker (2000) alleges that Robert Maxwell had the resources to carry out this type of investigation and that he,

'regularly hired teams of international private detectives ... to dig the dirt on ... people he did not like, such as Arthur Scargill, the British miners' leader. His stable of publications provided him with the opportunity to wage public campaigns through editorial columns and leaders.'  
(Parker 2000 P130)

Milne (1994) makes much of the action of Stella Rimington in the covert operations against the miners. Her memoirs were due to be published in 2000 under the title *Open Secrets* but worries over the content delayed publication until September 2001. However on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2001 *The Sun* newspaper announced that they would be published within months with, or without, permission from the government. The HMSO publication on the Security Service published in 1993, with an introduction by Stella Rimington admits that the use of eavesdropping, telephone tapping, surveillance operations are all used by the Security Services in the course of their work. No mention is made of any operations against trade unions, or the NUM in particular, although it does admit that certain individuals considered subversive are monitored and their actions recorded.

## CONCLUSION

Legality is a contested concept, not merely a question of what the law stated but one of interpretation. During the strike the law was interpreted in the context of very specific events, - picketing, freedom of movement – and as the strike evolved and the positions of key groups became increasingly policed it is not surprising that the Courts became a focus of political conflict. The Criminal Justice System became an important element of the strike.

This chapter raises a number of questions over the actions of the police in dealing with the striking miners. Certainly the police were given almost unlimited resource in order to police the strike and were seen by many as being a tool of the government. Inevitably in such a large scale dispute there would be contradictory evidence over what actually happened at various times during the strike, and Durham was not exempt from this.

For example one of the policemen that I interviewed firmly denied that men at Easington waved five pound notes at striking miners in an attempt to intimidate them, while another policeman not only admitted that it happened, but that he was there when the incident took place. This raises the question of was the first policeman adhering to the ‘official’ line that no incidents of intimidation took place or did the second policeman finally decide to admit, some thirteen years after the strike, that, yes, incidents of intimidation did take place and should now be admitted.

On the question of legality it must be remembered that the strike was declared unlawful in the High Court by Mr Justice Nicholls in August 1984. Therefore the police, on instructions from the government, could have taken an even tougher line with pickets. The fact they did not could be put down to two factors, firstly, a lack of resources, and, secondly, a fear of escalating support for the miners from other sectors of the labour movement.

For many of the people involved in the strike that I interview it is clear that they had little respect, and in some cases outright contempt, for the ruling that the strike was illegal. For them the actions of the police and the courts were 'illegal' because it allowed miners to cross picket lines, prevented them from stopping vehicles crossing picket lines, and as they saw it prevented them from obtaining the support that they thought they were entitled too.

On the question of betrayal many miners thought that they were betrayed by the local police simply because they enforced the law about picketing. Again miners that I interviewed suggested that had the local police let them picket how and when they wanted too then there would have been considerably less violence and trouble on the picket lines and the need for police from outside the area would have been reduced or eliminated altogether. The fact that the local police refused to do this was seen as a betrayal by the miners and their supporters.

The use of police from outside the area leads to the final point of this conclusion which is that those forces' lack of understanding of the culture of mining communities created, in many cases, including at Easington, more trouble than it contained. The mob tactics, and anonymous black uniforms, initiated violence rather than prevented it. For miners, their families, and communities, the police with all their resources and legal power were not going to prevent them from protesting. Neither was the threat of arrest and trial going to stop the miners picketing in order to save their jobs and communities.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE POLITICS OF THE STRIKE

The 1984/85 miners' strike was the most political industrial dispute seen in Britain. Although the government had become involved in industrial disputes such as the miners' strike of 1972 and 1974, and the steel strike of 1981, governmental involvement both actual and perceived, had never been as intense as it was during this dispute.

As the strike progressed the tones of the rhetoric between government, the NCB and the NUM became increasingly bitter, Margaret Thatcher describing Arthur Scargill as 'the enemy within' and as the support for the NUM failed to reach what they considered the 'correct' levels the word betrayal began to be used to describe the actions of some groups of workers.

Betrayal goes to the heart of the issue, and the strike itself shaping the actions and attitudes of key participants. It is characterised by a breakdown in trust, a loss of confidence by groups in each other, a break-up of relationships and solidarity all of which leads to the notion of order and security being threatened. Under these conditions the normal rules of industrial relations no longer apply.

In the case of the miners' strike the notions of public order and security being threatened were fundamental, from the police point of view. From the government's perspective there was a perceived threat to the democratic process. From the NUM's point of view there was a threat to jobs and the very existence of the union. Finally, from those communities under threat there was the portent of the ending of a way of life and the break-up of older solidarities and traditions. There was a fear

that there would be no future in mining communities.

The politics of the strike are naturally complicated and the term of betrayal for many, including Arthur Scargill, has its roots in the events of 1926, and this chapter begins by examining the events of that dispute.

The chapter continues by looking at –

- The similarities between 1926 and 1984/85 over the question of betrayal
- The perceptions of the strike at a National level
- The historic roots of confrontation
- The relationships between Scargill and the TUC
- The NACODS dispute
- Scargill and the NUM's relations with Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party
- The relations between the Miners', Labour Party and TUC at local level

It is around these themes that the issue of betrayal became articulated. Because the theme of betrayal is crucial to the historical memory of miners and their leaders it is important to clarify how the interpretation of the unfolding events of 1984/5 drew upon a much older framework for understanding industrial conflict that reached back into the nineteenth century, but in particular to 1926.

The history of the Durham coalfield is a period of coal production punctuated by a series of disputes, often violent, frequently long lasting, which resulted in hardship for the miners and their families. The 1926 strike and the lockout that followed, achieved epic proportions, but to this must be added the strikes of 1893, 1912, 1921, 1972, 1974, and what is seen by many as the last battle 1984/85.

The Durham committee of the MFGB in 1926 issued the following statement in mid November,

‘Our Army was ... breaking up and already ... large numbers of men had returned to work on the Owners’ terms. True the men in our County, with small exceptions, stood as solid as ever ... Is this not what we might expect after 30 weeks of heroic struggle? The marvel to all men throughout the world is that this Army of over one million men, with their women and children, have stood so long and endured the sacrifice forced upon them by a ruthless and relentless foe.’  
(Garside 1971 p 220)

With only minor alterations to the text the above statement could easily have summed up the feelings of many at the end of the 1984/85 strike. No wonder many comparisons were drawn in 1984 between what was happening then and what happened in 1926.

The miners returned to work demoralised by their defeat and bitter about what they saw as a betrayal by the rest of the working class.

Dukie Bevis, a Durham miner, whose comments can be taken to typify the prevailing popular memory of the coalfield, summed up how they felt.

‘The miners felt betrayed after the 1926 strike. Betrayed and left on their own. A lot of people said, “never again, never again”. They had bills that long to pay ... They were in debt to the masters and they wouldn’t get a start if they didn’t repay the debt ... Right through the 1930’s I remember that “never again Dukie ... the bloody bills we’ve got to pay”’.  
(Armstrong 1977 p 16)

Dukie Bevis goes on to comment about how the failure of the strike affected the Durham miners in the years that followed.

‘The men were very demoralised during the 1930s. They had stood together in 1926 and held out for almost a year but they had to go back to longer hours and huge debts. The older men would never trust anyone again. It was as if they had lost faith. And from then onwards Durham became politically dormant’.  
(Armstrong 1977 p 22)

Although they had been defeated, the Durham miners had never voted to return to work, it just ended. The miners' loss of faith was overwhelming and the way they were treated by many mine owners did nothing to restore their faith in the system. Due to the decline in the demand for coal the colliery owners did not require as many men so they could pick and choose, refusing to employ those who they saw as militant or trouble makers. At Langley Park colliery only 1000 out of 1800 miners were taken back. Unlike 1985 there was no compensation or redundancy payment. But just like 1985 the vote meant the men had returned to work disorganised and demoralised.

There now followed a long period of comparative industrial peace within the Durham coalfield. This peace was the result of three factors. Firstly the reduction in the demand for coal made miners jobs precarious and no one wanted to antagonise the colliery owners. Secondly the War, with its demand for coal, coupled with legislation passed to prevent strikes and thirdly in 1947 the miners finally achieved what they had sought for half a century, Nationalisation.

In the summer of 1971 the NUM submitted pay claims for their members that ranged from 5 to 9 pounds per week. The NCB was sympathetic to their claims but the government ordered the NCB not to increase the offer of an average of less than 2 pounds per week to each man. Before Christmas 56% of the members voted for strike action, which started on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1972. Not a single miner reported for work.

The government had a serious problem. If it had given in, the message would be that the Government had no stomach for a fight and a wages free for all would have resulted. Instead they chose to maintain their position. But the miners were tougher still. Arthur Scargill led an army of thousands of 'flying pickets', caused the police to shut the Saltley Gate coke depot because of the threat to life and safety. Eventually the Heath government relented and offered the miners £4 per week and set up a

Court of Enquiry under Lord Wilberforce.

The miners refused the government's interim offer. Wilberforce proposed increases of between £4.50 and £6.00 backdated by three and a half months. Still the miners refused. They asked for an extra pound and added a list of minor claims. The pound was refused but the 'shopping list' was accepted in full. The miners accepted. Ted Heath made a Prime Ministerial broadcast saying the government had not been humiliated. But many felt differently.

The climb down of the Heath government gave the NUM a green light for a further large wage demand in 1974. Heath again decided to maintain his position, hoping that the three day working week and power cuts, implemented under the Emergency Powers Act, would unite the country against the strike. He was wrong, the miners remained more popular than the government. In desperation Heath called a general election on the premise of 'Who governs Britain'. The answer was close, but clear, not the Conservatives.

On Monday March 4, after Heath's attempt to form a coalition with the Liberals had failed, Harold Wilson formed a government. One of his first tasks was to settle with the miners and end the three day week. The miners returned to work and a further period of peace started in the coal fields of Britain.

Between the 1974 strike and the 1984 strike the NUM moved from the centre right to the left. Much of this was to do with the increasing presence of Arthur Scargill. He finally became NUM President in 1981 after Joe Gormley's retirement. However, Gormley had won his last battle against the left of the NUM when in early 1981 he caused the Thatcher government to climb down over the proposed pit closure plan.

## BETRAYAL A REPEAT OF 1926?

The previous chapter explored the legality of the strike through the eyes of those groups representing the forces of law and order and those groups affected by the actions of the forces of law and order.

That account showed the importance in relating the perceptions and understanding the situation of key groups to their actions during the strike. It clarified the need to understand the position of each group and then to trace the ways in which these different perceptions unfolded into action.

In the same way, the aim of this chapter is to trace out the consequences of the positions taken by key groups on the political stage. These positions became fundamental to the position of the key players in the strike, shaping their interpretation, conclusions and actions. The political framework that emerged became a constraint on miners, the government and the whole labour movement providing little room for manoeuvre.

But why is the notion of betrayal such an important and emotional issue in the historical description of the miners' strike?

This is an important question, and one that needs to be fully understood. Equally important is how each miner, political group, the Conservative government, Arthur Scargill and the NUM and the Labour opposition, historically seen as the political champions of the working class struggle, perceived this image of betrayal.

The politics of the 1984/85 miners' strike were a kaleidoscope of betrayal, with industrial groups arguing that they had been betrayed by

other groups. Scargill argued that not since the General Strike of 1926 had one group of workers accused the rest of the Trade Union movement of not supporting them. This however was not true. The NUM did not take action on the scale demanded by Scargill in support of the steelworkers during the strike within British Steel in 1981.

Betrayal in the context of the 84/85 miners' strike will be shown to cut across four major issues: class, culture, society and politics. While these are different issues they are interlinked, and although certain issues were promoted by different groups, the notion of betrayal cut across them all. Again this raises the question of historical memory, of the miners being the vanguard of the trade union movement, and being the most victimised members of the working class. Certainly the left-wing element of the NUM saw the strike as being about all these four issues, but with class and politics being more actively promoted than the other two. Other groups promoted issues at different times in order to highlight what they saw as examples of betrayal. It was also perceived by the various groups as a battle between good and evil. On the one hand there were the factors that were seen as good, namely the ideas of jobs and the union creating a community in which everyone had a place, in short the 'old order'. On the other hand there were those characteristics that were seen as 'evil'. These included the attitude of 'establishment' groups such as the government, the National Coal Board (NCB) the police and the whole process of the judicial system. It also included individuals such as Mrs Thatcher, and Ian MacGregor as well as notions such as the free market, profitability and its principles of economics.

Given the good - evil structure, betrayal takes on an almost religious significance, and is both historical and unforgiving. Why then is the notion of betrayal such a problem?

Linked in with this idea of betrayal came two very important symbols of any dispute in the British Coal Industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that

of crossing the picket lines, and that of blacklegging. The use of blackleg labour by the mine owners conjures up images of groups of men being escorted by large numbers of police between rows of striking miners and their families. For the working classes, it revives memories of the threat to their jobs by mine owners, whose concern was only that of producing coal no matter what the social cost. While 'blackleg' labour was not a feature of the 1984/85 strike the symbol of crossing the picket line was probably the most powerful image in the minds of many individuals from all groups involved. The unforgiving relationship of strikers to blacklegs was clearly demonstrated in Aberdare when funerals of those who had worked during the 1850 dispute were accompanied by,

'the most heartless yells and laughter and by the discordant sounds of the beating of frying pans and kettles etc.'  
(Beynon 1989 p 203)

The crossing of a picket line has become synonymous in modern industrial disputes as a symbol of betrayal. The line is a symbolic boundary. To remain on one side of it means that you 'belong', that you are part of that group of workers with whom you are picketing. But to cross the 'line' results in you no longer being identified with your former comrades. Your identity has changed; you are no longer part of the group. This was certainly true of those miners who returned to work or, in some cases never stopped working. Not only did they lose the comradeship of their fellow workers, but they also lost the support of the community.

Most miners that returned to work before the dispute ended received little sympathy. One local vicar in County Durham, who was an active worker in the local miners' support group, said that he had,

'no sympathy for those that went back ... [and] they had betrayed their workmates and deserved all they got.'  
(Interview with Rev Hodgeson)

Such is the depth of feeling that surrounded the crossing of the picket line

during this dispute.

Much has been written about the break up of mining communities once the strike had finished. However, it is arguable that the alienation of those who crossed the picket lines and returned to work for whatever moral, family or financial reasons did as much to break up the communities as did the closure of the pits themselves. These families, often in a minority, whose husbands, fathers or brothers had crossed picket lines suddenly found themselves banned from shops and the club. Their children were tormented at school and many families moved away, simply to escape from the harassment and intimidation.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF THE STRIKE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

In looking at the perceptions of the three main political groups involved in the strike we need to analyse where each group was positioned within the political spectrum in 1984.

Arguably in 'taking on' the miners Margaret Thatcher was making an appeal to the traditional middle class Conservative voter. Prior to the Falklands War in 1982 she was unpopular. Indeed she was reported to be the most unpopular British Prime Minister this century. However post Falklands War the Conservative government's popularity increased, and their domestic power base became more solid, and its – and her – popularity increased. Arthur Scargill was also riding on a crest of popularity. Elected NUM President with an overwhelming majority he had obtained at the NUM annual conference what he saw as a mandate for strike action. Politically at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Thatcher, he really believed that he could again bring down a Conservative government. At a rally of striking miners at Mansfield, in the heart of the working Nottinghamshire coalfield on 14 May, Scargill admitted that the strike could last,

'until November or December, and made clear that his ultimate aim was

the downfall of the Thatcher administration'.  
(Routledge 1997 p 149)

Neil Kinnock's perception of the strike and that of some sections of the Labour Party, but not the left wing of the party, has to be put into the context of its performance in the 1983 General Election. Called by Margaret Thatcher on the back of the success of the Falklands War, the 'Falklands Factor' saw the Conservative majority rise to over 140 seats. The result was, in her words

'the single most devastating result ever inflicted upon democratic socialism in Britain.'  
(Thatcher 1993 p339)

For Labour the result was nothing short of disaster. It won just 27.6% of the votes and, arguably, never again could its policies of massive nationalisation, hugely increased public spending and unilateral nuclear disarmament claim to have popular support. The Labour party polled just 662,000 votes more than the Liberal and SDP alliance, and came very close to being the third party in British politics.

Meanwhile the Conservative government was pushing ahead with its election pledges to reform the laws on strikes, picketing and the election of trade union officials. The new Trade Union Bill required unions to ballot their members every ten years on whether to pay a political levy. With 78% of the Labour Party's income coming from trade union affiliated fees and with a crumbling trade union base, membership of the party had fallen from 1.2 million in 1979 to under one million by 1984.

However, not all the Conservative's action against the trade unions received popular support. The withdrawal of basic union rights at GCHQ combined with Mrs Thatcher's assumption that trade unionists were 'unpatriotic' gave Neil Kinnock a platform on which to attack the government. His party's support for basic civil liberties combined with

a better performance than expected, in the Euro Elections gave him a degree of confidence to attack the government. But that was all to change with the year long miners' strike.

There are a number of theories surrounding the perception of the miners' strike by the principal groups involved. Firstly, that the Conservative government and the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were seen to be out to defeat the miners, and, moreover their leader Arthur Scargill. Secondly, there is the perception that Arthur Scargill was equally determined to bring down the Conservative government in pursuit of his ideological dreams. Thirdly, there is the perception that the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, was not in favour of the way that the strike was called and that he was not going to stop the government from bringing Arthur Scargill down, thereby removing one of the major obstacles to his plans to modernise the Labour party.

The first of these perceptions, that of the Thatcher government plan to defeat the miners is one of the great myths of the miners' strike, although supporters from Arthur Scargill downwards would say that the evidence was overwhelming.

Indeed the very existence of the 'Ridley Memorandum' as discussed in Chapter 3 would indicate that the government knew that eventually it would have to enter into a dispute with the miners at some time. Support for the Thatcher governments actions came from the likes of Douglas Hurd, William Waldergrave, Kenneth Baker, Chris Patten and John McGregor – all former 'Heathites' – who

'were all sure that they should not – and could not – face another defeat at the hands of organised labour. Even 'wets' like Peter Walker had no desire to return to the miserable experiences of 1972.'  
(Stuart 1998 p74)

However, throughout the dispute the government kept insisting that the

dispute was between the Coal Board and the NUM, the Coal Board was in charge of the negotiations. It also insisted that the police were responsible for promoting order and the courts for upholding the law. While the government had become involved in industrial disputes before, what it was doing was trying to defeat the miners through the use of 'third party' agencies.

The second perception that of Scargill's plan to bring down a democratically elected government has more solid evidence which arguably turns it from perception to fact. Since his rise to fame in 1972 Scargill had been preaching at every opportunity of his desire to see a return to true socialism, and the end of capitalism in Britain. The election of a Conservative government in 1979, its re-election in 1983 with a mandate of free market policies signalled the end of his version of socialism. This made Scargill, now NUM President, even more vociferous in his demands that Thatcher and her government must be brought down.

I put the question of Scargill's belief that having brought down the Conservative government in 1974, he could do it again in 1984, to Joe Mills who in 1984 was the Transport and General Workers Union Regional Secretary in the North East. His comments reveal a widespread view in Labour circles that Arthur Scargill had wider political motives in pursuing this dispute.

'I think Arthur is a Marxist. He has particular policies which some people subscribe to and other don't. Some subscribe to part of it and not others. I think that there were two issues here, there was the genuine desire of Arthur Scargill and his NUM to protect the jobs of the miners. And, his manifesto when he stood for President was very clear; he wanted to save jobs. Now if you have a particular objective and particular policy which flies in the face of what indeed is the elected Government economic strategy, and energy strategy, then quite clearly you have got two converging differences. And therefore it is inevitable that your strike will be perceived as being to bring down the Government. Because, here was the Conservative Party which for whatever reason, didn't want to hang all their energy hats on one peg ie coal. And therefore they pursued this particular policy which meant there would be down sizing of the coal mining industry. So therefore

there was two conflicts. So indirectly, or whatever way you want to perceive it, it was indeed a challenge to the authority of the Government. And it was a simple as that.' ...

On the other hand, Joe Mills is clear that this agenda was not one for which Scargill could claim full support among the membership and the NUM.

'Arthur made many speeches and I was in discussions with Arthur, you know and I mean he didn't believe in the ruling class, he was averse to the capitalist system. He believes quite clearly that the Clause 4 in the Labour Party rules, or which it was in the rules, should be totally adhered to. And therefore, I mean, by putting a man like him in charge of a large Trade Union one would automatically assume that the members knew what they were doing. But I don't think they did. I think they saw him as a General leading to save their jobs, but I don't think that if there had been another ballot paper asking if they wanted to bring down the Government or indeed a new form or order in Britain, they wouldn't have voted for that. But I think Arthur did have strong political views and whilst he did make an error believing he could have created the kind of society that he has always talked about by using the miners as a battering ram. I don't know he might have done, but I don't think the miners that had supported him in his candidatureship of President would have supported that view.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

Joe Mills was a prominent, well-known, union leader in the North East. His view reflect those of senior members of the Labour Party.

For Neil Kinnock the strike put him in an invidious position. The son of a Welsh miner, brought up in the mining community of Tredegar, in a house overlooking Ty Trist colliery, he was elected to parliament as member for Bedwelty in the General Election of June 1970. He became an unofficial spokesman for the miners during the 1972 dispute claiming, in the House of Commons on 14 June 1972, that industrial action was:

'A hard and well defined struggle between people who presume to derive their living from owning money and those who derive their living from earning money. What would be the instinct of any red-blooded male in this House having put his family to all that inconvenience and near misery, if he saw someone riding roughshod over his picket line? I know what my attitude would be. In fact I should be worried if it were not the case.'

(Drower 1994 p 29)

However by 1984 Kinnock was in a very difficult position. He did not trust Scargill, but his strong conviction was that some form of action needed to be taken to prevent the government's run down of the British coal industry. When the strike began Kinnock's instinct was to declare that there should be a ballot, but he did not publicly say so, so as not to be seen as betraying those people who were fighting what they saw as a just cause. It was a decision that he came to regret. The year of the miners' strike came to be seen as a wasted year both for Kinnock and the Labour party. Large sections of the party were unhappy with the way the strike was handled, and considered that the party had more pressing needs to attend to instead of getting mixed up in an industrial dispute of such epic proportions. I put both these points to Joe Mills,

'I think the Labour party nationally were a bit uncomfortable with the strike. We had the National leadership who were trying to get back into power again, who were trying to be a little bit modernistic, who were trying to say to the people of this Country, trust us and we can do a great deal for you. But there was still that element of society who were anti Trade Union and when we had the miners' strike it was seen in some areas as an embarrassment to the objectives of the Labour Party, which was to get back into power again. That was in the general position. I think that in specific areas we had the right wing of the Labour Party who wished to hell the strike resolved, and of course you had the left wing who understood that you had a political strike and decided you had a tussle on here and by gum we had better win it. Because if not society could be changed forever.'

'It may have been a wasted year for the Labour Party as an organisation, but certainly if one enters into a struggle which you generally believe in, and you don't win it, its not wasted its a question of you engaging in a struggle and unfortunately you haven't been successful. I think Neil may have made the point that here was the Labour Party trying to get back into Government again and this strike deflected from that particular strategy and that particular objective. But I think Neil would reflect on it now, on the basis that here was a political motivated dispute by the Government to take the miners on and I genuinely believe that the strength of feeling in the miners wasn't totally understood by the Labour Leadership. Therefore there was probably a lack of judgement there as well.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

## CONFRONTATION – THE HISTORICAL ROOTS

Confrontation between the Conservative government and the miners has occurred at various times in British 20th Century history. These confrontations have usually been during times of great political and industrial upheaval, for example, in 1926 and 1972-74. Margaret Thatcher knew that she owed her position as leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister to the miners. If they had not provoked Edward Heath into fighting a General Election, on the basis of who governs the country, which he lost, then she would not be in power now. For her, the coal strikes of 1972 and 1974 had come to symbolise everything that she thought was wrong with Britain. Trade Union power had the ability to bring a government down, to cause three-day weeks and could block any government legislation threatening their interests by mass picketing preventing, for example, coal reaching the power stations.

For the government and particularly Margaret Thatcher the strike was, like that of 1974 which led to the downfall of Mr. Heath's government, over who was going to govern the country. But this time there was the personal determination that neither she nor her government was going to be as humiliated as Mr. Heath's. Although publicly saying that it was a dispute between the NCB and the NUM it was a dispute that the government had to win. If they won, her government could push forward her plans of privatisation and deregulation. If they failed, then Britain would once again, in her opinion, be ruled by Trade Unions. In order to win, the government were willing to go to extreme lengths and to use all resources at their disposal.

Dennis Skinner the MP for Bolsover argued in the Miners' Campaign video '*Solidarity*' that taking on the miners was only part of the governments campaign against the whole trade union movement and the Conservative governments' real aim was to shift the balance of power from the working classes to what he describes as the 'employing classes',

which he argues as being entirely made up of Conservative party supporters and backed by institutions such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Institute of Directors.

The idea that there was in 1984 a trade union, or labour, movement can, arguably, be seen as a piece of historical fiction. The notion of a trade union movement is viable up to 1926, when the movement in all its various forms had won a succession of victories. These victories included legislation covering wages, hours of work, conditions of work, employment of women and children, holidays and even the basic right of belonging to a trade union. By 1926 the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was firmly committed to the common purpose of trade unions standing together, firmly committed to a unity which ensured that employers would be reluctant to challenge unions unless it was crucial to do so. Trade union strength had grown during the 1880s and 1890s as the economy grew. Trade union power was able to assert itself more when there was no reserve pool of unemployed workers for company owners to draw upon. They were then more vulnerable to demands from their workers. After a period of economic down turns the economy began to recover from 1910. Trade union power increased and its membership rose from 2.5 million in 1910 to 8.3 million by 1920, slipping back to 5.3 million by the time of the General Strike in 1926.

However, the General Strike and the miner's lockout which followed, destroyed the conception of unity and of a trade union 'movement'. Worse was to follow with the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mass redundancies during this period, most of it in the traditional base of the trade union movement resulted in a reduction of trade union membership. The election of a Labour government in 1945 saw the creation of the National Health Service, together with reforms in welfare, education and a programme of nationalisation of various industries, saw the trade union movement achieving all that it had fought for. With its objectives achieved the unity of the trade unions started to fall apart during the

1960s and 1970s. Industrial unions fought to gain the best possible pay award from governments and the power of certain unions such as the NUM and the TGWU grew to such an extent that a MORI poll in September 1978 found that 75% of the electorate felt that the trade unions were too powerful.

With the election of a Conservative government in 1979, the trade unions came under a two pronged attack. Firstly legislation was introduced curbing the effectiveness of picketing to the point where the only pickets not open to legal challenge were those attending in small numbers where they themselves worked, who kept out of everyone else's way, and who were therefore completely ineffective. Further restraints made secondary picketing illegal, and changes were made to the benefit system and the income tax system to reduce the amount of money payable to strikers. Secondly the traditional industries that provided the majority of the rank and file union membership, such as steel making, coal mining, shipbuilding and the manufacturing industries saw a run down or, in some areas, closure all together.

The working class of Britain was changing. No longer was it confined to the rows of terrace houses in industrial areas of the country but rather there was a new, fast expanding and more affluent working class living in the modern housing estates of the south and working in service industries. The Labour Party still represented the traditional industrial working class areas of the north, while the Conservative Party now represented the more affluent working class in the South. Sociological debate from the 1960s, such as those published by Stewart (1983), testify to the fact the working class support for the Labour party had begun to erode and this continued as the historical class voting traditions became less distinct.

What was also missing from the traditional working class way of life, was the idea of full employment. In 1983 Michael Foot was arguing that

Britain had seen the collapse of the idea of nearly full employment which it had enjoyed from 1945. But this too was a myth, full employment was never complete or totally secure and during the 1970s under both Labour and Conservative governments full employment was not achieved.

During previous recessions unemployment was normally confined to black spots within the old industrial areas, bad enough for those that lived there, but not widespread enough to be described as a national recession. But during the 1980s whole areas such as the Midlands became affected in the same way.

From these changes a new division of labour emerged. Many of the newly created jobs were in industries that lacked any industrial muscle and with rising unemployment levels a pool of workers was created who were prepared to work for less money and with conditions of work which were similar to the conditions of the 1930s. The miners' strike brought a return to the idea of a united trade union movement. But while there was much talk of unity there was little in the way of solid support to back up the rhetoric.

Earlier mention was made of the historical and unforgiving nature of betrayal and this is certainly true in comparison between the General Strike of 1926 and the 1984/85 miners' strike. The sense of *deja vu* was inescapable. As Powell (1993) argues,

'Britain seemed to be reliving its industrial legacy freeze-frame by freeze-frame each with a voice-over from the past.'  
(Powell 1993 p223).

These 'voice-overs' included firstly, the establishment of a breakaway union in Nottinghamshire and paralleled the formation of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association. Secondly, the clashes between striking and working miners, the manipulation of welfare benefits and the role of the media in presenting the establishment side of the dispute to the public. Thirdly, the comparison of Neil Kinnock with Ramsey

MacDonald for betraying the miners, and A J Cook's, like Scargill's, bitter condemnation of the Labour leadership following the collapse of the strike. Finally, the deployment of a police force now trained in para-military crowd control techniques, give the impression that the government was taking sides with the employers.

These were the echoes from the past, the final acts in a struggle for power between the irreconcilable forces of capital and labour whose dispute had punctuated British industry since coal first powered the Industrial Revolution.

#### SCARGILL AND THE TUC – RELATIONSHIPS AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

Arthur Scargill had been a Communist since the age of 15 when he joined the Young Communists League, following his father who had also been a lifelong member of the Communist Party. Scargill's rise to power in the NUM, along with the Communist Scottish miner's leader Mick McGahey to the post of Vice President, caused alarm in the Heath government. During the 1972 miner's strike Scargill saw the closure of Saltley Gate Coke works, by large numbers of pickets, as the turning point of that strike. This action may have gone a long way to laying the ghost of the 1926 General Strike, when the miners were betrayed by the remainder of the Trade Union movement, an action which Scargill described as ,

'selling the miners down the river.'  
(Routledge 1994 p9)

But in reality it led to mass and secondary picketing becoming illegal.

The relationships between the TUC and the NUM under Scargill's presidency seemed to be based yet again on the events of 1926. Scargill mistrusted the TUC and appeared to only want to work with unions, whose leaders and members would give him the loyalty and control over them that he demanded. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 1984, during the first week of the

strike Peter Heathfield wrote to the TUC informing them of the industrial dispute but saying that no request was being made for assistance or intervention by the TUC. Scargill, it seems, was not prepared to run the risk of the strike being run by the TUC, whose actions in 1926 he regarded as those of betrayal and whose actions in 1984 he regarded with suspicion.

Three groups of workers could reasonably be expected to support the miners. Firstly the power workers, secondly the railway workers and thirdly the steelworkers. Unfortunately for the miners these three groups of workers whose wholehearted support could have brought the strike to a successful conclusion were somewhat ambivalent in their support.

The power workers were divided into two unions. The first was the Electrical Power Engineers Association (EPEA) led by John Lyons. While the second was the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) led by Eric Hammond.

Right from the start of the dispute the official line was unless there was a ballot neither union would get involved in settling the miners' dispute. John Lyons argued that the electrical supply industry was not the place to solve the miners' strike.

The tension between the miners and the power workers came to a head at the TUC Congress in August 1984. Here the TUC General Council produced a statement on the dispute that gave Scargill a blank cheque, with regard to saving pits, jobs, and mining communities. It also agreed to make support more robust by not moving coal, coke or any substitutes such as oil across NUM picket lines. For Hammond the statement was dishonest and he pointed out that coal was being mined by working members of the NUM, transported by members of the rail unions and the TGWU, to be burned at power stations by members of his union. However, apart from the lack of support by the EPEA the TUC was

solidly behind Scargill and the miners. No wonder Hammond thought he was,

‘the only man on the planet with the view that Scargill was a menace who must be stopped.’  
(Hammond 1992 p49)

Hammond reveals in his book that he offered Scargill the chance to win the dispute just three months into the strike. All Scargill had to do was hold a ballot on strike action. If the NUM won then he would call out the power workers in support of the miners. He suggests that not even Mrs Thatcher could have resisted that threat to daily life. She would, he argues, would had to have made the biggest political U-turn, and the miners would have been saved from the disgrace, misery and hardship that they then had to endure.

However, the condition of having to call a ballot on strike action was not one that Scargill was prepared to take, and so the offer proved impossible to accept.

The second group of workers who could have been expected to support the miners were the steelworkers. In 1981 the steelworkers had formed a pact with the miners and railway workers known as the Triple Alliance, or as some militant miners came to call it, the ‘Cripple Alliance’. This ‘triple alliance’ was an attempt by the rails unions, miners and steelworkers to re launch a coalition which dated back to 1913 when the National Transport Workers Federation preceded the steelworkers in the alliance.

Unfortunately for Scargill and the miners, British Steel had just emerged from a long period of slimming down and re-organisation under Ian McGregor. During McGregor’s turn at British Steel he halved the workforce and brought production into line with demand. He also outmanoeuvred the iron and steel union which fought for fifteen weeks to

halt the process. But British Steel was now making a profit and the remainder of the steelworkers' jobs were relatively safe. What they did not want was a miners' strike, and if there was one they were not going to risk their jobs and the whole iron and steel making industry by supporting it.

All three main steel works at Ravenscraig, Llanwern and Scunthorpe received supplies all through the strike. However, delivery of these supplies was not without its problems.

At the beginning of April representatives from the Triple Alliance met to try to persuade the steelworkers union (ISTC) to boycott supplies of coal to the Ravenscraig steel works in Scotland. It was this request that started the conflict of interest between miners and steelworkers and created a split between the two unions that was to widen further as the strike progressed. The workers at Ravenscraig knew that any form of embargo on coal rationing would jeopardise the future of a steelworks already under the threat of closure. Once the furnaces were shut down British Steel would never start them up again. So when the proposal was put to the ISTC the response was less than enthusiastic.

When the rail union refused to move coal into Ravenscraig the British Steel Corporation (BSC) hired lorries to bring in supplies with the approval of the ISTC. The result of this action was a series of violent confrontations between pickets and lorry drivers. In spite of the efforts of the lorry drivers, production at Ravenscraig was cut back from 90% to 70% of maximum production.

The attitude of the men at Ravenscraig did not endear itself to the striking miners. One Scottish pit, Polkemmet was supplying coal directly to Ravenscraig and when the miners there asked the men at Ravenscraig not to accept imported coal, they refused. According to Joe Owens,

'they just put two fingers up at them, which was another contributing factor to the closure of Polkemmet'  
(Owens 1994 p90-91)

The efforts of BSC and the lorry drivers also helped keep the Llanwern steelworks working. Convoys of up to two hundred lorries at a time travelled the sixty miles between Port Talbot and Llanwern. The local Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) regional secretary had some success in persuading union firms and drivers not to take on the work. But BSC went to an English firm, EJ Meek of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire, an area where miners were working. Attacks on vehicles were regular occurrences as the drivers had to negotiate the picket lines at Port Talbot.

So although the steelworkers wanted to help, the all or nothing approach by the NUM ended in nothing. As Bill Irvine ISTC President told the NUM executive,

'give us something we can deliver, not something we can't.'  
(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p139).

The third group of workers were those belonging to the two main rail unions, The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF). The rail unions had been traditional supporters of the miners and had entered into a number of different agreements with them over the years. Therefore it was understandable that the NUM depended on both the NUR and ASLEF to form part of the core of their industrial support.

The level of support that ASLEF had given to the NUM in previous disputes is illustrated by the fact that during the 1972 strike a train driver reported that a track running into a power station had no pickets. Therefore the miners simply hung a banner over a railway bridge with the result that train crews took this to be a picket line and refused to pass

underneath. During both the 1972 and 1974 coal strikes ASLEF gave the most unqualified support to the miners.

But by the 1984 miners' strike the situation had changed. Due to a series of rail disputes during the early 1980s British Rail had lost some of its contracts to move coal from pit heads to power stations. Much of the work had passed to road haulage firms, many employing non-union drivers. Some railwaymen began to become concerned about this loss of traffic; a factor which encouraged some based at Shirebrook in Nottinghamshire to continue working. Their jobs, they realised, depended to a great extent on the continuation of mining in the Nottinghamshire coalfield and them moving the coal trains.

At a local level there is a contradiction over how British Rail management treated its staff. The unions argued that their members were warned that if they did not move coal trains then they would be sent home for that shift. While British Rail's management do not contest the fact that men were sent home for refusing to obey instructions, they insist that they took a deliberately soft line with railwaymen who refused to work coal trains. Men, they agree, were sent home, but were allowed to report back for their next shift as if nothing had happened. Eventually the rail unions realised that by asking their members to refuse to obey instructions to move coal trains they were running the risk of legal action. In June 1984 the NUR conference voted to pay their members ten pounds a day if they were sent home for,

'carrying out loyally a decision of their executive'  
(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p134)

As the strike progressed strains appeared between the leaders of the rail unions and the NUM. The rail unions had also agreed to ban the movement of iron ore deliveries to BSC plants. But BSC simply moved the iron ore by road. Relations between the rail unions and the NUM were by now, at best, lukewarm, and the Triple Alliance had ceased to exist.

The rail unions, like the steelworkers, had failed to deliver what the miners wanted, a total rail strike. As it was, 98% of British Rail's passenger trains ran during the strike. Jimmy Knapp, the NUR's General Secretary admitted that,

'the miners never asked us to take strike action. ... I don't think I would have called for that action.'  
(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p136).

But there were some successes. The two key Trent Valley power stations of Cottam and West Burton were cut off from rail supplies. A number of pits would have run out of storage space if collections by road instead of rail had not been substituted, and nine thousand tons of coal was imprisoned in the rail network until the end of the strike. Finally even in Nottinghamshire where miners continued to work the rail unions maintained a broad but not quite total ban on coal movement to the end. But their efforts were undervalued because it was easy to find alternative ways of moving coal.

In his relations with the TUC Scargill made two serious errors. Firstly his attitude to the TUC in general was still shaped by the events of 1926 and, secondly, he would not risk the TUC taking charge of the strike. Both of these factors were historical and illustrate both Scargill's distrust of, and his arrogant attitude toward the TUC. In theory with the full support of the TUC it should have been possible to put a stranglehold on Britain's economic life similar to the three-day week of 1974. For example, a substantial number of lorry drivers employed to move coal and iron-ore were TGWU members, working in defiance of union guidelines. These drivers, and TGWU workers in power stations, took the view that with NUM members working there was little reason for them to refuse to carry out profitable work.

Had Scargill cut his links with the past, been prepared to ballot his members, who if they had voted 'yes', would have had the support of the power workers unions and been prepared to trust and accept the support of the TUC then the outcome of the strike could have been much more favourable to the miners.

#### THE NACODS DISPUTE – THE STRIKE THAT NEVER WAS

When on 16 October 1984 the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) announced its first ever national strike, due to start on 25 October, many saw this as the decisive turning point of the strike. It was, but it was not the decisive turning point that signalled victory for the NUM, rather it signalled the moment when thousands of ordinary miners realised that they were not going to win. It is no coincidence therefore that within days of the NACODS dispute being settled more miners started to return to work and by early November the NCB had offered a series of inducements to encourage striking miners back to work.

The relationship between the NUM and NACODS up to October 1984 had varied from NACODS readiness to accept the NCB's pay offer in February through to their voting for strike action in April, but without the necessary two thirds majority to transfer the result of that ballot into strike action. However, the NUM had always had doubts about NACODS' 'loyalty' to their cause. Jack Taylor, President of the Yorkshire area NUM, did not believe that NACODS would support strike action, stating that,

'We don't believe that NACODS will support us, but we are going to put them in a position where they will have to fight'  
(Ottey 1985 p63).

NACODS was a small union with around sixteen hundred members. It

was seen as careful, respectable and middle-of-the-road. Its members were promoted from the ranks of the NUM, and it was not uncommon to have members of the same family, or indeed household, working for both unions. Like the NUM, NACODS was also concerned that the NCB were considering a programme of cutting jobs by a programme of pit closures, actions that would also affect NACODS members. Both NACODS President, Ken Sampney and its new General Secretary, Peter McNestry were impressed by the warnings that Scargill was giving over pit closures.

As the strike progressed the Yorkshire area NUM refused any safety cover and tried to prevent NACODS members getting into the pits to carry out safety work. Therefore should a NACODS member come across intimidatory picket lines he was free to return home, contact the colliery manager to explain his actions and continue to draw full wages. The guidelines for these actions had been set in 1972 after a number of violent encounters. But on the 15th August the NCB instructed NACODS members that they were expected to cross picket lines. The NCB's view was that if miners were crossing picket lines to return to work then NACODS members should cross as well. Any NACODS member unhappy at walking through the picket line could be bussed into work with, if necessary, a police escort. Ironically much of this pressure being placed on NACODS' members to cross picket lines was as a result of more miners returning to work.

The NACODS Executive's response to the NCB's demand was to hold a ballot for strike action. The union was in a powerful position, It could achieve what Scargill and the NUM had failed to accomplish the shut down of the entire British coal field including those areas like Nottinghamshire which were still working. The shutdown could in turn stop the flow of coal to the power stations and threaten the government's resistance to the strike. The result of the ballot was announced on 28th September and showed an 82.5% vote in favour of strike action. The

government was now in a precarious position and Ian McGregor was summoned to Downing Street to be told by Margaret Thatcher that she was very worried about the NACODS' dispute and told,

'You have to realise that the fate of this government is in your hands Mr McGregor. You have got to solve this problem.'  
(Routledge 1994 p177)

The government and in particular Peter Walker realised they were close to losing a dispute which they had to win. The NCB backed down, the new guidelines on crossing picket lines were withdrawn, further more the closure of Scargill's five named pits, Polmaise, Herrington, Bullcliffe Wood, Snowden, and Cortonwood would be withdrawn. A new independent review body as a final appeal court for all closures was accepted. The NACODS leaders found these concessions impossible to reject and on 23 October the NACODS executive agreed to call off the strike.

The result of the settlement between the NCB and NACODS was that the NUM had lost its last chance of a settlement on relatively favourable terms. For the NUM executive, NACODS had compromised its principles and in the words of NUM Vice President Mick McGahey had made things,

'much more difficult for the NUM.'  
(Goodman, 1985 p151)

Scargill, however, was not fooled. He considered that NACODS had been tricked into settling the dispute and that the government had not given way on the question of pit closures. He was correct. The independent review body never kept open a single pit that the NCB wanted to close. In effect the NCB-NACODS settlement had cleared the way for a concentrated campaign to, if necessary, starve the miners into submission.

## SCARGILL AND THE NUM V KINNOCK AND THE LABOUR PARTY

This section of the chapter examines the relationship between the Labour party and the NUM during the 1984/85 miners' strike. In order to provide some evidence for the Labour party's alleged lack of support I am going to examine this issue in the context of the following extract,

'I knew that defeat for the miners would be a defeat for the entire working class movement. The miners had to win. That they did not, was, in part, the result of the attitude of the Labour and TUC leadership.'  
(Heffer 1991 p204)

To a certain degree the Labour party, or at least the centre and right-wing factions of it, took a lead from the trade union movement. Whilst the natural instinct of Labour supporters is to side themselves with the striking miners, many found it difficult to accept Scargill's tactics for calling and running the strike. Support from the Labour party was far from wholehearted, and there was a split in the party between those, mostly on the left, who supported Scargill and those who had their doubts. Neil Kinnock was very definitely in the second group.

If Scargill and Thatcher were ideologically at opposite ends of the political spectrum, then neither Kinnock nor Scargill shared the same political views. In short Neil Kinnock.

'had come to loathe Scargill'  
(Drower 1994 p103)

During his 1983 leadership campaign Kinnock accused Scargill of,

'destroying the coal industry single handedly ... [and being] the Labour movement's nearest equivalent to a First World War general.'  
(Drower 1994 p103)

Neil Kinnock's attitude towards the government and its plans for the coal industry were affected both by family and constituency factors. Two generations on both sides of his family had been miners. In his

parliamentary constituency, Islwyn, there were 3700 miners and their families, all of whom were determined to resist plans by the NCB to close pits. Failure to resist would result in almost permanent unemployment.

At the start of the strike Kinnock's opinion was that it would only have wide spread support if there was to be a ballot of NUM members. But he never publicly said this, conscious perhaps, of being seen as betraying the miners fighting for their jobs. However, he came to regard his failure to publicly demand a ballot as the worst decision he ever took during his time as leader of the Labour Party. As the strike progressed so he hesitated to condemn the ever increasing levels of violence on the picket lines. In an interview he argued that,

'mass picketing by itself, the collection of large numbers of people at a picketing site is not intimidatory.'  
(Drower 1994 p103)

By this statement he refused to insist that the NUM follow TUC guidelines on picketing.

Kinnock's attitude to the strike continued to waver. He never publicly condemned the picket line violence, although when addressing the 1984 TUC Congress he came close. But by the Labour Party Conference, under pressure from the Left Wing of his party, he retracted his position and tried to link picket line violence with unemployment and social decay, which he insisted the Conservative government was responsible for.

In the House of Commons he again refused to condemn the picket line violence. In debates in April and July 1984 he refused to answer a direct question from the Prime Minister asking if he would condemn picket line violence.

As Autumn came, the trickle of miners returning to work became a steady flow. Neil Kinnock could see that the strike was crumbling but he continued his policy of not publicly criticising Scargill but nevertheless making himself 'too busy' to take part in a series of regional rallies that were being organised to win back support for the miners. By this time support for the Labour Party had faltered, images of the strike with its picket lines and soup kitchens had rekindled the image of the Labour Party as old fashioned and irrelevant in a modern technological age. Neil Kinnock was very aware that as a potential government, the Labour Party could not be seen to be supporting industrial and political violence. Whereas the Conservatives were almost completely united behind Mrs. Thatcher, Labour was split. For every member who supported his approach to the strike there were those on the left of the party like Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner and Eric Heffer who thought that Kinnock's support was so muted as to be betraying the Labour movement.

His non - appearance on picket lines and at miners' rallies, although he did attend the Durham Miners' Gala in July 1984, was seen by many of the left of the Labour movement as a betrayal of the miners, an accusation that he had tried so hard not to be incriminated with. Emlyn Williams, the South Wales NUM President accused him of ,

'trying to outdo Thatcher in carrying out a character assassination of Scargill.'  
(Drower 1994 p109)

Whilst the Scottish NUM President, Eric Clarke, suggested that Kinnock should resign because he was guilty of,

'disassociating himself from the miners'  
(Drower 1994 p109)

Criticism of Neil Kinnock was not confined to people of the labour and trade union movements. Charles Moore writing in the *Spectator* magazine in November 1984 commented that the,

'Labour leadership is conducting what is now called a damage limitation exercise which distances itself from Mr Scargill'  
(Moore 1989 p45)

He also argued that Neil Kinnock was,

'burdened with first generation middle-class guilt for not going down the pit'  
(Moore 1989 p48)

But, sarcastically suggested that,

'being the member for Islwyn, supports the miners with all that last drop of fibre and final ounce of breath that Mr Foot was always squeezing from his body in defence of socialism'  
(Moore 1989 p45)

However, there was some support for his handling of the strike. Barbara Castle (1993) argued that his behaviour had been perfectly correct. But as the strike drew to a close the left wing of the Labour Party were still refusing to accept that defeat was inevitable. Tony Benn was still calling for a general strike and Neil Kinnock was being taunted with accusations of being a 'scab', a 'traitor' and being called 'Judas'.

The position of the Liberal/Social Democrat Party, who in the 1983 General Election polled 26% of the total vote compared to Labours 28%, was one of general supports for the government. They condemned what they called the ambiguous language of the Labour party over their attitude to picket line violence by striking miners. However at the party's annual conference in 1984 David Steel was critical over the government's handling of the dispute arguing that,

'we have seen the Thatcher way at its very worst.'  
(Steel 1989 P 259)

Dr David Owen suggested that the confrontation was,

‘worse even than 1925/6. Should never have happened in a sophisticated democracy.’

(Owen 1986 P 120)

He goes on to argue that a more sensitive government would have gone to greater lengths to encourage more miners to return to work earlier in the strike, and that a more competent government would not have come as close to being defeated, as it was with the threatened NACODS strike.

For Neil Kinnock, the year long strike could be seen as a ‘lost year’ in a number of ways. Without the destruction resulting from the miners’ strike policies such as One Member One Vote, and changes to traditional thinking on Europe and defence policy could have been introduced earlier. However the government had done Kinnock a great favour; they removed Scargill and the miners as a barrier against the middle-of-the-road policies that the Labour Party were trying to promote. But it is arguable that the public did not see it that way, the Labour Party and the miners were seen as inseparable with the violence of the picket lines being inadequately rejected.

The 1983 General Election results proved one thing, Britain no longer wanted a Socialist party, to form a future government. Kinnock and many Labour party members realised that to regain power it had to distance itself from the policies of the left wing of the party, and try to appeal to the middle ground of British politics. He realised that Scargill’s attempt to bring down the Conservative government was unrealistic, particularly as the strike did not have one hundred percent support from the miners, let alone the trade union movement. Calls for a General Strike were useless as many British workers were already fearful for their jobs and with an ever increasing level of unemployment many trade union members were only interested in keeping their jobs, and not acting as Scargill’s ‘cannon fodder’.

Neil Kinnock knew that there would be an aftermath and a series of bitter recriminations into his handling of the Labour party's approach to the strike. While he was later to write that 1984 was a wasted year, it had in fact been the start of a process that continued with John Smith and is continuing today with Tony Blair. Kinnock's biggest mistake was to have taken too long in defining his relationship with Scargill over the way the strike was conducted. Had he said right from the start that the strike was wrong, and even futile, then both the Labour party and Kinnock himself might have emerged from the dispute with their credibility somewhat less damaged

#### THE MINERS, LABOUR PARTY AND TUC – WHAT HAPPENED AT LOCAL LEVEL

If nationally the NUM had reason to be unhappy with the actions of the TUC and Labour Party, then at local level the reverse was true. In the North East, from the people that I interviewed there was tremendous appreciation for what had been achieved at local level. I asked Joe Mills, then Northern Regional Secretary of the TGWU, how he thought the strike had affected the region and why there was such great support for the miners.

'I think it was a very difficult time in the region when the strike was on because initially I think everybody wanted to lend support and a lot of support was forthcoming. We had the Private Sector and indeed some of the Public Sector a bit concerned that the miners were making demands on them for political reasons. Of course we understood that, but there was a little bit of unease that they should be giving total support to the miners, although they were sympathetic to the cause. Within the Trade Unions there was total support for the miners, it was at various levels and I think because we have a fairly strong mining community in this part of the world everyone was effected by it in one form or another, because everybody had had an Uncle or a Father who was a ex-miner. And they had sympathy with the particular issue and it effected the region in the way of people being very very sorry for the miners, but a little bit lacking of understanding in how they could be positive in their support for them.'

'In the main support for the miners was the National Policy by the various Trade Unions, the TUC had their own policy decisions on the way in which the miners should be supported. For example the WEPTU at the time were a little concerned that Scargill was leading a particular dispute which didn't have the democratic support of the membership so the National position was very much determined by the National Leadership. As far as the regions were concerned, they were under some guidance and direction from the top, as to how indeed people should react.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

I asked him if he thought that the support at local level was reflected at National level,

'No I don't think so. I think that in National level within the TUC there certainly was support for the miners, although I did indicate it was qualified in some areas. I think regions reacted in the way they believed they should react, I mean, the Midlands, the South East, the West Coast, the North East have different perceptions, different traditions and different backgrounds and historical backgrounds. And therefore what was happening, for example you had in the North East tremendous support and in Cumbria good support, but not as strong. So where the National Leadership were encouraging support it was coming over in different forms in different levels within the districts in the region. The Regional TUC played a major part but there was no sort of centrally directed policy that suggested that all regions should act the same.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

I then asked him about his perception of actual support given to the miners both at National and local level.

'In some part, in some areas, very very weak, it all depends on where you were. I mean, in union branches of the TG in and around coalfield areas, there was a lot of support there. Other areas where they saw the miners in a slightly different light, thought, here were the miners once again having a go, and what was happening was a lot of the measurement of their support, sometimes was based on Scargill. A lot of the members didn't like Scargill's leadership and therefore felt the miners were being dragged down a road which had no hope, and therefore they reflected their support accordingly by not being as receptive, not being as generous and not being as supportive as perhaps they should have been.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

Joe Mills confirms the fears that many in the Trade Union movement expressed that they were being asked to support a strike that was not being fully supported by the miners themselves. The two most common

reasons for not supporting the miners seemed to be concerned with the Nottinghamshire coalfield still working, and the fact that there had been no national ballot to decide on strike action. Again Joe Mills expresses concerns held over Scargill's reasons for holding the strike and the general concern that the miners had embarked on a course of action that they were not going to win.

'On the Labour Party side I think there was mixed views. I think they weren't too sure where the National Leadership were, and I think they wanted them to be stronger than they were. And I think looking back, I think they could have been a bit stronger than they actually were. As far as the Regional Labour party were concerned I think we were at one with the miners, from the early stages, and we gave them maximum support in many, many areas. And I think that the miners were quite pleased with the response they were getting from the Labour movement. But I have to say that there were, some local authorities who were seen not to be as supportive as others. But I found that the local authorities that were supporting them in the main, in a very positive way, were, urban areas and areas where indeed there was ex-miners on the council and so forth. The rural type communities were not as forth coming, as the urban areas.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

Again Joe Mills confirms what many ordinary people felt, namely that support at local level from Labour Party was very strong, and very generous, but it lacked a strong lead from the Labour Party leadership. Although the 'left' of the Labour Party gave tremendous support to the miners, they were not in a position of power in any great numbers to influence Labour party policy. Arguably a stronger lead from Neil Kinnock and the shadow cabinet would have encouraged a more positive response from Labour Party activists. With regard to the attitude and actions of local authorities, they had much to lose, if only in loss of revenue so therefore it was in their best interest to support the miners.

'As far as the Trade Union were concerned, I think again, the Trade Unions did lend a great deal of support although the miners have taken the view, and I think they're right, that some of the Trade Unions were not as forth coming as some of the others. But some Unions like I mentioned the WEPTU where indeed they had reservations at National level, where they were exactly reflecting totally the National policy at regional level, there still was that level of reticence there to get totally involved. So the miners had a mixed bag of messages coming in, it wasn't totally support from the Labour Party and during the strike there

was support in varying degrees, but more on the high side than the low side.'

(Interview with Joe Mills)

The positive views on the support given to the miners at local level is repeated by many of those that I interviewed. I asked Billy Stobbs if he thought that the miners had received the support they deserved from the Labour Party and the TUC,

'No, no not at all. People are saying we made a big mistake. In 1984 we should have all been together we should have had a General Strike.'

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

And at local level.

'Oh yes, the local Labour Party, the local union branches they were 100% behind the strike.'

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Alan Cummings was more forthright in his condemnation of events at National level, and Neil Kinnock.

'It was a shambles. They never gave us any support. The only argument they had was that you can't get your own members out. ... We got support off [Dennis] Skinner and Tony Benn, but I mean not off Kinnock. I think Kinnock saw us as an embarrassment. I mean there was no love lost between Arthur and them people. People were fighting for their jobs and unfortunately some people in the Labour Party thought it was taboo. ... I mean nobody, Kinnock never came out and spoke about it, or the TUC. We were telling people the truth and they just wouldn't believe it.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

Many miners that I interviewed told much the same story of tremendous support from local trade union members, and trade union members from non mining areas, such as the Liverpool Dockers, and the local Labour party. But what they all complained of was the lack of support at national level. Many felt that a chance had been missed to promote the fear that the working class felt itself to be in from the Thatcher government and to organise a campaign of national protest in defence of

jobs, conditions and the position of trade unions generally.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion this chapter has shown that the web of betrayal created during the 1984/85 miners' strike was both complex and diverse. There are strong arguments in support of the feelings of betrayal felt by all the parties although there has been a tendency for the sense of betrayal felt by the NUM to overshadow the same feelings felt by other groups.

These feelings of betrayal are still very alive for many involved in the strike even fifteen years after the strike finished. For these people the word betrayal is not too strong a term and reflects the contempt they feel towards the way they were treated by other groups. This long lasting contempt is a common phenomenon, Akerstrom (1991) notes that contempt can last for a long time and be subject to a continuing process of moral evaluation and redefinition. He also notes that while contempt can last for along time so those of carrying out the act of betrayal can present their versions of the act long after it has taken place.

Twelve years on from the start of the strike the sense of betrayal is still felt by many and there is also a sense of bitterness. In 1994 a Scottish miner stated,

'I've no sympathy for the Nottinghamshire miners. I'm actually praying for pits to close in Nottingham so that I can laugh at them. I'm bitter about the lack of support from other unions.' (Owens 1994 p91)

However, the Nottinghamshire miners, now almost solidly NUDM members also had a right to feel betrayed, only this time it was by the government. The pit closures in the early 1990s reduced the size of the Nottinghamshire coalfield and many of the pits which had worked during the whole of the 1984/85 strike were closed, and much of the work force

faced life on the dole. Neil Greatrex, the President of the NUDM argued that the Nottinghamshire men might have expected better treatment from the government who had said,

‘that it would support the Notts miners [and that it] looked after those that looked after us.’  
(BBC 2 ‘Coal’)

With regard to the Labour Party the strike came at the wrong time, the wrong era. The British people did not want a return to Socialism, although arguably a large proportion did not want Thatcherism either, what they wanted was a modern Labour party which appealed to a wider audience. Neil Kinnock and a majority of the Labour Party members knew this and Alan Cummings talk of Scargill being an embarrassment was to some extent true. The British political scene was changing and the Labour Party needed to change too.

Much the same could be said about the TUC. Their 1984 conference made an attempt to paper over the cracks but union leaders like Eric Hammond were astute enough to notice that like the Labour party the TUC had to change. The days of union power influencing government policy were over. Nevertheless the unions took comfort from what they had done. Moss Evans in his letter of 19 March 1985 to all TGWU branches speaks of ‘the miners struggle for jobs was not only for their benefit but for the good of us all’ and goes on to talk about the need for solidarity and mutual support. The NUM letter to Moss Evans of 14 March 1985 speaks of ‘the gratitude of this union and its members to all those who, over the past year have given so much of their energy and resources to support the miners.’ So even after the strike finished there was still a feeling of victory, that even though the NUM had been defeated, the Trade Union movement had demonstrated solidarity.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA – A QUESTION OF BIAS?

The aim of this chapter is to highlight that the media played a role, not only in promoting different interpretations of the strike but also in creating the images, story lines and symbols within which different participants interpreted their experience and judged that of their opponents. The conflict of 1984/5 became visible through the selective perceptions of the mass media. The control of media images was one of the sub themes of the conflict. Mistrustful of the media, miners recorded their own videos, took their own pictures and recruited community artists to document their experience. Some of these images, for example, the shot of police in riot gear at Easington have become iconic of how miners remember the strike. Future historians will find in this archive a rich vein of comment to balance the overwhelming dominance of professional media images. This chapter looks at the role of the media through the following sections

- The media context
- The politics of the media
- Three local case studies
- How other television programmes portrayed the strike
- The strike as portrayed in the area
- The media and the strike in retrospect

The miners' strike was like no other industrial dispute seen in this country before. It was played out in full view of the media who saw to it that the population of Great Britain was given saturation coverage of a dispute which lasted a full year. Indeed, not since the Second World War has one event remained in the headlines both in nationally and locally as this one.



Those pictures of police charging striking miners at Orgreave became potent media images, which will be long remembered. Media coverage of the strike penetrated all aspects of the dispute. It covered the violence, the attempts at a settlement through to documentaries on the women's support groups and how the various coalfield communities were coping with the strike.

The coverage of the strike is in sharp contrast to that of the General Strike of 1926 when it was the national newspapers and BBC radio programmes that provided information on the strike. Lord Reith, then Director of the BBC, ensured that only the Government's point of view was heard during that dispute, even to the point of refusing to broadcast an appeal by the Archbishop of Canterbury for both sides in the dispute to resume negotiations. In contrast, during the 1984/85 dispute Bishops and Archbishops were free to give their views and Arthur Scargill had an opportunity every day of the strike, if he chose, to put the NUM point of view.

#### THE MEDIA CONTEXT

Since the miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974, where there had been considerable coverage of the events of those disputes, there had been two major changes in television in Britain. Firstly the introduction of new television cameras meant that film footage was ready immediately without the need for processing. These cameras in the hands of experienced operators provided dramatic footage of the often violent events on the picket lines.

The second development was that of Breakfast Television, and this combined with instantly usable early morning film footage often set the tone for the day's events and also comments by leaders of the various groups involved in the strike.

There was also the development of the home video camera. This meant that

miners could, and did, record events themselves as a means of contrasting how the media portrayed events with how they saw, and filmed, events. While not up to the standard of professional media crews, their film provided another form of prime source material. Undoubtedly these home videos will provide proof as to the way striking miners were treated and will give substance to the events of the strike as they pass into historic memory. The miners needed to make their own videos to recall how it was; they did not trust the media.

However, television coverage of the strike was not confined just to the picket line or the site of the next meeting between the two sides trying to settle the dispute. Television coverage moved into the communities trying to throw different angles on the increasingly bitter dispute, resulting in allegations of mis-representation and of inaccurate reporting. Helen Grey the wife of a striking miner in Scotland recalls,

‘I can remember one day the Provost of Paisley had made a donation, a cheque. Three o’us went to a big supermarket in Paisley. It was wrong at the time because we should have gone to a warehouse; we were shopping for twelve strike centres. It was a publicity stunt, STV were there following us round filling the trolleys.’

‘We were just going forward to the checkout and this wee old pensioner came up to me wi’ half a dozen eggs. She says its no’ much, it’s a’ I can afford but take that for your strike centre. And see when the film was on the six o’clock news that night, I was emptying the trolley and the guy from STV was asking me what it was like tae beg for donations, but they never showed the clip o’ that awld women given me the half dozen eggs – that was too sympathetic, that was going tae get the public on the side o’ the miners through television and they could nea do that because the media was a’ against us.’  
(Owens 1994 p 27)

Another example of unfair, or biased, reporting was reported in *‘The Miner’* of 7 February 1985. A striking miner, Peter Neilan from Derbyshire had £9000 of damages inflicted on his family’s house and his car wrecked. However when an ITV film crew arrived and found he was not a ‘scab’ but on strike, they immediately lost interest, packed up their cameras and returned to the studio. Were the media therefore biased? Certain people that I interviewed certainly believed that there was a large element of biased reporting both locally and nationally. Billy Stobbs thought that the worst coverage the miners received

came from the *Daily Mail* and, at a local level, the *Sunderland Echo* and the *Hartlepool Mail*. Although he thought, and still does, that the media was biased against the miners because they were part of the 'institution', he singles out the then *Times* reporter Paul Routledge as being 'brilliant' for his honest reporting.

Instances of alleged biased reporting were not confined to Durham, every area had examples of it, and some striking miners argued that the media was concentrating on the violence and thereby supporting the governments position of focusing on the law and order issues rather than the reasons behind the strike.

At a local level, at least in County Durham, the local media reporting of the strike lacked many of the sensationalist headlines that appeared in the national press. The strike was not always headline news, often news items being on the inside pages. Articles seemed to try and take opinions from all quarters, the NCB, police, local and County Councils as well as from members of the public. Maybe this style of reporting had much to do with the fact that Durham, was almost solidly on strike and lacked the sites of the big confrontations like Ravenscraig, Orgreave or Llanwern. The three main local papers, *The Newcastle Journal*, *The Evening Chronicle* and *The Northern Echo* all reported the strike and the incidents surrounding it. For example, they reported the trials of striking miners after incidents such as those at Easington and also produced stories concerning fundraising and the help that people were, or in some cases, were not giving the striking miners. *The Newcastle Journal* and *The Evening Chronicle* both reported the strike in and around Northumberland, northern Durham and Sunderland while the *Northern Echo*, which produces several different editions for different areas, covered all of County Durham.

Doubts have been raised over the neutrality of the media when reporting events connected with the strike. Arguably there is great difficulty to remain neutral when the law of the land is being broken. However it could be argued that the media can be impartial to those who support the lawbreakers by giving them time to explain why they are doing so. One incident that brought the whole question of reporting and impartiality into question was the television news

coverage of the confrontation between police and pickets at Orgreave on 18 June 1984.

The police maintained then, and still do, that it was a riot and that they acted accordingly. However the fact that the subsequent 'riot trial' collapsed after 48 days with the accused being acquitted throws some doubt on the interpretation of events by the police. The most powerful image of the whole strike was of one man being repeatedly hit by a policeman wielding a truncheon happened on that day. The miner in question, Russell Broomhead, was himself charged with riot, and warned that he could lose his job as a result of the charge. He was later acquitted.

These pictures were not shown by the BBC news, but were shown by ITV, and treated as an isolated incident. Further television footage of the day's events was altered to give the appearance that the pickets threw missiles before the police charged them, when in fact it was the other way round. This altering of news footage raised serious doubts about the position of both television companies with regard to their position of neutrality.

The Channel 4 series *Right To Reply* investigated the question of biased or unbiased media reporting when it considered if the media had fairly reported the events at the Orgreave coking plant. The programme was entitled *The Battle for Orgreave* and the question was put that the media were more intent on trying to break the strike than by reporting events fairly. It also argued that before the strike miners were thought of with some dignity and respect but media reporting of the strike turned that round. This question of biased reporting is one of great importance as television is required by law and in the case of the BBC, by charter to report events fairly.

Yvette Vanson producer of this Channel 4 programme argued that balanced reporting could not be objective stating that,

'what you lose in trying to be balanced is a clear decisive statement on the line

of questioning.’

(Yvette Vanson Channel 4 *Right To Reply*)

Alexander Hetherington accused the makers of the *Battle For Orgreave* of promoting a myth. He argued that if the film makers had started at 3.00 am and not 8.00 am they would have seen miners uprooting lamp-posts, dismantling a wall and building barricades. By omitting this, Hetherington argued, the film falsified events.

However the verdicts at the trial that followed the events at Orgreave seemed to support what the makers of the film were arguing, namely that the police were ‘out of control’ that day, as all 95 miners arrested for ‘riot’ were acquitted. One possible explanation put forward as to why the miners were acquitted was that the police were not police at all, rather soldiers masquerading as police. As one interviewee stated real police do not act as they did.

Arguably reporters can only report what they see, and this is only a version of events, and their version of the truth. Absolute honesty and truth in reporting is impossible, and balanced reporting is the most you can expect.

Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) offer considerable evidence to support the idea that most striking miners felt that the media was biased against them. Their study of four Yorkshire mining communities in the aftermath of the 1984/85 strike found that of those in favour of the strike 34% felt radio broadcasts were biased against the miners and 63% felt the same about television programmes. Of those against the strike 13% felt radios programmes to be biased against the miners, while 33% felt the same about television programmes.

They also found that television was by far the most popular medium for gaining information. Surprisingly the second most popular media was the informal network of friends, family, neighbours and workmates with radio broadcasts and newspapers being only secondary sources of information. With television being the preferred method of gathering news, the survey found that mining

households watched a far greater number of news programmes than they did prior to the strike, a trend which persisted in 33% of households once the strike had finished.

## THE POLITICS OF THE MEDIA

The media needs dramatic stories, and to this end it uses journalistic licence to improve its stories. The media is selective; it interprets events and establishes the significance of the material selected in its stories. Not only does the media interpret the actions of the strike, but it also interprets information coming back from the strike via speeches and rhetoric, the performance of the principle actors and the selective perceptions of groups of participants. In the case of the miners' strike the principle actors were Margaret Thatcher and Ian McGregor on one side, and on the other, Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey. Examples of the participating groups include the miners, both striking and non-striking, the police and other members of the labour movement. This produced a process of simplification whereby the groups are positioned into those for or against the strike.

The most common form of interpretation of industrial disputes is that strikes are irrational and are condemned. Certain sections of the media see groups that do not conform to the establishment's view of things as a threat. The establishment in this case is not just the class or groups which are seen as having institutional authority within British society but also those newspapers and other media owners who had an interest in returning a Conservative government. This can lead to a process of certain groups' views being excluded or distorted, and certain sections of the media are quick to highlight the actions of those groups which are normally grouped together under the banner of the 'loony left', resulting in opinions and stories being unreported and becoming part of what the papers did not say. Brian Hill and Lesley Sutcliffe's (1985) book on the political use of the Social Security benefits system during the miners' strike, accuses the media of,

'constantly trying to portray the miners as being isolated and friendless.'

(Sutcliffe and Hill 1985 p 37)

The truth, is that miners had received massive support from all over the country. Penny Green (1990) found that

‘60 per cent believed, albeit cautiously, that the mass media were biased against the striking miners.’  
(Green 1990 p 167)

Specific examples found by her were of an Ollerton picket who thought that the role of the mass media was,

‘A strike breaking force ... a morale deboost. To try and get us back to work.’  
(Green 1990 p 167)

and

‘For people working inside and outside mining communities the media have given the impression that the pits are working normally in Nottinghamshire.’  
(Green 1990 p 167)

There was also arguably bias in the media coverage over reports of intimidation. This question of intimidation was a recurring theme throughout the strike and the media gave great coverage to incidents of working miners who were themselves or whose families or property was attacked or damaged by striking miners. Striking miners found that incidents of intimidation against them by police and working miners were rarely reported. Accusations were made that three or four hours of peaceful picketing were ignored in lieu of a few minutes of rowdy behaviour and pushing and shoving between police and pickets which resulted in no arrests. In some ways this is not surprising as we have already noted the media needs a sensationalist approach to reporting to either sell newspapers or to increase its television audience figures. There is also the question of space in television news where the events of several hours have to be condensed into a few short moments of news time. It is only natural, therefore, that the coverage will be of the confrontation between police and pickets rather than the stand off between them. Thus the feeling of the dramatic

events can present distorted highlights of the day's proceedings.

The view of striking mining communities was that the media was being used as a strike breaking force by a way of undermining morale with the sole aim of trying to get striking miners back to work. Propaganda was the way in which striking miners thought that the media went about breaking the strike. The first way that propaganda was used was towards those miners that were wavering in their resolve to continue the strike by highlighting information and distorting statistics about the number of miners returning to work, and the amount of coal being produced. This form of propaganda was particularly important in Nottinghamshire where the media's impression that pits were working normally served the dual purpose of keeping the working Nottinghamshire miners at work and persuading non working miners to return.

The second way in which propaganda was used was against people from outside the mining communities whose sympathies may have been with those miners who were on strike. Those people were forced to believe what they saw on television and read in the papers. As they did not live in areas where the strike was taking place they had to rely on what they saw to form their opinions of the strike. Therefore some sections of the media attempted to isolate the striking miners and to actively discourage any notions of sympathy or support for them.

The apparent impartiality of the media made them as legitimate a target as the police, judiciary and government for Arthur Scargill. This underlined the fact that in this dispute the actions of the media, and what they reported were not incidental but central to the battle for the hearts and the minds of the British public as to whether they perceived the strike as just, or as yet another unnecessary industrial dispute.

The relationship between the striking miners, the NUM and the media was conducted at two levels, nationally and locally. At a national level relations between the news media and striking miners soon deteriorated. Speeches by Arthur Scargill soon started with an attack on the news media, not just the

editors of Fleet Street, the BBC and ITN, but almost every working journalist. Television crews began to feel increasingly vulnerable when filming picketing. Many television crews suffered violence, a number of their cars were damaged and some were overturned, and at Orgreave on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1984 a BBC camera crew trying to interview Arthur Scargill was attacked by pickets. At many locations camera crew were directed to where they could film, by the police, arguably so there would no restraining effect on the police when dealing with pickets, as the police always knew where the camera crews were.

The press too were not exempt from the anger of striking miners as to their coverage of the strike. Some journalists had to dress in donkey jackets and jeans and hide their notebooks for fear of being attacked by miners unhappy at the press coverage they were receiving. It was not just the daily editorial abuse, they endured but headlining such as the *Sun*'s front page headline of 29<sup>th</sup> September 1984 portraying them as the,

**'Scum of the Earth'**

but as much as their portrayal as unthinking people being manipulated by Scargill for his own political ends.

The media image of the strike provides both written and visual interpretations of the theme of legality that is central to this study. The confrontation, often violent, between pickets and police portrays the miners' perception that they were lawfully attempting to prevent, or persuade, miners from crossing picket lines while also portraying the police's perception that people should be allowed their right to work.

The strike was without doubt a media strike. Within the media there was a battle for images, for the sensational picture or footage of the picket line violence or from other issues affecting the strike. The media, through newspaper headlines, pictures, and articles along with the television news and news programmes shaped miners' understanding of the strike and therefore their primary actions.

The legacy for the media is that it created an archive of powerful images, icons and symbols. The analysis of the media is part of the continuing process of understanding the strike from a viewpoint that was there for all to see. What this produced was yet more material that could be added to the miners store of memorabilia, and which could be used to illustrate the events of historical memory within the culture of the miners. However what is important is that these images, whether caught in photographs, or newsreel, or home video footage could be used by the various groups to define their position and role within the strike.

### THREE LOCAL CASE STUDIES

The third section of this chapter looks at three local case studies, which are all based on reports of incidents and events that took place during the strike. Firstly, the Durham Gala of July 1984, secondly, Paul Wilkinson's return to work at Easington Colliery in August 1984 and finally how the return to work by the striking miners at Easington were reported. Part of the methodology of this particular piece of research is to examine how the contemporary media portrayed the strike, and therefore these three case studies are all important in their own right and are landmarks in the year-long dispute. What makes these case studies useful is that they took place over short periods of time, can be substantiated by written material and contain evidence from those who experienced the events of these case studies first hand.

Firstly, the Durham Miners' Gala has long been the highlight of the year for the miners of County Durham, and a celebration of the Labour movement and the part that the miners were playing in it. But during the 1970s and 1980s it became more political, a platform from which the NUM leaders could rally support for their wages demands and later to vent their anger on a Conservative government seemingly intent on destroying the world which they knew.

Paul Wilkinson's return to work at Easington is important for two reasons. Firstly, it was the first crack in the solidarity of the strike at Easington, a pit which after some initial misgivings had been, to a man, unanimously behind the strike call and, secondly, because it was the scene of the most violent clashes between police and striking miners in County Durham. The final case study shows that although support for the strike was still almost solid at Easington, and that its miners took great pride in what they had achieved, the return to work was a subdued affair lacking the almost triumphant feelings that were present at other pits as they returned to work.

The first case study is a look at how the Durham Miners' Gala – The Big Meeting – of 14<sup>th</sup> July 1984 was reported in the local press. The Gala was the 101<sup>st</sup> in a series which began with the first being staged in Durham's Wharton Park in 1871. The Gala became an annual event which only failed to be held because of the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars, or due to the national Lock-outs of 1921 and 1926, or in 1922 when the industry was in a state of depression. The centenary gala in 1983 gave Tony Benn the chance to have reported that the gala celebrated a centenary of struggle and compared the victories and defeats of Durham Miners Association as the victories and defeats of the working class and not just the victories and defeats of the NUM. The 1984 Gala was held when the strike in County Durham was still solid, negotiations between NUM and NCB were still in progress and the financial implications of the strike had started to really affect the striking miners and their families.

*The Northern Echo* 16<sup>th</sup> July 1984 devotes only one inside page to reporting the event with two articles. The first with the headline,

**'On To Victory Vow Miners.'**

is a report of the speeches made by the guest speakers, Neil Kinnock, Arthur Scargill, NUM Secretary Peter Heathfield and Bolsover MP Dennis Skinner. Much is made of Kinnock's appearance beside Scargill, and the article mentions that while he had been criticised earlier in the strike for not speaking out strongly in support of the striking miners his speech had reunited

himself with the NUM leadership.

The way that Arthur Scargill's speech is reported can be likened to a list of demands, no more pit closures, wages to be paid to cover those lost during the dispute and a demand that the NCB does not victimise striking miners. The report does not convey any of the emotion, excitement or passion normally used to report a Scargill's speech to an audience of his supporters.

The second report under the headline,

**'When The Heart Rules The Head'**

paints a rather depressing picture of the whole day, reporting that in 1983 there were 200,000 present at the 100<sup>th</sup> Durham Gala, but this year there were only 15,000. The opening three short paragraphs of the report seem to sum up not only the event, but also the reporting of it,

'Big Meeting day it wasn't but Saturday's miners' rally was held in difficult times.'

'A sombre almost funereal air hung over Durham replacing the laughter and celebrations of the past 100 Galas.'

'But there again it was difficult for miners and their families who came from all parts of the country to unwind after 18 weeks out on strike.'  
(*Northern Echo* 16 July 1984)

One can almost read into these reports the premonition of defeat despite Peter Heathfield's promise that the NUM was on its way to a historic victory, and MP Dennis Skinner's prophecy that 1984 would be a turning point in British labour history.

Both Heathfield and Skinner were to be proved wrong. The NUM was on its way to historic defeat rather than a victory, while Skinner's prophecy was correct, but for the wrong reasons.

Tyne Tees Television coverage of the Gala showed films of the parade and the speeches of Neil Kinnock and Arthur Scargill but did not portray the feeling of depression and defeat that the *Northern Echo* seemed to put across in its reporting. But what was more significant was the previous day's news item on Durham's preparations for the Gala. In this item shops were filmed being boarded up, shopkeepers were interviewed saying that they were not opening because they thought there would be clashes between police and striking miners. The report gave an expectation of trouble (historically union gatherings were particularly unpopular with the *Durham Chronicle* reporting with some surprise that the Gala of 1872 passed off peacefully) instead of the normal family friendly atmosphere associated with the gala. This view was balanced by an interview with Durham NUM General Secretary, Tom Callan, who thought that only people from outside the DMA would cause trouble, and was,

'hopeful that the family atmosphere would prevail.'  
(*Northern Life* TTTV 13.7.84)

What this case study shows is that despite all the hardships being endured by miners and their families, this would not be allowed to stop the historic events of 'big meeting day' taking place. It also adds another story to the historic memory that even in 1984 when times were bad the gala still took place. What is also important is that no mention is made of the fact that the gala passed off peacefully with no incidents of trouble between police and striking miners, and again it appears that positive aspects of the day were ignored in favour of comments about a 'funeral air replacing the laughter'.

However video footage shot from the speakers' platform contrasts with the bleak pictures portrayed by the local media who left out many factors that could have presented the day in a more positive light were left out. True the racecourse was less crowded than usual, but the bands still played, Scargill got a hero's reception, the banners still flew, and the day was still a family affair. There was no mention in the media of miners and their banners from outside the Durham area, including Cortonwood and Mardy, there was no evidence of over policing, and Arthur Scargill and Dennis Skinner were relaxed enough to spend

time signing autographs.

The emotion of previous galas was still there. *Gresford* was played in honour of the two miners that had been killed on picket lines and the speeches themselves were the predictable 'call to arms', and not at all defeatist or downbeat.

Peter Heathfield referred to the gala being held in good times and in difficult times and warned of what would happen if pits closed. He spoke of a new generation of miners following their forefathers in standing up to government, and he accused the BBC and ITV of portraying miners as thugs, and of withholding film of police brutality. His theme all through his speech was that of trying to link the fate of the strike to that of the British trade unions in general.

Arthur Scargill continued Heathfield's theme of previous generations confronting government and argued that the forefathers of today's striking miners would be proud of their sons and grandsons. Naturally enough the question of defeat was not raised; Scargill was confident that the miners would win and that the next socialist government would bring all the media into common ownership.

So which side portrayed the Gala correctly? Again we are back to reporters reporting their version of events. The local newspapers and television saw it as a depressed gala compared to previous ones, while the miners own video footage portrayed it as a positive event, a day in which the NUM leadership motivated their members and a day when the scent of victory and not defeat was in the air.

The second case study looks at the return to work of a single miner at Easington Colliery, hitherto a pit which was solidly on strike, and whose actions brought about the worst violence seen in County Durham during the strike.

The strike remained solid at Easington until August, when the NCB made its second attempt to persuade men to return to work. Their first attempt in July had been a total failure. The Easington Colliery Manager, Peter Farrage, assured the NUM that any miner returning to work at Easington would have to enter the colliery yard through the main gate on foot. The NUM took the manager at his word and on 19<sup>th</sup> August barricaded the main gate to the colliery confident no one was going to try to return. Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August was the day that the NCB had arranged for pit buses to bring any miners wishing to return to work to the pit.

The case study looking at how the media reported the return to work of Paul Wilkinson starts on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 1984. On Monday 20<sup>th</sup> he had attempted to return to work but the police, heavily outnumbered, were unable to get him through the picket lines. On Tuesday he returned home after talking to others who, like him, had been transferred from East Hetton. On Wednesday and Thursday he failed to appear. But on the Friday 25<sup>th</sup> with the assistance of a large police presence he finally managed to cross the picket line and return to work.

The press coverage starts with a front page report in *The Northern Echo* on Tuesday 21 August 1984, the day after Paul Wilkinson had first attempted to return to work. The headline read,

**'I'll Get Past The Pickets.'**

and the article tells how Paul Wilkinson wants to go back to work and that he is not going to be frightened away by any mass picketing designed to keep him out. The reporting of Wilkinson's side of the story is very fair, they quote fully his comments about the union leaders being a bunch of thugs, that it was wrong not to have a national ballot and that the strike was all political and the union was falling apart because of it.

The article also quotes the NUM Easington Lodge secretary, Alan Cummings, who puts the union side of the story saying that the union had tried to help

Wilkinson. He had been given food parcels, hardship money and the chance to earn more money by going picketing.

The tone of the reporting is unbiased, the facts are reported as they are and there is no attempt to portray Wilkinson's return to work as a victory for those miners wanting to work. Equally there is no suggestion of threat in the statements from Alan Cummings, whose comments come over as being almost sympathetic to Wilkinson's position and to the personal problems he was having.

The return to work on Friday morning was reported in *The Evening Chronicle* on the same day under the headline,

**'Riot As Lone Miner Gets In.'**

There is great emphasis in the report that it was a riot, and an NCB spokesman was reported as saying it was a 'riot situation'. The report added that although hundreds of extra police were on duty there were only 250 pickets present. All groups are given the opportunity to comment on the incident. Predictably the NUM blame the NCB for the violence because they had gone against their word and brought Wilkinson in by a side entrance. Again, predictably, the police blame the striking miners for the trouble. Considerable space was given to John Cummings, the Labour leader of Easington Council, who blamed the police for the riot claiming it was caused by people seeing their friends and colleagues brutally attacked by the police of whom he alleges there were 2,000 at Easington. He added that Easington was a village under siege with people prevented from going about their normal business.

This report appears more sympathetic towards the actions of the striking miners and their reaction to the police operation to get Wilkinson into work. Any sympathy for Wilkinson's position has gone; he has crossed the picket lines and has caused a riot. While the report does not condemn or condone the actions by groups or individuals there is a sense that it is Wilkinson's and the police's fault that the violence took place.

*The Northern Echo* report on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August of the previous day's events under the headline,

**'A Village Street In Co. Durham'**

and underneath a photograph of a group of police dressed in riot gear walking down an Easington Street towards the photographer.

The report starts by saying that there was the worst outbreak of violence in the North East in the 24 weeks of the strike and possibly the first time that riot police had been used in the area. The report concentrates on the violence itself, the damage which occurred, and the injuries to striking miners, caused allegedly, by the police. There are no comments by the NCB or the police and those of the NUM are restricted to them blaming the NCB for sneaking Wilkinson into the pit by the back door.

The tone of the report is one of almost disbelief that this could have happened in Easington let alone County Durham. There are comments from Easington MP Jack Dormand who said he would be protesting to the Home Secretary, Leon Brittain; from Alan Cummings who said that the village would take a long time to forget what happened. Finally, there were comments from the Reverend Hodgeson who said that he felt a sense of anger over what had happened to the community, and that the events of that day compared to the 1951 Easington Pit Disaster, not as tragic but will leave the same lasting effect.

Once again the reporting is matter of fact. There are no sensational headlines, in fact the headline, 'A village street in Co. Durham' and the photograph set the tone of disbelief in the report. There is no attempt to use emotive language or to try and produce a sensationalist story from what was a tragic incident for those involved.

From then on the Wilkinson story had ceased to be headline news. Whilst he continued to go into work there was still mass picketing to try and prevent him and there continued to be incidents of violence on the picket lines. Easington

still had a large police presence, police erected roadblocks, and there were allegations of police harassment of ordinary people going about their normal business, but the Wilkinson affair had become inside page news.

*The Journal* of 28 August 1984 has an interview with Alan Cummings who likens the return to work of Wilkinson to a National Front march, arguing that the police would ban a National Front march because it would offend people. Cummings argues that,

‘What they [the police] do not accept is that Wilkinson is offending thousands of people and he should be prevented by the police from approaching the colliery.’  
(*The Journal* 28.8.1984)

*The Evening Chronicle* of the same day has the headline,

**‘18 Arrested As Rebel Walks In’**

This report concentrates on two issues. Firstly that there had been further trouble between police and pickets and secondly, that the Durham NUM General Secretary, Tom Callan, had attempted to speak to Wilkinson but had been prevented from doing so by police. The report also included a quote from the Easington MP Jack Dormand, who was at the scene, that,

‘the whole thing should not have happened. The great public expense of getting one man in was not worth it,’  
(*Evening Chronicle* 28.8.84)

The type of reporting now shifted to incidents following the violence. The police were faced with a growing hostility, not only because of their continuing presence in Easington, but because of the resources being used to get one man into work. *The Northern Echo* of 30th August reported that Durham police had cancelled a meeting with Easington Council to discuss the situation in the village. Accusations were made in the report that the police were being used for political means and that according to Easington Council leader John Cummings the ratepayers were disturbed that hundreds of police could be

used to get one man into work.

Wilkinson continues to be mentioned briefly in the press with the *Evening Chronicle* of 6<sup>th</sup> September reporting that he had been granted an injunction stopping the NUM from withdrawing his rights and privileges as a union member. The report went on to say that he was getting into work without any problems.

The *Newcastle Journal* on 11th September reported that police had twice had to turn back after being confronted by pickets, before being able to get Wilkinson into the pit. It is interesting that the report was confined to a couple of column inches whereas pickets stopping Wilkinson from crossing picket lines would have made headline news a couple of weeks earlier. In a follow up the *Evening Chronicle* of 12<sup>th</sup> September reported that 1,700 pickets had turned up at Easington that morning, but Wilkinson had got to work and there had been no arrests. The report also said that Wilkinson had told the Chief Constable of Durham that he did not want the police van stopped so any NUM official could talk to him, and that Durham police had confirmed that there was no agreement between them and either the NUM or NCB on stopping the men from talking to Wilkinson.

The final mention of Wilkinson in the four weeks since 24<sup>th</sup> August was in the *Evening Chronicle* for 15<sup>th</sup> September when it was reported that Wilkinson's injunction against the NUM had been renewed.

The reporting of the return to work of Paul Wilkinson started off with a number of highly emotive articles in which terms like 'riot', 'brutal attack' were used. These articles also reported that the local MP was questioning the role being played by the police. However, once it was clear that Wilkinson was going to be brought to work despite the actions of the pickets then the news quickly ceased to be headline material. This is very much in line with the comment made earlier in the chapter that the media needs dramatic stories and unless

there was a riot everyday in Easington then the story soon ceases to be the sort that sells papers.

The events at Easington were probably the most violent seen in County Durham although there was picket line violence at Wearmouth Colliery and violence in the nearby village of Murton. What did result from the police actions in Easington was that the village became even more militant with accusations from people, especially Alan Cummings, that,

‘Easington was a village under siege with people prevented from going about their normal business.’  
(*Evening Chronicle* 24.8.84)

The mood in Easington was one of frustrated anger as it had to endure a police presence that came close to permanent occupation, all, as one villager put it,

‘for one bloody man.’  
(Wilshire, Macintyre and Jones 1985 p 204)

Interestingly while all three local papers gave balanced coverage to all sides involved in the return to work of Wilkinson, no paper actually stated he had a right to return to work, and therefore the police were only doing their duty to uphold the law. The national press with its alleged bias towards those miners working or returning to work would have been quick to pick up on this fundamental point of his right to work.

The return to work of Paul Wilkinson received considerable coverage by Tyne Tees Television. Although we have mentioned its coverage of the gala earlier in this chapter, before analysing its coverage of this second case study, the position of television’s reporting of the strike needs to be examined.

‘Assuming the BBC is for the people and that the Government is for the people, it follows that the BBC must be for the government in this crisis too.’  
(Jones, Petley, Powens, Wood 1987 p 20)

This quotation from Lord Reith, then Director of the BBC was made in the context of the General Strike of 1926. However, it could just as easily have been made in 1984. The message that he was putting across was that by going on strike the working classes of Great Britain had ceased to be part of 'the people'. While broadcasting institutions would argue they are not 'for' or 'against' the trade unions, but simply for the 'national interest' this inevitably means they are against strikes.

Arguably this is what happened to the miners at the hands of the BBC and ITV. Their case was marginalised, not by the alleged propaganda and lies which happened in the coverage by Fleet Street, but by the daily repetition of the strike as seen by the NCB and the government. However, Channel 4 gave the miners a much fairer hearing. Its news items were longer and therefore more detailed as all sides were given a greater chance to express themselves. Television news is limited in the time it can devote to each story, so the longer a story runs the less background is given. It is also a visual medium but the words that accompany the image do much to fix the meaning of those images to the viewer.

The first programme featuring Paul Wilkinson showed him saying goodbye to his children, his wife had left him and he was living with his parents. The feature continued with him being interviewed on the bus taking him into work where he states he is £6,000 in debt, that the strike has gone on too long and that the union has no intention of settling it. The programme also shows the organised cat and mouse tactics employed by both police and strikers as the bus is spotted, and the police decide they do not have the resources to get him through the picket line that day. The programme ends with the feeling that neither Wilkinson or the pickets are going to back down.

The next day the scene of the report moves to the actual picket lines. At first all is calm and good humoured. The police in shirt sleeves and with no riot gear in evidence appear to be on good terms with the pickets. One can see the similarity between police and fans at a football match, a lot of noise but no threat of trouble. But once Wilkinson appears the trouble begins. The camera

crew, behind police lines film the melee, pickets being arrested and unceremoniously being dragged away, a couple of injured policemen being led away by their colleagues and the constant background chanting of 'scabby bastard'.

By the third day the situation has changed completely. The police are now better organised, greatly reinforced – possibly by officers from outside Durham – and all have shields and other riot gear. The pickets are now more hardened in their attitude possibly because they are being kept well away from the pit entrance. The police's attitude has hardened too, there are more scuffles as Wilkinson arrives, arrested pickets are more firmly dealt with, being led away in arm locks and head locks.

The edition shown on 24<sup>th</sup> August shows the aftermath of the worst violence. There are shots of upturned cars, broken windows both in the pit offices and the surrounding houses. The reporter confirms that police have been drafted in from South East England and Wales, although their numbers have not been revealed, they are now keeping the pickets a hundred yards away from the colliery. The programme includes interviews with Tom Callan who suggests that the NUM might take Wilkinson's union card away, and with local MP Jack Dormand who compares the violence at Easington with that happening in Nottinghamshire. He stated that the Home Office is directly responsible and that Home Secretary Leon Brittain has personally given the police an instruction that Wilkinson must be got into work. A bystander is interviewed who says that he was beaten up by police just for sitting on a wall.

The Tyne Tees Television programmes reporting of the violence at Easington paints a picture of a village with a continual police presence and where each day is punctuated with violence between the police and striking miners. The editing process took out the abusive and foul language directed at Wilkinson by the pickets, as well as chants of 'Sieg Hiel' as the police marched down the road. Tyne Tees Television programmes looking at the strike in retrospect stated that violence between police and pickets had become common place, the worst

being at Easington and Wearmouth and that 593 people had been arrested in County Durham during the year long dispute.

The third case study looks at how the return to work at Easington in March 1985 was reported.

Depending on which group of people you listen to, the return to work started at a variety of different times. But in County Durham, from the miners I have interviewed, two months are always mentioned, November 1984 and January 1985. Support for the November date comes from factors such as the NCB's campaign promising returning men money for Christmas, the fact that summer was over and picketing took place in the dark, the cold and wet and also that financial hardship was beginning to bite. Three factors support the January date. Many miners and their families had had a miserable Christmas, the pressure on family relationships was increasing and 'General Winter' had not come to the rescue of the striking miners. Indeed the government had announced that it saw no reason why there should be power cuts at all that Winter. Also the striking Durham men were seeing miners returning to work in other areas of the country, indicating that the strike was no longer solid nationwide, as well as in ever increasing numbers at the local pits.

For the purposes of this chapter I am taking January as the month in which the return to work became a flood rather than a trickle.

From early in January all three local papers began reporting, on a daily basis, men returning to work in Durham's pits. Headlines such as the *Evening Chronicle* of the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1985,

**'Miners Flood Back To Work'**

And the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1985,

**'North Miners Flood Back'**

became common. Articles now started to appear describing how men were being driven back to work because of hardship in one form or another. These articles were sympathetically written and there was little comment by the NUM on how they were trying to help men to prevent them from returning to work.

By February 1985 the question about what happens when the strike ends was being posed and answered in the three papers. Appeals were made for understanding and for there to be no retribution between miners who had returned and those who would remain on strike to the end.

In Easington the strike remained virtually solid. In spite of all the pressure they were being put under only 52 NUM members, 2.4% of the workforce, were working at Easington on 22nd January 1985. By the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1985 this figure had risen to 61, 2.8% and at the end of February just 100 men, 4.6%, were working. Indeed the *Evening Chronicle* of 26<sup>th</sup> February 1985 reported that 350 men were still picketing Easington.

The actual day of the return to work on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1985 received very subdued reporting, there were no pictures of parades of men, bands and banners. Instead all three papers concentrated on what the future held. Articles looked at how miners families would repay their debts, what further criminal proceedings would take place against some striking miners and the scope for potential trouble between miner's who had returned to work and those who had remained on strike until the dispute ended.

Television coverage of the return to work at Easington portrayed a picture of a somewhat confused situation, as the programme concentrates on the future, the hostility and the atmosphere in the pit and above all what is the future for the pit. There is a positive interview with Heather Wood who speaks with pride when she talks about the community pulling together with families solidly supporting each other. However, without the pictures of miners marching back to work the end of the strike seemed to be portrayed as an anticlimax.

The miners' vote to return to work was reported in the lunchtime ITN and BBC news on Sunday March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1985, and by the BBC's *This Week Next Week* programme. The ITN news made reference to the fact that many miners wanted an amnesty for those miners sacked during the strike. The BBC news concentrated on the fact that many more miners would have returned to work if a settlement had not been reached.

*This Week Next Week* had interviews with Des Dutfield Vice President of the South Wales miners, who was critical of the support received from the Trade Union movement, ASLEF's Ray Buckton who blamed the lack of support on the climate of fear introduced by the government and Ken Moses, the NCB Director in Derbyshire. Moses was concerned that there would be guerrilla warfare in the pits and stated that discipline would be maintained and that a general amnesty for sacked miners was out of the question.

#### OTHER TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

Although the miners' strike made headline news everyday on television, and provided the headlines in the national press on an almost daily basis, there were also the regular current affairs and political commentary programmes which could provide several further hours of debate during the weeks of the strike. Most confined themselves to debating one issue, policing being a favourite topic although another favourite was how negotiations were, or were not, progressing. There was also the 'review' type programme of just who was perceived to be winning the war.

From the number of programmes of this type I have selected three. Firstly, ITV's *World In Action* from October 1984, secondly BBC's *Panorama* from December 1984, and thirdly ITV's *Weekend World* taken from February 1985.

*World In Action* featured an interview with Bill Sirs, ISTC General Secretary, who argued that Ian McGregor was very anti-trade union and had little notion of the problems that the break up of mining communities would cause. He also

considered that McGregor's actions in breaking strikes in the coal rich states of Western America in the 1970s was just a dress rehearsal for what he was doing in Britain in 1984. However it could be argued that Scargill's actions in the 1970s were merely a dress rehearsal for the campaign that he was waging in 1984.

This programme entitled *The Coal War*, went on to report that 'General Winter' would help and possibly win the strike for Scargill and the miners. A bleak picture was painted of power cuts in November and the question was posed, but not answered, of what would happen if Thatcher sent in the troops.

The *Panorama* programme entitled *To The Bitter End* focused on the policing of the strike in Yorkshire. However it did not portray a picture of violence, arrests and injuries. Rather it portrayed the fact that the protest had become a daily ritual. Pushing said one picket helped get rid of the frustration. A number of pickets praised the police for their handling of the situation, and a degree of understanding between police and pickets had ensured that there was no violence or arrests. However both sides had some criticism of each other. The police alleged that infiltrators were stirring up trouble between striking and working miners, and striking miners spoke of scabs betraying their fathers and forefathers and NUM officials spoke of their 'divine right' to talk to miners crossing picket lines, which the police were preventing.

A group of miners who had returned to work was also interviewed and they were critical of the police arguing that they had no idea of the amount of intimidation that was happening. Finally a group of striking miners was interviewed in an attempt to gauge their mood which varied from the still strong belief that they were going to win through to a couple whom recognised that they were going to be defeated but were still not going to cross a picket line.

The third programme, *Weekend World*, was broadcast in mid February and featured Arthur Scargill being interviewed by the programmes presenter Brian Walden. This interview followed a 'review' type report on where both sides

stood. The programme argued that after the settlement of the NACODS dispute the Coal Board had become more confident, less concerned with settling the dispute, and more concerned with getting miners back to work. It suggested that to defeat the miners rather than negotiate a settlement would bring a period of stability to the coal industry.

The interview with Arthur Scargill centred around the question of the closure of uneconomic pits, a category that Scargill refused to believe existed, and his refusal to negotiate a settlement similar to that agreed with NACODS. On the question of uneconomic pits Scargill continued to argue, as he had done all through the strike that there were only two reasons for closing pits (exhaustion and geological problems) and closure on economic grounds was not one of them. This he argued was tied in with the settlement with NACODS and therefore to accept a settlement under those terms would be to betray his members and all that they had suffered during the strike. When asked if he wanted a settlement based on compromise he replied that he thought that the government was prolonging the strike.

In comparing the three programmes the most important thing to notice is the change in mood from the *World In Action* programme in November to *Weekend World* in February.

In *World In Action* there was still a belief that the miners could win. Winter was coming power cuts could start very soon which might force the government into a corner with the possibility of accepting the miners demands or – although their duties were not made clear, - possibly using troops. But by December's *Panorama* programme there had been no power cuts, nor was there going to be according to Energy Secretary Peter Walker's announcement on 29 December, and no troops had been needed. What confrontation there was on the picket lines between police and pickets was now relatively peaceful with little or no violence or arrests and the pushing was part of a ritual. The mood seemed to be that the strike was lost therefore there was no point in any unnecessary violence.

By the *Weekend World* programme the strike had less than a month to run, yet Scargill was still sticking rigidly to his position on the closure of uneconomic pits. What the programme demonstrated was that arguably Scargill did not want to settle by compromise, but rather was determined to maintain his position despite the fact that the strike was crumbling around him.

In a matter of weeks from October to February the mood had changed from one of no confidence that the battle would be won to one of why bother to settle? The miners are defeated anyway.

As well as the type of programme described above, there were also those programmes produced by independent film makers, such as *The Battle For Orgreave* mentioned earlier, and shown on Channel 4. One of these programmes *Only Doing Their Job*, made in Yorkshire by striking miners, was a condemnation of policing, their tactics and of those miners who had scabbed.

The now normal complaints and allegations were made, the police were running the courts, cases were pre-judged, telephones were being tapped and we now had a national police force under the command of senior police officers and government ministers. Comparisons were made between police tactics in Northern Ireland in keeping Catholics and Protestant apart with those tactics used to keep working and striking miners apart. An NUM spokesman estimated that eighteen thousand police every day were engaged in policing the miners' strike. The same official admitted giving false information over the phone to foil the police, knowing that his phone was tapped.

A group of miners then gave its feelings on the miners who had returned to work and crossed picket lines. The condemnation of their actions bordered on pure hatred. 'Scabs' who crossed picket lines no longer belonged to the working class. Working class people who join the police have automatically joined the upper class because they now help protect the capitalist society by defending private property. The miners argued that the law in Britain exists primarily to protect private property, therefore diametrically opposed to the

working classes. Miners had needed to break the law to achieve all that they had, throughout the history of coalmining in Britain.

These programmes gave the ordinary striking miner the chance to put his point across and basically to get his hatred off his chest. Many allegations were suspect. I am sure that the police did not consider themselves upper class, or that by crossing a picket line a miner automatically left the working class. What the programme did however was to make the public aware of the fears of miners, their concerns that they were being subject to phone tapping and that their basic rights were being infringed. However they would probably have received more support if the level of hatred had been reduced.

#### THE STRIKE AS PORTRAYED IN THE ARTS

Sixteen years since the end of the strike, the events have become so significant historically as to take their place in the world of the arts. Previous industrial disputes involving miners, their pit, and communities have also been the focus for the arts world. The film *The Stars Look Down* based on the book by A J Cronin deals with life in the mining communities of the North East in the 1930s, whilst *How Green Was My Valley* looked at the mining communities of South Wales during the same period.

However possibly the major contribution the strike made was to the BBC Television series '*Our Friends In The North*'. The subject of the miners' strike was the subject of one episode and had all the ingredients of the confrontation between police and pickets; indeed this could have been based on the events in Easington where Paul Wilkinson returned to work. There is the friendly policing by the local police, contrasting with 'fiver' waving brutal policing by forces from 'down South', and their contempt for the local police and their 'soft' approach.

There is also the feeling of the whole community supporting the miners when they were faced with police aggression and an unfair judicial system. The final

episode of the series was set in 1995, after the last pit in Durham had closed and missed the opportunity to revisit the pit village to show the events leading up to the pit closure and the effect the closure had on that community.

The closure plans of the 1990s are also featured in the arts, this time in the film *Brassed Off* which dealt with the controversy and arguments over the closure of a pit in Yorkshire viewed from the angle of the future of the colliery band. In 2000 the award winning British film *Billy Elliot* was set against the background of the miners' strike and filmed, in part, in the former pit villages of Langley Park and Easington.

#### MEDIA AND THE STRIKE IN RETROSPECT

Since the end of the strike in March 1985 there have been many programmes that have focussed on why the strike took place, while the NUM was defeated and what tactics the government used to win. Examples of these include the Channel 4 *Despatches* programme *The Men That Kept The Lights On*. This programme revealed just how power cuts were avoided and included a number of revealing interviews with, amongst others, the late Walter Marshall then Chairman of the CEGB. A more recent example was BSkyB's History Channels *Flashback* programme featuring Tony Benn who was criticising the media coverage of the events at Orgreave.

Locally there have been a number of programmes mostly concerned with the closure of the remaining Durham pits but also looking back to the events of 1984/85. The BBC North East programme *Close The Coal House Door* spoke of how mining culture had shaped the North East for two hundred years. The programme described the parade of banners at the Gala as the Labour movements' equivalent of 'trooping the colour'. Banners of the now closed collieries were not battle honours, but were war wounds. The pit villages were described as welfare states in miniature as they united to protect themselves from those who would try to close their pits.

These retrospective programmes are a memory to a culture and way of life which has now ended. They refer constantly to the 'hard times' of previous generations, of poor working conditions, poor wages and the threat of eviction should strike action take place, references which continue to contradict to the historic memory, the myth and legend of the mining communities.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the reporting of events by the three local papers seems to have lacked most of the bias, emotions and sensationalist headlines that people became accustomed to seeing and reading in the national press. Some reports seem to concentrate on the facts without attempting to put any gloss or emphasis on any one particular side of the story. Maybe it was because Durham saw comparatively little violence compared to other areas of the country that the strike was not headline news every day. There is also the fact that local papers tended to look behind the scenes rather than concentrate on sensationalist headlines. No one could realistically claim that the media played the decisive role in the outcome of the strike, but undoubtedly sections of the media played a vital role in constantly reinforcing the Government and Coal Boards' case as well as systematically undermining and demoralising striking miners.

While *The Times* and *Daily Mail* were engaged in fighting a class war with as much dedication as the *Socialist Worker* and *Morning Star*, the Communist media were divided. Some felt that the *Morning Star* gave too much space to Scargill, while Scargill himself denounced *Marxism Today* for vilifying the NUM leadership and compromising with the class enemy. The NUM's own newspaper *The Miner* played an important part in the dispute. With a circulation of up to 400,000 copies it provided a vital information service to mining communities, striking miners and played an important role in keeping up striking miners morale as well as acting as a balance to national media distortion. However the control and style of reporting in the *Miner* could be open to the criticism that it was guilty of bias towards the miners, their families

and the actions of the NUM. Whereas newspaper coverage is widely seen as being biased, broadcasting is seen as retaining a reputation for fairness, but television is a highly selective image of the events it reports and its commentary plays as great a role as the newspapers in putting across an explanation of the visual action.

Some activists within the ranks of the striking miners were so concerned that the truth would be repressed that they took their own photographs, (some of which are used in this thesis) and video footage to tell how it really was, because they did not completely trust the media.

In viewing the strike in retrospect one quickly becomes aware that the media coverage of the strike has informed historical memory and influenced the way in which the strike is viewed. This theme and others is examined in greater detail in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE STRIKE AND LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

In their book *The Miners' Strike 1984/85 – Loss Without Limit* Adney and Lloyd (1986) entitled one chapter 'No other industry could do it' which describes, in broad terms how the industry, and the communities were able to sustain the strike for so long. This chapter of the thesis looks at how the communities of East Durham supported the strike and details the help and some of the activities that took place in order to try to keep the strike from failing.

But what was this community, what form did it take and how can this be defined? Philip Selznick (1992) in a major re-evaluation of sociological concepts of community argues that to understand the definition we need to take into account a complex set of interacting variables. He puts forward seven factors that need to be taken into account when defining community. Firstly Historicity, where the fabric of the community is strongest when formed from history. Second Identity, when a shared history will normally produce a sense of community expressed in loyalty, piety and a distinctive identity. Thirdly Mutuality, when people need each other. Communities, Selznick argues, are largely supported by interdependency and reciprocity. Fourthly Plurality, communities draw strength from corporate groups, in this case the NUM. When these groups disappear the benefits to the community are lost also. Fifth Autonomy, which is measured by what the community does to ensure that people with unique skills can emerge. Sixth Participation which Selznick describes as the need to sustain the community through friendship, work and kinship. A flourishing community has high levels of participation. People are expected to participate in many different roles and aspects. Finally there is Interaction, where all the above factors need supporting elements such as belief, custom and practice. Therefore communities need the emergence of political, legal and cultural practices.

In the mining communities of East Durham all of these factors were present. The communities were based on history; their members had shared identity often going back several generations. Families supported each other and there was a high degree of interdependency during the bad times, and the community drew strength and support from corporate groups such as the NUM. A number of mining communities threw up people unique, in some form. Many miners progressed to being Members of Parliament for their local constituency, such as Manny Shinwell MP for Seaham and more recently John Cummings MP for Easington. Many community members were active in different ways, the local NUM Lodge Committee being an important way of participating in the community, as was being a parish, district, or county councillor. The communities were supported by common beliefs and practice the most popular being that of historical memory, a belief that they had been severely oppressed in the past, and a belief that they still had to fight to resist change.

The 'community' had gone through a year of enormous upheaval; some villages had been like countries under siege, or at war. One woman, a resident of Murton, described the eerie feeling of hearing shouting as the police escorted working miners across picket lines, of blue flashing lights, in the early morning darkness of a winter morning. She also described how you became used to seeing groups of men sitting aimlessly about during the day, of a constant police presence as both groups waited for the next shift of miners to cross the picket line. While Pamela Wright, who lived in Percy Street Hetton on the road leading up to Eppleton colliery remembers that,

'For months there were pickets, sometimes hundreds of them. They were there from 7 in the morning and there was always a big police presence. One night after the miners were taken in the pickets rioted. Missiles were thrown, and it was the first time I'd seen the police in riot gear. The atmosphere was scary and many people were apprehensive about walking past the pickets.'  
(Interview with Pamela Wright)

One NUM leader described the strike as,

'130,000 men sitting at home and quarrelling with their wives.'  
(Adney & Lloyd 1986 p 219)

While this may have been true in some cases for others it gave them a chance to experience things that they would never have believed possible. The spring and summer of 1984 was, for many, a time of great excitement, playing cat and mouse with the police, tending allotments and gardens and enjoying being in the sunshine rather than down the pit.

It was also a time of misery and hardship, of bewilderment, brutality and of intimidation. Many miners found to their surprise that they were on strike, and then found that because of the threats of violence and intimidation, whether actual or perceived, they were too scared to return to work. Miners found themselves unable to discuss the merits of the strike in case they were overheard and accused of being disloyal to the union or worse still of running the risk of being branded a scab.

Many miners that I interviewed intimated that defeatist talk was not encouraged, speculation about what would happen when the strike was over was only discussed in terms of victory and what would happen to the scabs, not what will happen if we lose, and what would become of those miners who had been sacked. This discouraged a number of miners from actively taking part in picketing or from any excess contact with other striking miners outside of family or close friends.

It was not just the miners and their families that expressed these emotions; the whole community shared them in some way. Shopkeepers willingly gave food, goods and services to the support groups that sprang up. Many did so because they wanted to support the miners and saw it as a long term investment to help keep the pits open, and safeguard their business, while others contributed because they were afraid of the consequences of not doing so.

It was also a time of brutality and intimidation brought about through feelings of bitterness and frustration. Men who had never been in trouble with the law suddenly found themselves fighting with the police, being arrested and charged, or plotting to intimidate miners and their families into not crossing picket lines. And on the other side, miners willing to try and overcome the fear of reprisals

and returning to work in order to feed and clothe their families. There were bitter feelings towards the police and considerable criticism of the way the media was reporting events.

Once again the scene was of history repeating itself. During the 1921 lock-out the *Durham Chronicle* of 15<sup>th</sup> April 1921 reported that

‘With fine weather prevailing the miners have been hard at work in their gardens and allotments. The younger men are indulging in football, while others are practising in their respective cricket fields for the coming season.’  
(Garside 1971 p 144)

Many financial institutions such as banks and building societies were only too pleased to be flexible with repayments of loans and mortgages taken out by miners. In the Easington area the TSB allowed miners to run up overdrafts to pay bills such as gas and electric. In Murton 350 miners who banked with the TSB took advantage of this facility, running up debts on an average of £1,300.00 by the end of the strike.

Jimmy Moutter recalls

‘I had a loan out at the time for a £1,000. Up to the strike I’d paid about £500 off, but when the strike was on there was no pay so we got in talks with the bank and they said they would freeze it. At the end of the strike when I went back it wasn’t £500 I owed it was £1,200. There was £700 gone on interest and this that and the other.’  
(Interview with Jimmy Moutter)

Other miners kept the bills paid with their savings.

‘I didn’t get any pay for a full year. ... I kept my mortgage paid with the savings I had from past years ... but another three or four months I would have been at rock bottom.’  
(Interview with David Aston)

For the women, the wives and mothers, of working miners it was a time of suffering, and the constant worry of how to run the house and feed a family with little or no money coming in. Once again history repeated itself with the women suffering more than the men. Bill Williamson (1982) argues in his book

### *Class Culture and Community that*

'My grandmother's contribution was not obvious or outspoken; it was a calm determination to bear the burden of the budget and never to question my grandfather's reason for sticking strictly to his unions decision. ... Although not obviously political my grandmother's support expressing itself in a creative willingness to muddle through, to make do with nothing and to scratch together as best she could ... was central to the family's ability to battle through the eight months which followed and during which time they had no income whatsoever. Her experience of class conflict, as it were, in the kitchen was just as sharp as my grandfather's in the pit.'  
(Williamson 1982 p 176)

In 1984 the position of women had changed, but it was important that ordinary working class women were seen to be supporting their husbands. The problems of 1984/85 were the same as their parents and grandparents had experienced in 1926. Many miners' wives claimed that their husbands were being starved back to work by the DSS. The Miners' Campaign Film *Not Just Tea And Sandwiches* highlighted some of the problems being encountered by families. These included, no money for prescriptions, children who had no food, and a six week old baby who had not had a bottle for two days.

The strike gave women their moment of glory within the community. Historically, their role was one of bearing, nurturing, the early education of children and of being a support system to their menfolk. With the start of the strike the role of the support system changed, they were now supporting the community as well as their families. A quarter century of change in labour marked with more women in employment – though often part-time work in expanding service industries – the growth of child care services and, in East Durham, the support for women as the extended family – all meant that the role of women in mining communities had changed profoundly.

For some women the reason for their support was simply that if their local pit closed there was the possibility that they would have to up-root and move to a different coalfield leaving their family and friends behind. Without the support of the women in the mining communities the strike would arguably have been shorter. At the end of the strike the joke within mining communities was of the miner who at the end of the strike got his job back, and then asked for his wife

back, not the new one but the old one.

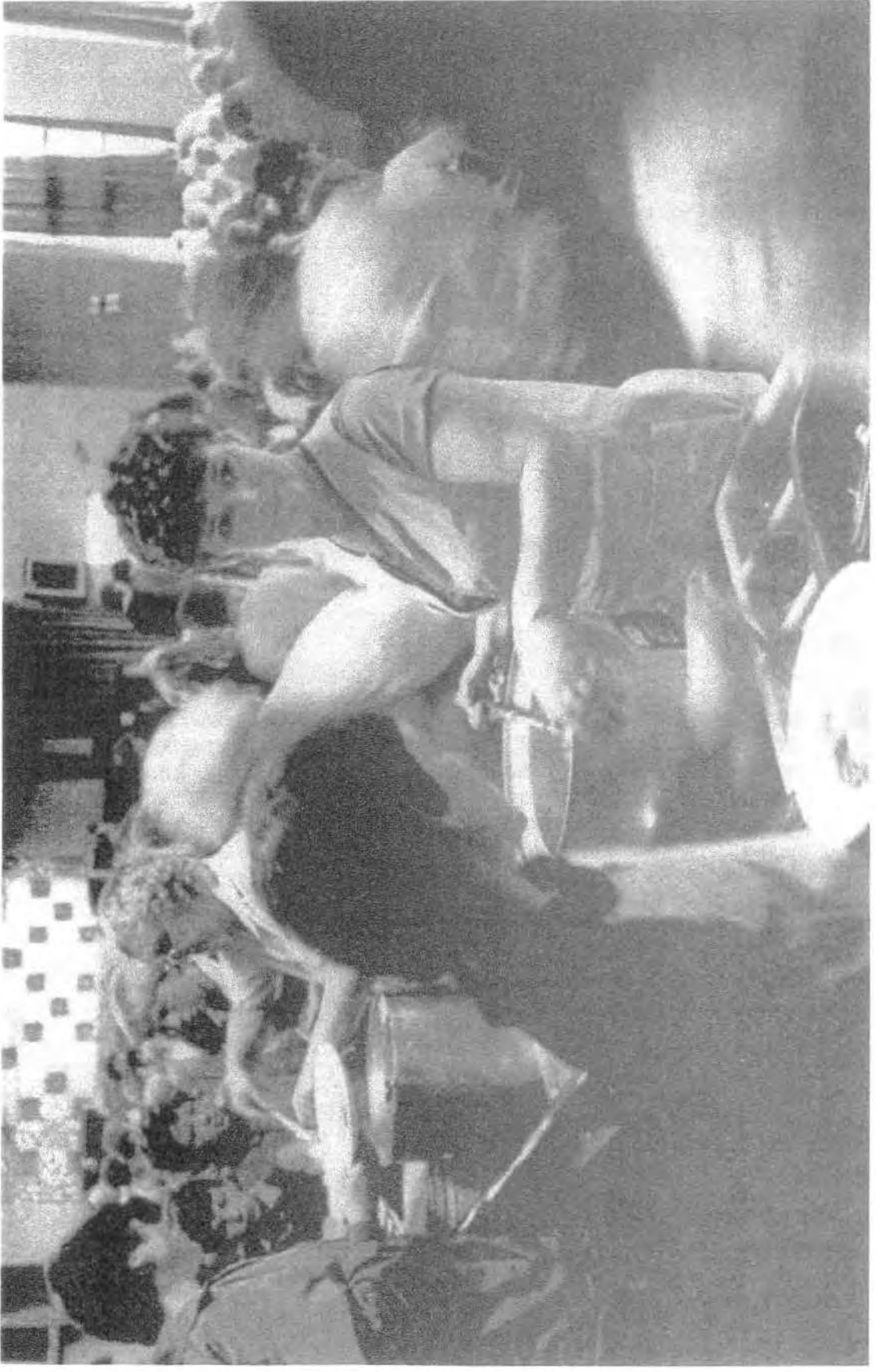
## SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

During the year long strike this process of fighting a political battle in the kitchen was repeated, but this time the women had a greater role to perform, via the women's support groups set up in many areas. These groups were to play a major role in ensuring the welfare of miner's families, as well as feeding the single miners who were getting no social security benefit, and keeping the communities morale going. Frequently led by political activists what these support groups achieved was to show to the public and media at large that the women of the mining communities were behind the strike. Many activists argued that this was not charity, but what working class people would do for working class people.

However not all women were active supporters of the strike. As Adney and Lloyd (1986) acknowledge the wives of working Nottinghamshire miners appeared, frequently in large numbers, on the picket lines to shout at Yorkshire pickets trying to prevent miners going to work, and to encourage their men to cross the picket lines.

The prime function of the support groups was to provide meals for miners and children and food parcels for families. At Easington the SEAM campaign started the first feeding centre in the country on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1984 in the colliery club. It was no soup kitchen, rather as one of the SEAM committee called it a free cafe for miners and their families. As mentioned in Chapter 3 by the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1984 13 Relief Cafes were operating within the SEAM area, and by 30<sup>th</sup> May the operation had grown to such an extent that a separate section within SEAM was established to concentrate on the Relief Cafes work.

In Easington the majority of the produce was brought from local shopkeepers, which strengthened the feeling of the community acting as one. Approximately £500 per week was being spent with Easington traders with some businesses providing some produce free of charge to top-up what was purchased. Help



THOMAS J. THOMPSON, JR.

came in other ways the local fish and chip shop owner lent his potato peeler, and the local bakery cooked batches of pies prepared by the Relief Café staff.

Easington Council was Labour dominated. Its leader Councillor John Cummings was a miner at Easington, and there was an overwhelming willingness to help in whatever way that was possible. Councillor Alan Barker, another striking miner and Environmental Housing Chairman at the time of the strike, recalls that,

‘the council would be dominated by Councillors who were miners, I was a working miner, John Cummings was a working miner, all the villages and we are talking 14 villages in the district, all have in one shape or another miners’ representatives. So it would be 100% support for the actions of the members of the NUM.’

(Interview with Alan Barker)

I asked him if he felt that the Conservative government ever put pressure on local councils to instigate measures that would be detrimental to the striking miners.

‘I wasn’t aware of anything like that, I mean, we would have resisted it in any case, you know, it was just chalk and cheese. The mining communities were up against a government we didn’t like, or what they were doing in any shape or form. ... But to answer your original question, was there any pressure on local councils I would say no and we were able to use the council’s resources, they were quite open about it. I was Secretary to SEAMs campaign at that particular time, I don’t have access to computers and printing labels and that sort of thing, but we were actually able to use facilities. And I used to do regular mail drops and things, I think there was 106/107 people I used to write to on a regular basis keeping them informed and it was the council who, you know, provided all the envelopes, sticky labels and that sort of thing. I used to just go in and get a run off and do the administration, so they were helpful in that way.’

(Interview with Alan Barker)

In fact Easington Council did a great deal to help the miners in their community. Local politicians were put under pressure to help their constituents who were finding problems with rent arrears, threats to cut off gas and electricity and with Social Services reluctance to provide grants for shoes for school children. The council also raised a 2p rate for providing assistance to families in their area. Durham County Council involved the Salvation Army, as

a charitable organisation to distribute £25,000 to families in need. Easington Council also made a further £10,000 available to the Salvation Army provided it was distributed to families within the Easington area.

The work of the support groups gained huge amounts of praise from those actively involved in the strike. Billy Stobbs admitted that,

‘I’ll go as far to say that if it was not for the women I think we may have been back at work six months prior, I honestly do. It was them that kept us out, kept up our morale and that.’

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

The strike had a detrimental effect on businesses in the community. Many were hit hard by the strike because of the lack of money in circulation within the community. Even when the strike finished miners had so much debt to repay that businesses failed to improve in the short term.

One of the great criticisms levelled by Arthur Scargill at the trade union movement and the Labour Party was that it failed to support the miners. He constantly referred back to the betrayal of the miners in 1926 when the TUC called off the General Strike leaving the miners isolated. While it is true that the TUC never called a General Strike in 1984, or ever seriously entertained the idea of doing so, there was support at local level from the trade union movement and the Labour Party. However as Joe Mills then Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) Regional Secretary pointed out in his interview there were certain restrictions to this support.

‘I think in the early days there was a lot of financial support, physical support and general support for the whole issue. But as time went on there was a lot of question marks starting to be raised, whether or not indeed the miners were going down a particular route that was not going to resolve the issue.’

(Interview with Joe Mills)

He also pointed out that the demands of the NUM led to certain tensions within the local trade union movement.

‘We had for example the miners making demands on bus drivers and wagon drivers not to cross picket lines. ... Some of the aggressive picketing didn’t go

down well with some of our membership.'  
(Interview with Joe Mills)

But in spite of these tensions the local mining communities did receive considerable support from the local trade union movement.

Miners argued that in asking for support from the trade union movement, they were only repeating the request that their forefathers had made and the right to make this request was one that they had inherited. Other trade unions had some local successes, the Merseyside Dockers 'blacked' 70,000 tons of coal during the year long strike and at one time 28 coal carrying ships were being 'blacked' at ports around the country. The dockers had a fear that if the miners lost they would be the next group to be targeted by the government and this fact helped sharpen their support for the miners. There was support for the Alliance between railway men and miners at local level, and to some degree at national level but not the complete support needed to put pressure on the government. But the steelworkers having experienced the attentions of MacGregor and the Thatcher government were in no mood to put any-more of their jobs at risk. Nowhere was the fragility of the Triple Alliance between steelworkers and railwaymen more obvious than at the Ravenscraig Steelworks in Scotland. By 1984 the workforce here had dropped to just under 3,500 from a figure of 18,000 in 1920 and 5,000 people in 1950. During the miners' strike the Triple Alliance proved to be no more than a myth. True the railwaymen stopped moving iron ore from the terminal at Hunterston, but British Steel moved it by lorry, as they did from Port Talbot to Llanwern, instead. But in a town built on a history of socialist tradition and militancy the steelmen of Ravenscraig would not shut the plant down. They knew once the furnaces went out they would never be relit again.

However despite the lack of support perceived by the miners in not actually striking, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation gave £400,000 in food parcels and toys. The General Municipal and Boilermakers Union gave over £1 million pounds in donations plus a loan of a further £1½ million, and the print union

SOGAT gave a further million pounds in donations. Despite these donations there was still criticism. Kent miners had sent the steelworkers money during the steel strike of 1981 and supported them. All they wanted, they argued, was support in return. The support of the Trade Union movement was crucial in keeping the strike going and donations of food and cash from the trade union movement prevented many miners from being starved back to work.

However there were instances of positive support from the railwaymen in an attempt to support the miners. No British Rail iron ore trains ran to Llanwern from Port Talbot from 25 June 1984 until the end of the strike. The loss to British Rail in revenue was £2.9 million as a result of traffic being taken by road. In Scotland no coal was moved by rail after the same date, and no iron ore was moved after 28 June 1984. These two commodities accounted for 46% of Scotrail's total freight revenue, a loss of £250,000 a week.

Money was also raised through public collections, concerts, sports activities and sponsored activities. Many miners raised cash by digging and selling coal, Jimmy Mouter remembers, going to railway embankments where the foundations were made of coal.

'We were digging down 6 to 8 feet and getting it out and flogging it at £2 a bag. ... There was a ready market. There was one day I sold about 30 bags. ... We had our own customers you know.'

(Interview with Jimmy Mouter)

Many people that I interviewed spoke of the pressure put on families by, lack of money, trying to look after the family, going picketing and in many cases helping with the support group. But no one could actually positively identify any family that had their house repossessed or whose marriage broke up as a result of these pressures. One former miner Ray Pye actually thought his marriage was stronger at the end of the strike. Again he also remembered doing odd jobs to make money.

'There was hardship during the strike up to a point. I think I was fortunate that I had no debt. I'd had a good job worked lots of hours and saved a little bit. We drew some of our savings and we drew out insurances. ... I did any work I could get hold of, I was painting windows for £1. I think it was a matter of

survival. And I think our marriage was stronger at the end of the strike, rather than weaker.’

(Interview with Ray Pye)

Ray Pye’s experience is shared by Mick Brown,

‘I was married, I had two children of nine and six. It was a long struggle. My wife was very supportive because she was from a mining family as well. Really it brought us closer together.’

(Interview with Mick Brown)

Michele Scott remembers her sister who was married to a miner being badly affected financially by the strike.

‘Money was very hard to come by, and if you didn’t have good parents or family who could help you out you literally went hungry. When it came to Christmas time it was absolutely desperate. The parents didn’t want anything for themselves, but the children were asking, “What have I got from Santa Claus” and if they couldn’t get them anything how would the children feel?’

(Interview with Michele Scott)

One of the storylines to emerge from this dispute was that of families split apart by brother, father and sons either working, striking, going back or staying out. During the course of my interviews a number of cases where this happened were quoted but the only other case where a family admitted to this came during the interviews with Tommy and Paul Wilkinson. Tommy described his post-strike relationship with his brother as non-existent.

‘If he was in the same room as me I wouldn’t speak to him, if I was in the street I would walk across the other side of the road and pretend I hadn’t seen him.’

(Interview with Tommy Wilkinson)

He also blamed his brother Paul for the break-up of his family,

‘Me dad and me mum were heartedly sickened by what had gone on in the strike and they wanted no more so they moved to Peterborough. ... I mean I used to speak to them all the time on the phone and I used to go down when I could and I was denied the access all the time when they were in Bowburn. I was denied 10 years of access basically.’

(Interview with Tommy Wilkinson)

Paul Wilkinson’s reply to this allegation was that he had done nothing wrong,

he was just standing up for his right to work and

‘he would speak to his brother, but he won’t speak to me.’  
(Interview with Paul Wilkinson)

One other case I was told about concerned two brothers, miners at Murton one in the engine house, and the other a waggonway man who never spoke after the strike.

After the strike there were some examples of arguments taking place as the why and wherefore of staying out and returning were discussed. Jimmy Moutter recalls.

‘I remember I had a bit of bother in the club, one of the union men he starts balling and shouting and I tell him what to do. ... I’ve never spoken to him since, because he’s a big mouthed slob as far as I’m concerned. We don’t speak, that’s the way I want it.’  
(Interview with Jimmy Moutter)

But as regards disputes within families I found little evidence. Indeed in the Moutter family of four brothers, of whom two were Deputies and continued to work. There was no animosity at all.

‘It brought us closer together because we would all help each other. ... I mean we were a close family to begin with. The day when Jimmy’s windows were put out we were round there together sorting it out. ... Although I had to go to work there was no bitterness between me and Jimmy.’  
(Interview with Joe Moutter)

From the evidence above it is true that the community did pull together to support the miners. Further evidence of this comes from the Reverend Tony Hodgeson who was very active in Easington during the strike.

‘We set up a Welfare State Mining Community. ... I made sure there was a permanently open door at the vicarage, and there was always food being put down in case anyone dropped in. ... We once had some Yorkshire miners come up, and these so called destructive strikers were actually JPs and councillors. They slept on our dining room floor even though we did offer them beds.’  
(Interview with Reverend Hodgeson)

But what was this community? I would argue that it was not the example quoted or pictured in historical memory. Times had changed and the NUM slogan 'Save Our Pits – Save Our Communities' was an attempt to paint a picture conjured up from historical memory. Since nationalisation fracture lines had been appearing. Pit closures had resulted in a more mobile workforce, often travelling many miles, rather than walking down the street to work. Social boundaries were changing, women now worked, boys went into other industries rather than follow their father 'down pit'. As standards of living rose so did people's expectations, the round of pit, pub, club and allotment became insufficient. The cohesiveness of the community had been badly eroded by 1984 and had become another feature of historical memory.

But the end of the strike left a scar across the community. Besides those families and friendships which had not survived the tensions of the strike. In April 1985 10 Durham miners were in prison as well as four other men who, while not miners, were imprisoned in connection with the miners' strike. As Tom Callan, Durham Miners General Secretary said,

'We have engaged in class war with the wicked government. Thatcher has taken prisoners. We must ensure they are looked after by the labour movement as a whole. They need every form of support we can offer.'  
(*The Durham Striker* July 1985)

After such a long strike and with men only returning in large numbers since Christmas 1984 what condition were the pits in? Obviously this varied from pit to pit depending on how many men had returned to work and for how long.

David Aston recalls that Easington was in good condition.

'It wasn't too bad considering it had been stood for a year. There were jobs to be done, but we were back on the face I would say within a fortnight, starting to repair damage, and about four weeks before we were cutting coal again.'  
(Interview with David Aston)

Murton pit had also survived the strike without major problems.

'The pit was quite canny actually. The pit was very good. ... we produced coal the first week. When I went in to start the machinery it started first time.'  
(Interview with Jimmy Patterson)

This opinion is supported by Ronnie Dixon a deputy from Murton who had inspected the pit all through the strike.

'I walked in and examined the face. I could have gone onto that face and produced coal within 24 hours.'  
(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

But at Dawdon things were not good as Mick Brown remembers.

'[things were] Terrible, I mean it was months and months before we could get any coal out. I mean weight had come on all the faces, you couldn't move any of the faces. ... It must have cost a fortune to get it back.'  
(Interview with Mick Brown)

Joe Moutter a deputy at Herrington described what it had been like underground with no men working.

'It was awful mind with nobody being there, you know, entirely on your own underground. I mean there might be, I think there was 10 of us and we had the whole pit to go through. You know it was eerie, with no loco's running about it was eerie.'  
(Interview with Joe Moutter)

When the miners returned they found that management attitude had hardened considerably. MacGregor had issued instructions that the miners would have to be punished for their 'insurrectionary insubordination'. Durham miners were, according to MacGregor

'in the militant vanguard and struck immediately.'  
(Boyle 1994 p 48)

Durham Area NCB managers read the miners new conditions out to them at mass meetings. These included,

All men convicted of offences to NCB property were to remain sacked.

All men convicted of stealing coal from NCB pit heaps would be reinstated, but only as new starters. A terrible penalty if they were ever to be made redundant.

Shift times were changed without consultation, with the shift cycle being 5 am, 12 noon, 5 pm and 9.30 pm.

Any miner using the word 'scab' was to be instantly dismissed.

The union quickly realised that its former position of being part of a joint team with management of overseeing terms and conditions had gone for good. But these conditions were not as bad as the loss of the friendly atmosphere underground. The presence in most areas of the pits of men who had returned before the strike was officially called off cast a shadow over what had once been good friendly working conditions.

Many miners that I interviewed remembered vividly the first day back at work and the bitterness. Jimmy Moutter recalls that,

'the day that everybody went back, we were down the pit like, and the NUM lads came down, and we were ready with the manriders. They wouldn't speak to us 'cause we'd gone back. ... They were disgusted, but as time went on they knew that we'd been right.'  
(Interview with Jimmy Moutter)

David Temple argues that when the strike ended then the repression of the miners began. He offers this evidence to support his argument.

'In the whole of my shift there was only one man that had scabbed, and they changed the shift around so I had to work with him. And that was done for a reason, I mean I was Secretary of the miners who got sacked. I was under enormous pressure. ... I went for a year and a half not speaking to that man. Who would?'  
(Interview with David Temple)

## CONCLUSION

The return to work brought some sense of normality back to the communities, but things would never be quite the same again. There were many bridges to be

rebuilt; families had to start rebuilding their relationships. In the pubs and clubs there was still animosity, people were barred from certain clubs, shopkeepers whose support had been less than enthusiastic found that business did not improve. Many miners were too busy working overtime to get involved, for now the strike had finished there were debts to repay. For many women a huge gap developed in their lives. Used to working for the Support Groups, and travelling to different parts of the country, addressing meetings and being, politically active, many found there was now a huge gap, and a return to the boring domestic chores.

With the return to work came elections for a new set of leaders for the Durham Area NUM. The 'old guard' had gone and there were new candidates for Secretary and President of the Durham Miners, Alan Cummings spoke of building bridges to get better industrial relations and of reinstatement for sacked miners. David Guy was concerned about young miners leaving the industry. David Hopper's concern was the atmosphere at his pit, Wearmouth, after the strike and wanting sacked miners reinstated, while Billy Stobbs wanted talks with the NCB to discuss the future. In none of these interviews, shown on the BBC local news programme *'Look North'* was there any mention of industrial action. Arguably the Durham miners did not want to go down that road again.

The General Strike and lock-out of 1926 produced a tension in the pit communities that took years to dispel, and writing 16 years after the end of the 1984/85 strike my research and interviewing shows there are still tensions in some of East Durham's coalfield communities caused by that last great strike.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE RETURN TO WORK AND THE STRIKE IN RETROSPECT

This chapter will deal with the end of the strike nationally and by presenting a case study of how this took place at Easington. It will also look at how various groups reacted to the steady flow of miners who returned to work from December 1984. This chapter will also look at the pit closure programme of the early 1990s and will conclude by focussing on the legacy, both social and environmental, that the demise of deep mining in County Durham has left behind.

By November 1984 the strike started to show the symptoms of collapse. The NCB had increased the financial incentive for miners to return to work. Returning miners could earn up to £1,400 in wages and bonuses, enough for many to pay off the majority of their accumulated debts. From then until the strike finished there was a propaganda battle. The NCB would issue figures confirming hundreds of new miners returning while Scargill would categorically deny the figures. Men at Bersham Colliery in North Wales, who staged a mass return to work, were told by Scargill,

‘There can be no forgiveness.’  
(Routledge 1994 p 179)

In January 1985 10,000 men went back to work nationally prompting Peter Walker to announce that the miners having been denied a ballot were now voting with their feet. On 28<sup>th</sup> February over 50% of miners had returned to work and it was now only a matter of time before the strike collapsed. Still Scargill refused to settle, he appeared to have no regard for the hardship he had inflicted on striking miners and their families and having planned for total victory was now facing total defeat.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 95,000 miners were back at work. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March the NUM executive voted 11 for 11 against not to recommend the South Wales proposal for a return to work, and not to endorse the Yorkshire area motion not to return to work without an amnesty for those men sacked during the strike. However Scargill refused to use his casting vote. When the vote went to the delegates the result was an 89 to 91 for a return to work on 5<sup>th</sup> March.

Nationally the return to work was an emotional affair. Most pits marched back behind the colliery banner, with the colliery band playing. Women from the many support groups joined in the march and those men who had stayed out for the year went back, in debt, but with their heads held high. Scargill joined the return to work march at Barrow Colliery but when he found it was being picketed by Kent miners protesting over the refusal of the NCB to offer an amnesty he refused to cross the picket line and the miners went home again. As one miner commented,

‘In a way it was a shame that the pickets had stopped them. It would have been nice for the men to have walked back through the pit gates together. As it was the pickets later withdrew and the men went back shift by shift.’  
(*The Heart And Soul Of It* 1985)

In South Wales which had remained on strike almost to a man, the men marched proudly back banners flying, bands playing and with the whole community turning out to see the men go back. This action was seen as almost an act of defiance against the NCB, MacGregor, the government, Thatcher and all who had been against the miners.

However the return to work at Easington was not the triumphant march behind the colliery banner with the band playing. Instead it was a shambolic return – no band, no banner, but the community still turned out to applaud the men back. This is surprising when one considers that the pit banner and the band are the two great symbols of coalfield communities. One has only to look at films or video footage of the Durham Miners’ Gala to see what powerful images these

two symbols conjure up in peoples' minds. In Easington the band has had a special significance as every year on the anniversary of the 1951 pit disaster the band would gather at the monument to play 'Gresford' as a tribute to those miners who were killed on that day.

Why then was this return to work at Easington such an anti-climax, and why at a pit where such great emphasis was put on tradition and unity was there no organised march back if only to say 'thank you' to the community for its support.

Before trying to answer this question we need to find out why they went back.

Easington remained solidly on strike until Paul Wilkinson returned to work in the August. Many miners working at Easington came from outside the area and it was from these miners that the drift back to work started. Alan Cummings recalls the men from Easington remained solid almost to a man. Even those from outside Easington itself remained on strike, again Alan Cummings recalls, it was as if they felt part of the Easington community and wanted to show solidarity with those striking miners from Easington itself. The drift back to work continued through the summer, autumn and winter. Christmas became a turning point.

British Coal offered extra financial inducement to those men returning in December. Extra money meant a better Christmas and the drift back to work became a trickle, and then a flood, Alan Cummings remembers:

'In November the lads were saying let's get through Christmas ... so there was a big effort to raise money, we took money out of the area fund to give everybody. I think it was ten pounds, a turkey and we got some toys for the kids. Not a lot mind, something to give them some hope.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

However if Alan Cummings memories of Christmas 1984 paint a bleak picture then Billy Stobbs paints a quite different view.

'One of the best New Years and Christmases I ever had was during that strike ... we went to the welfare hall, I mean not many people had money to go and buy pints, but what they did they used to brew their own. That [homebrew] made you cheerful and by the time you got up home from the hall you were well and truly happy.'

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

This is very much a male view of Christmas during the strike as undoubtedly many a wife and mother would have a much different tale to tell of Christmas 1984.

Once Christmas and New Year were over it was becoming clearer by the day that the strike was lost. The weather was mild 'General Winter' was not coming to the miners' aid, the power stations were producing electricity the lights remained on, and more and more miners were returning to work.

As Alan Cummings remembers,

'It was disheartening going to collieries like Vane Tempest and Wearmouth where more and more people had gone back to work, disheartening. One bus going in then two buses, and three buses. The pickets were good lads, good lads getting sickened by the people going back to work.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

By February even the Easington committee men were saying

'Look Alan [Cummings] if we don't do something before long our men won't hold up.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

He knew that something had to be done to bring an end to the strike before it collapsed simply because of the number of miners returning to work.

'We came back from conference and the strike was still on but the lads were disheartened, so in the next couple of days I had meetings with the mechanics and others. Billy Stobbs went to the committee and asked everybody exactly what they felt. They felt what we were all feeling. Let's cobble something up, we can't get back up, let's get back to work with no agreement, look after the sacked miners, and we framed the resolution from Easington.

'And there was hell on, I mean, half of them blamed us, I knew that South Wales were sitting on the fence waiting to see what we were doing because we

were a large pit, the pit with the most people out. Out of about 1,700 members we had about 50 odd back to work. And a lot of them had gone back in the last few weeks. So we decided to put the resolution into Durham. And it was passed and that resolution went to the National Conference in London on the Sunday and it was carried.'

'I mean I was disheartened but a lot of people were upset, particularly the younger lads, we fought a good fight, but you know there is the time to fight and a time to know when you can't go on no further, and that time had been reached. And I was fearful that if we didn't sort something out then we would go back to work when we were the minority. I mean, there were a lot of people who weren't happy within the County, you know, particularly the activists on the left within the strike, and a lot of people blamed me for the way the strike ended.

And on the day I asked these people have you got an answer, tell me what I can tell my members? What can we do to win? And they sat round there and nobody could answer me. I said that's fair enough do you want me to go back and tell my members that, I knew that if we didn't get back to work we wouldn't have a union. At least we went back with some kind of negotiating powers, a lot of people didn't. It was that desperate. I don't think Thatcher would have done anything to get us to end the strike. People working throughout the strike in Nottingham was always a downer for us, our lads, they fought a good fight and we just couldn't take it any further, people just couldn't see any end. There was no light at the end of the tunnel.'

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

Alan Cummings makes a number of important points in this long resume of how the strike ended. Firstly there is pride in the fact that by returning to work the union had made the process of defeat easier. Then there is the question of the wider picture, the position of the union nationally where no area really wanted to be the first to put the motion for the return to work but, in the case of the South Wales Area, there was a growing feeling that a settlement had to be reached in order to save the union from humiliation. The different opinions are also shown, the Left wing unhappy but with no real idea how to carry on the strike and ensure the long term survival of the union. The Durham Area through Alan Cummings seems to have adopted a pragmatic approach to ending the dispute, one which saw a honourable return to work and one that ensured the long term future of the union and gave some hope to those miners sacked during the dispute.

Billy Stobbs agrees, admitting that after the New Year things were difficult.

‘But after the New Year into 1985, the back end of January there was more people going back to work, it was getting harder to keep up the morale. I mean they were absolutely terrific down Easington and elsewhere in the Durham coalfield, but as time went by one was getting a little disheartened and you could tell the feelings of the committee at times, when we had committee meetings, how long is it going to be? Are we not going to try something different? I mean some of them that were on strike, our members, would have been out yet I think. Some of them. I mean some of them were really disappointed when it finished. They wanted to carry on regardless.’  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

I asked Alan Cummings if he thought it was the resolution from Easington that brought the strike to an end.

‘There’s no doubt about that. There’s no question about that. I mean, South Wales followed suit but a lot of people accused me, I was accused in a book by the Socialist Workers Party to be in collusion with the South Wales officials, and that’s entirely untrue. There was no collusion, I knew what their feelings were because I had been talking to them at the conference, but it was a decision made by Easington Miners’ Lodge Committee. Every Committee member had his say, they asked me to frame the resolution, and I said do you support that and they did. There was nearly seventy percent agreed, and them lads’ had been solid throughout the strike. So that was the problem there was just no way I could see there was any resolution of the strike by stopping out any longer.’  
(Interview with Alan Cummings)

Here Alan Cummings appears to be trying to defend his actions and to prevent any accusations of betrayal or collusion with other areas. Again his pragmatism comes through in that in his mind there was no way forward, and with the support of the members of Easington he considered he had no alternatives but to table a resolution to bring the strike to an end.

The day that the miners of Easington returned to work was an anti-climax. A dispute between Billy Stobbs and Alan Cummings resulted in a disorganised walk through the colliery gates instead of a triumphant march back.

Alan Cummings remembers,

‘Well it was a sad day, some people wanted to go back with the band playing, some people asked for that, I couldn’t see any sense in that. I don’t think it was a day of rejoicing as such that way, I think it was magnificent that the members and their wives, families stuck out so long. A magnificent achievement, it will never be done again, I mean for such a large body of people, to be out that long and survive was absolutely phenomenal. And I was really proud of what the lads had done, the girls who from the SEAM campaign had clapped all the lads in at the Colliery gates when we got there. But, I mean I could never thank them enough for their magnificent solidarity, it’s the finest bunch of lads I’ve ever known, I was their Secretary but it was just magnificent. For people to stop out that long with virtually no money, you couldn’t thank them enough. They’d given everything for a year; you couldn’t ask no more of them. I can’t be critical there. I mean, if you look at the rights and the wrongs of the history of how the strike started and how things should have been done, you can’t change that. All I would say is that I do blame the people that went back to work, I couldn’t care when they went back, I do blame them.’

(Interview with Alan Cummings)

The quotation is full of the deep political symbols that comprised the language of the strike. Alan Cummings talks of the ‘magnificent solidarity’, of blaming people who went back. There is passion in his words, but they are symbols of an older society.

Billy Stobbs has a different opinion of how the return to work should have been organised. I asked him if they should have gone back with the band playing.

‘We should have done. Aye but that was another thing that wasn’t organised. I was away in Sheffield and I came back and said ‘what are we organising? Surely we are going to have another day off’ we should have the banner at the top of the village and walk all the way down around the council houses with the band. I said ‘We’ve been off a year, another day isn’t going to make any difference’. He [Alan Cummings] said ‘We just thought we’d be going back to work’. A bad ending but I wouldn’t say it was a bad strike. In many ways we had good times, believe it or not, we had no money but we had good times. It brought people closer together; everyone was in the same boat. Yeah, an experience I would not like to go through again but being in at that time, especially for me being on the National Executive, I met people I went places.’

(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

While this reaction is what one would expect from local NUM officials, it also was one expressed by the then vicar of Easington, the Reverend Hodgeson.

'I've always been brought up to believe that the working man's only weapon is his solidarity, and if you break it you are doing a very serious thing. Now that means you must respect persuasion even at the picket lines. But what is unacceptable is any kind of violence, intimidation, that sort of thing. I have sympathy, up to a point, for those that went back. But I have more sympathy for those that stayed out. You have got to get the scab to see the harm he's done to his comrades, and also the harm he's done to his family.'  
(Interview with the Rev. Tony Hodgeson)

To conclude the return of the Easington miners, and the difference of opinion over the type of return it was, is an image of how the community at large viewed the end of the strike. Some felt it was a defeat, others a victory. Some felt that strike should have gone on, others felt that it was time to call a halt. Memory plays tricks and maybe those that think there was a case for prolonging the strike are wrong. What is nearer the truth is that, apart from a hard core of militant activists, the men were pleased to end what had become for them a ruinous strike.

For the NCB the return to work was according to David Powell (1993) a pyrrhic victory. The miners may have suffered but defeating the miners had been at a cost to the Coal Board as well. There was still no agreement on the closure of uneconomic pits and many pits had suffered, as 56 of the 490 working faces had been lost or suffered damage due to flooding or collapse. However the Coal Board returned to a style of management unheard of since the 1930s. No longer would the union play an important role in the running of the pits, managers demanded that men did as they were told, or face the threat of dismissal. Shift times were changed without consultation or negotiation and in some pits NUM officials were sent back underground to work.

However the most difficult situation was how would those miners who had broken the strike work with those who had stayed out till the end. Working underground depends a lot on the trust of your fellow workers to help out if problems arise below ground. The question needs to be asked if any returning

miner doubted that his 'marras' would come to his aid should trouble strike. Fortunately the question never needed to be asked or answered. With the threat and intimidation that the working miners had suffered on the surface, there must have been many who were dreading going underground, and what would happen to them. Mick Brown from Dawdon remembers,

'There was a terrible atmosphere. You know there were men going back to work with those that stopped out, men that had worked together for years, they just ignored each other.' ...  
(Interview with Mick Brown)

At Easington David Aston recalls,

'There was one nasty incident where there was a locker set on fire of one of the people who had gone back. And that was really bad like, you know what I mean, there is no real call for that. No matter how much ill feeling there is. There is no call to damage people's property like that.'  
(Interview with David Aston)

Victimisation was another historical phenomenon. Workers who had 'scabbed' and continued to work in the 1870 dispute had their clothes and tokens stolen and stones mixed with their coal.

Of Paul Wilkinson, the lone returnee, whose actions caused so much trouble and violence, Billy Stobbs remembers,

'As soon as we got back to work Paul Wilkinson got the flu. After a couple of weeks the manager sent for me and Alan [Cummings], he said "I've got a problem on Monday, Paul Wilkinson is coming back to work". I said, "Why is that a problem?" He said, "Well where can I put him?" I said "He was on materials down the Lower Main, put him on his old job". He said "No, Bill, he'll never come out of the pit alive, I'm not sending him down the pit". I said "Mind you said that not me".'

'So Monday came when Wilkinson came with the Coal Board van. We had a belt from the surface to the sea which used to tip the waste over. It was closed in this belt, and they put a gate on the front and the end of it. Paul Wilkinson was taken from the van on to that belt line, and he wasn't allowed to go to the toilet outside or even go to the canteen for a cup of tea. He was there the full shift. Within a week he took his redundancy. And that's the way the Coal Board treated Paul Wilkinson.'  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

In a bizarre way this was yet another example of betrayal within the miners' strike. Paul Wilkinson was betrayed by the NCB, the group that he had, in his own way supported during the strike.

Other mining unions who had not been on strike such as the NACODS members also had to work in this intimidating atmosphere. Ronnie Dixon recalls that,

'Most men were pleased to get back. They were willing to work. But there was, a very small minority mind, scab labour. There was bad feeling against them. They [the other men] wouldn't work with them. ... One night I had to put a scab on a job, that wasn't necessary for that night, on his own because no one else would work with him. I had to put him 3 miles away by himself otherwise I wouldn't have gotten that night's work done.'

(Interview with Ronnie Dixon)

Many miners were extremely resentful of NACODS actions but as Joe Benham, a member of NACODS negotiating team told me, when I asked him the question of why his union did not go through with their intended strike action,

'Simply because at the end of the day following negotiations with the Coal Board and ACAS, TUC and everybody else the Coal Board gave us what we wanted. Much to our surprise. We couldn't believe it when we were at ACAS and MacGregor came down on the last morning and said we will not close the five pits we will give you a review procedure. I personally could not believe what I was hearing. Unfortunately someone along side me said Oh that's fine then. I was raving about it because I didn't believe, I did not believe, and I can put my hand on my heart and say that. But they gave us that assurance we sat and discussed it and then we went across to the TUC and we told the TUC about that and then the NUM. And then we called our National Executive Committee together in the TUC Congress House and we gave them a full report of what had happened, and we said right, on the ballot sheet is the following questions. We sought to have a decision against the five collieries being closed. The board have said they will not close them. We sought to have an independent review procedure. The board have agreed to an independent review procedure. So we were all sitting there inwardly raging that the board have give us, because we were going on strike the following morning, we were actually starting the next morning.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

The NACODS settlement was greeted with scorn, Scargill announced that the deal was worth less than the draft agreement he had been offered, and rejected. He was right to be dismissive. The independent review body mentioned by

Joe Benham never kept open a single pit that the NCB wanted to close, but what it had done was remove the last obstacle to MacGregor's victory over the NUM.

Joe Moutter also recalls that those were difficult days to work through. I asked him what the atmosphere was like, and if there was divisions amongst the men.

'The atmosphere? It was terrible. ... There was one lad under me he went back about a week before the strike was finished. There were those that went back before him. And the ones that went back with the banners would call those lads names. They called them scabs because they went back early ... and them that went back with the banners, oh they were the bee's knees as far as they were concerned. ... It got at me because I've got men calling me scab because I went through the picket lines and them men were on the sick. They went in to the pit and handed a sick note in they weren't on strike, they were on the sick. But there they were shouting and calling everybody scabs. And that galled me that. I said "There's a useless git there calling me names and he's been on the sick. He's not even been on the picket line".'

(Interview with Joe Moutter)

And on the relationships between the different unions,

'Why they were bitter weren't they. The lad joined the UDM, so the NUM wouldn't talk to the UDM. The mechanics union wouldn't talk to the UDM either. So if he walked into the room those two walked out. It was chaos man.'

(Interview with Joe Moutter)

I asked him where the Deputies fitted in in this chaotic scene?

'Talked to anybody. We weren't bothered, if they didn't like it they lumped it, that's all there was to it.'

(Interview with Joe Moutter)

However Joe Benham put a more serious tone to NACODS relations with other unions once the strike had finished.

'Well it would be true to say it was strained at Area level, but there was also the problem that the (NUM) had new officials. The older ones had gone and there were younger ones like Guy and Hopper. Well Guy was all right but Hopper was more left wing. But on an Area level we still met and still conversed, but it was never the same. Never the same again.'

(Interview with Joe Benham)

Obviously these scenarios were repeated in pits across all the coalfields in

Britain. In Yorkshire the most militant of all the coalfields the feelings and comments of miners were the same.

‘On a morning when we go to the Deployment Office all the men are stood around talking, and there’ll be a scab on his own in a corner.’

‘There’s nearly half the workforce that’s scabbed at our pit, they have put me to work with three scabs, and I hate it. I can’t work with them so I have put my notice in. I’d sooner be on the dole than work with a scab.’

‘There are people saying that you can’t call the men that have gone back to work near the end of the dispute, but I can. They all crossed picket lines. A scab is a scab regardless of when he goes back.’

*(The Heart And Soul Of It 1985 p 143)*

If the majority of the miners themselves had little sympathy for those miners who had broken the strike, how sympathetic then were other groups affected by the strike.

Probably the most sympathetic group was the police, many of whom had family and friends caught up in the strike. Their comments were varied, but each expressed sympathy for the miners’ plight.

Gary Stanger had no illusions about the difficulty they were in and how they were suffering.

‘They were on the bones of their arse. They had been worn down. I mean some people were harder natured than others, but certain ones were just so sick, the wives were on their backs. The families had nothing.’

‘I thought they did very well to last out so long. But when you went to the coast there wasn’t a scrap of driftwood at all, because they had no coal. We used to go to Hawthorn Colliery and on a night they used to come running across and we seen them we used to say go get your pals ... and they would come back with haversacks, sacks, wheelbarrows. It was like a trail of ants. We would say right get yourselves over there and make sure that everything gets done and dusted we are finished at six. But after six you’ve got the outsiders coming on, make sure you don’t get caught. That was the sort of sympathy we had.’

*(Interview with Gary Stanger)*

Neil Stephenson’s sympathies lie more with those that went back than with

those that stayed out, no matter what circumstances they found themselves in.

'I think I've probably got more sympathy for those that went back, because it takes a lot of bottle to do that. Some went back to provoke. ... We had been told that so and so has a desire to go back, but he's probably just doing it to wind them up. ... But yes those that had genuinely had enough of the strike, because at the end of the day 12 months is a long time. You certainly have pressures at home, when you've got a decent level of living and it vanishes overnight, then yes I've got total sympathy with the lads that said enough's enough we're not getting anywhere I want to go back.'

(Interview with Neil Stephenson)

Stan Davidson used one particular phrase that seemed to sum up the despair felt by those striking miners' families.

'Every time I see the *World at War* it always comes back to me the strike, because there is one scene where it's a young boy he's sort of got his head on one side and he's looking up, and I remember seeing kids faces just like that. ... I mean it was lads fighting for their livelihoods. Of course I didn't agree with Scargill, but he was fighting to improve rights to an extent.'

'I remember talking to a picket, he was there for one reason and one reason only to get his £2.00 for picketing. Now £2.00 would feed his family for that day. And I thought this sought of thing went on years ago, they would be evicted unless they went back to work, chucking them on the street. So we had a lot of sympathy for those that went back.'

(Interview with Stan Davidson)

Bill Brennan and Peter Griffiths, both now retired, both had sympathy for those miners that went back, but Bill Brennan qualified his sympathy.

'I certainly had sympathy for those miners who did not want to be out. The others as well because of the financial position they were in and also because of the possibility of pits closing. I don't like to see anyone put out of work, but I don't see any reason why they should have used violence.'

(Interview with Bill Brennan)

While Peter Griffiths,

'I felt sorry for them because they were going back during the dispute and most of them were living amongst their colleagues. They had a big decision to make.'

(Interview with Peter Griffiths)

From the police's perspective on a local level it would appear that there was great sympathy not only for those miners who made the 'big decision' but also those that stayed out for the duration of the strike, no matter what hardships they and their families were having to endure. The police from outside of the region appear to have less sympathy probably because they did not understand the strike, the culture or the devastation the communities would suffer should the pits close. For the local police too there was the knowledge that when the strike was over they would have to return to the streets of these communities.

Because of the reaction of the communities to the strike there was, on the surface, little sympathy to the families of those miners who returned to work. There are many families who were subjected to intimidation. Jimmy Moutter a member of the Enginemen's union who returned to work in November 1984, remembers that twice he had ball bearings through his windows once he had gone back to work.

Sympathy however came from some unexpected sources. Alan Barker, then an Easington Councillor, a striking Easington miner and Secretary of SEAM, told me,

'I had a lot of sympathy but my colleagues didn't, in fact I was criticised. I was just walking into work and I just said to the lad walking past me 'Aye, Aye' and one of my mates called me for speaking to a scab. But I hadn't realised the chap who had passed me had broken ranks. So I used to say where's your Christianity, you know them people stood out for nearly 12 months there were loads of social problems and I could understand why people couldn't last anymore.'

(Interview with Alan Barker)

One person who because of his position as Vicar of Easington would have had sympathy was the Reverend Hodgeson. However his sympathy was restrained.

'I hope so, my sympathy is stronger than most of the miners, and I saw what they went through, their suffering. But my greatest sympathy is for those who stuck out to the bitter end.'

(Interview with Reverend Hodgeson)

The lack of sympathy by the leaders of the NUM at national and local level for those miners who broke the strike was never in question. At national level the words betrayed were used with ever increasing frequency as the numbers of miners returning increased. But at local level the feelings were more personal, after all these were men who at some time during their time in the pit had sought the unions help and certainly had been glad to take the pay increases that the union had won for them. There was also little sympathy and, even after sixteen years, little in the way of forgiveness. I questioned Billy Stobbs on this point, his answer fourteen years after the strike had finished was almost certainly the same as he would have given days after the strike had finished.

'Me, no. When I see them now, you know they look at me and there's one or two smile and they're about to speak. But no, I've got no sympathy for them.'  
(Interview with Billy Stobbs)

Alan Cummings too expressed his bitterness in the answer to the same question.

'No, I mean we did everything for everybody. There was a lot of hardship mind but we tried to sort people's problems out.'  
(Interview with Alan Cummings)

Tommy Callan was especially bitter not just because of the Durham men who went back, but because many Durham miners moved to Nottinghamshire in the 1960s, the Union men kept working during the strike while the Durham miners some of whom were closely related to the Notts men supported the union by striking. Tommy Callan recalled with some sadness,

'I went down to Notts when I was on the Area Union, to see they got settled in and adjusted to the Notts miners' rules. After the strike was over they came back visiting and brother wouldn't speak to brother. Many a mother must have wept many a tear that the son had ever gone down to Notts.'  
(Interview with Tommy Callan)

The years following the failure of the strike and the return to work in March 1985 saw a period of relative calm within the Durham coalfield. At National level the overtime ban was called off and the NUM accepted the NCB's outstanding pay offer which was first offered in 1983. Scargill also signed the modified colliery review procedure as negotiated by NACODS. His climbdown

attracted little media attention after the year long strike; the public wanted a rest from industrial strife.

However the period of calm did not prevent a further rundown of the Durham coalfield. Herrington, one of the five pits whose closures were at the root of the strike, closed in 1986. This is how the closure was described by Joe Moutter, a Deputy at that pit.

'I went down Wearmouth in 1986, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, I mean, we got a visit off a Mr Ian Day he was head for the Durham area for the Coal Board side, and I was in development, and this is exactly what happened mind, exactly. I got told that Mr Day was coming, and he was coming to this development, as he wanted to talk to the men. And I was the deputy. And there was me, and Colin Logan was there and Mr Day, and he came to our pit and he said this is the position, Horden was going into the review procedure, so your behind Horden. If you don't vote to go through the review procedure I can put all of you anywhere you want to go. I'll give you transfers to any pit you want to go. If you want to go to Wearmouth, you can go to Wearmouth. If you want Tempest, you've got Tempest. I will struggle to put you all at Wearmouth. But if it goes into review procedure you follow Horden. Horden goes to Wearmouth, Tempest or anywhere they want. You get what's left, and with Herrington having a high percentage of men going back to work before the strike finished the key things was Westhoe. Nobody wanted to go to Westhoe. It was one of these militant pits not many went back at Westhoe. And that was the sort of inference, the only way you can avoid this is for you to go to the union and tell them you want the pit shutting.'

(Interview with Joe Moutter)

Eppleton closed in 1986 and its workings became part of the Hawthorn complex. Many men were transferred to Murton described by Jimmy Moutter.

'as a hell hole. The atmosphere at Murton was we'd gone over there and pinched their jobs. They took all the taps off the showers when we were down the pit and everything.'

(Interview with Jimmy Moutter)

Sacrison closed in 1985, Horden in 1986, and Seaham in 1988.

#### THE CLOSURE PROGRAMME OF THE 1990s

However, 1984/85 was not the final battle in the war between the mine owners, NCB, government and the miners' unions. This came in 1992 when

Michael Hesletine announced the virtual ending of the British coal industry. Of the fifty remaining deep mines, thirty one would close by the end of March 1991, and some within days of the announcement. Redundancies would be in the region of 30,000 miners plus a knock on effect to jobs in the community and the railways.

The background to this decision was a simple one, British coal was too expensive for the newly privatised electrical companies. Their estimate was for 40 millions tons of British coal a year compared with the 65 million tons required in 1991. The need for further closures in the industry had been signalled as far back as 1984 when in the BBC *Panorama* programme *The Coal War* David Archibald then NCB Director for the North East admitted that he did not think that the closures being demanded at that time would be the last.

Was this the moment of vindication for Scargill? He reminded people that nine years earlier he had warned that the government had a hit list of pits for closure.

‘I was told I was telling lies. One hundred and forty pit closures and 140,000 redundancies later I ask this question who told the truth and who told the lies?’  
(Routledge 1994 p 233)

While the decision to close the thirty one pits was Hesletine’s one senior Civil Servant on the energy side of the DTI commented that,

‘Hesletine’s style by this time was very diluted, consistent with management philosophy.’  
(Crick 1997 p 386)

Although Hesletine spoke after the decision of spending,

‘much time sharing the agony of that decision’  
(Crick 1997 p 386)

that same Civil Servant recalls that Hesletine had very little involvement with the impending closures before they were announced.

‘[Tim] Egger was very much in charge of this process and it was up to Egger to

decide when he wanted to involve Hesletine.’  
(Crick 1997 p 386)

Public outcry resulted in the government putting back the closure timetable and Scargill continued to demand that all 31 pits be saved. What is surprising about this 'outcry' is that it was not just from mining areas or from political opponents of the government. Conservative voters and MPs were appalled not just about the closure of around two thirds of the industry but also at the speed at which it would take place. Six pits would close at the end of the week and another thirteen by Christmas. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April a day of action was proposed with Scargill arguing that,

‘every worker in Britain should be out on Friday that week in support of the miners’.  
(Routledge 1994 p 230)

He also attempted once again to bring in the TUC and Labour Party arguing,

‘Don’t make the mistake of 1984. Act now in defence not only of the miners and rail workers, but the health, local government and social services’.  
(Routledge 1994 p 250)

He insisted that only

‘the mass action of the British people’  
(Routledge 1994 p 250)

would defeat the pit closure programme.

Due to the fact that the closure plan, and the fact that a dozen Conservative MPs threatened to vote against, thus defeat, the government in a vote Hesletine had to retreat. On 19<sup>th</sup> October he told the House of Commons,

‘that no pits would close immediately. Instead ten pits would be given the usual ninety-day notices and there would be a moratorium on closing the others’.  
(Routledge 1997 p 391)

As Michael Crick comments,

'it was one of the fastest and most spectacular U-turns by any minister in modern times'.  
(Crick 1997 p 391)

Two days later Hesletine conceded that all 31 collieries would now be reviewed including those scheduled for immediate closure.

The strike on 2<sup>nd</sup> April was not a resounding success. At Easington 70% of the midnight shift went in followed by 40% of the six am shift.

Like a majority of strikes before it this failed to achieve its objectives. However by the time the results of the review appeared in March 1993, as opposed to January as had been promised, the sense of outrage had all but disappeared. The review concluded that 13 of the 31 pits would be kept open pending privatisation and a further six would be mothballed. But in the long term it was not very different from the closure programme announced the previous October.

By the summer of 1994 33 pits had closed, 40,000 men had lost their jobs and the NUM was in a financial crisis. Yet Scargill seemed unable to grasp the reality of the situation. At the Yorkshire Miners' Gala of 1994 he stated that privatisation had to be opposed with the same resolve as pit closures.

'And to anyone daft enough to buy pits, we say that if they change our terms and conditions and they reduce safety standards, then we will close all pits'.  
(Routledge 1994 p 250)

However his threats were no longer headlines to the national press, his comments attracting only a couple of paragraphs. The final battle had been lost.

Of the pits in East Durham, Dawdon closed in July 1991, Murton, which was now included in the Hawthorn Combine closed in 1992. and Easington finally closed in April 1993.

However, was there any need for this final battle, were the figures quoted by

Hesletine and the government as bleak for the British Coal Industry as they made out?

The Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme '*The Great Coal Comundrum*' disputed the need for the closure programme on this scale. According to their research 2.8 million homes in Britain still used solid fuel, while in Scotland 17% of all homes relied on solid fuel. They also found a market for 22 million tons of non-power station coal of which British Coal could only supply 9 million tons. But after the pit closure programme that supply figure was down to 2.4 million tons for that market. The programme calculated that British Coal would make up the shortfall of 4.6 million tons with coal from their opencast operations or from imported coal. It was estimated that the pit closure programme cost the tax payer 1.5 billion pounds plus half a billion per year for the next ten years.

Despite the political and financial cost, the Conservative government under John Major wanted the run down of the British coal industry completed ready for privatisation. By the tenth anniversary of the miners' strike the most drastic rundown of an industry in British history was complete. From 133 pits and a workforce of 138,000 in March 1986, this figure had fallen to 25 pits, of which 19 were owned by RJB Mining employing around 13,000 miners in total.

In 1975 in the North East Coal, Steel and Shipbuilding accounted for 37% of non-service industry employment. The area suffered from little local innovation, poor infrastructure, narrow focused skills and few entrepreneurial skills. From 1975 to 1984 there was a rapid decline in these base industries. 185,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing, unemployment in the region doubled, reaching 17% in 1984. By 1994 less than 2% of the workforce were employed in the coal, steel and shipbuilding industries.

So what has the closure of the coalfield in East Durham meant to those communities?

There are two areas in which the 'cost' of the pits has been felt the greatest;

socio-economically and environmentally.

As we have seen earlier the workforce in the Durham coalfield was relatively young, many with young families and many with mortgages and other financial commitments. For them the redundancy pay outs would not support them for long, they had to find other employment. But again as noted earlier Easington District had high unemployment before the pit closures and by January 1997 the male unemployment figure was put at 10% slightly higher than the average for Great Britain. However a Sheffield University report put the real unemployment figure for males at over 35%, the worst of the 15 coalfield districts surveyed.

The difference between these two sets of figures is those males excluded from the unemployment count by one of the following means, ineligibility for benefit, enrolment on government training schemes, early retirement from mining, enrolment on permanent social benefit, or in seasonal employment.

The result of unemployment 'real' or official is that County Durham experiences deprivation amongst some of the worst in Britain. Examples of the scale of this deprivation are that some areas have had unemployment levels above 30% for many years. The County's mortality rate is 19% higher than the national average. In some parts of County Durham 45% of detected crime is committed by juveniles. In short while County Durham is a shire county, the levels of poverty and deprivation are the same as heavy industrial, or inner-city areas. In 1994 it was announced that 700 new jobs had been created in East Durham as a result of the £5.5 million Coalfield Initiative.

The environmental problems can be divided into two groups : those that can be seen such as the remains of former collieries, pit heaps and other 'blots on the landscape' and the unseen problem of ceasing to pump water from disused pits.

With regard to the visible remains of the coal industry there have been many significant achievements. The reclamation of land at Easington, Horden, Murton and Vane Tempest, has provided Enterprise Zone sites able to offer sites for new industries and employment. The Durham coast had, during the years of coal mining become a dumping ground for colliery waste, with spoil, liquid sludge from the colliery washers being dumped on beaches thoroughly polluting them. Raw sewage was also dumped just off these beaches being washed back in by the tide. The problem was just left while the pits were working, but now the whole coastline has had to be cleaned up with the work completed by the year 2000, in order to comply with the European Urban Waste Water Directive.

In 1995 twelve former miners were employed by the National Trust under its Enterprise Neptune campaign to clean-up the coastline of East Durham after the years of being blackened by coal tipping. The problem of ceasing to pump minewaters from disused pits has meant that the groundwater was maintained at an artificially low level to allow mining to be carried out. The rising levels of water contain high levels of dissolved iron and magnesium which could cause pollution within streams and rivers and adversely affect the flora and fauna in these streams and rivers. These are just two of the legacies left by the demise of the coal mining industry in East Durham.

## CONCLUSION

The strike itself left a greater number of legacies such as the feelings of betrayal, of broken friendships of families split by the dispute and of the feeling of frustration felt by the communities when they realised that to win they would have to defeat the state and all the resources that it could use against them.

But the most potent legacy of it all is in the memories of those who lived through it all. The strike in this sense, continues. As it fades into history, people in East Durham still talk about it. They still seek ways to understand what has happened to their communities. There remains a pervasive sense of

loss and of good times gone by, and it remains hard for people to envisage a future not based on heavy industrial work. But that is where the future lies. Historians of the future will have to assess how memories of this strike will be refracted through the experience of future generations living in former mining villages.

## CONCLUSION

For many of the 100,00 or so striking miners the strike had not only meant that they had lost a year's wages, but as one miner explained, they had lost a year of their lives. The popular argument that Arthur Scargill, and he alone, maintained such a degree of solidarity within the coalfields for so long is naive. What he did do was to inspire the communities to foster a spirit of solidarity which kept the strike going for as long as it did. Arguably Scargill's tactics were flawed. He refused to hold a national ballot which would have given greater credibility to his strike call. This alone, had he have received a 'yes' vote, would have strengthened his position with the Labour Party and the TUC as well as his negotiating position with the NCB. The decision to hold a strike in March is also questionable, as 'General Winter' would not be coming to his aid for 8 months, although with the amounts of coal stockpiled by users such as the CEGB, it is doubtful if a strike in October would have had any affect on the outcome.

However, the East Durham coalfield and its communities were different from other mining communities during the strike. The major difference was that there was no Orgreave, no Armthorpe and apart from the ritual pushing and shoving little picket line violence. Even that at Easington passed very quickly and what there was could arguably be attributed in part to some heavy handed policing from forces outside of the area.

What the area did have in common with all other mining communities was a large number of miners many of whom were striking, let alone picketing for the first time, driven to their actions by a fear for their jobs and jobs for the future generations. Many who were arrested, tried, and charged had never been in trouble with the law before. Many were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is no doubt that the mining communities of East Durham responded with a show of strength and unity that was probably unmatched in the industrial

history of the region. This was a conflict that took on the dimensions of an historic battle with the coal owners, only this was a battle against the NCB and the government rather than the Lords Lambton or Londonderry, but the strike was rich in the political symbolism of struggle and class conflict. It produced enemies, traitors and heroes, and was interpreted through the language of political violence, sacrifice and conjured up potent images of the communities and the oppressed. This framework and meaning drew heavily on a language of class that stretched back to the nineteenth century. It tried to create a picture of communities and a sense of belonging which had probably not existed for almost half a century, but which came into being on the picket lines and in the soup kitchens. The experiences of those days is still recalled vividly and sympathetically, and with pride by activists and non-activists alike. That memory is dominated by an overwhelming sense of loss.

But many people interviewed thought that the strike was not lost from within the community but from forces outside over which they had little or no control. This was a conflict that nurtured potent mythologies, powerful explanations of the failure which is still recalled with regret. These included harsh policing, at times amounting to a denial of personal rights, through unjust and biased media reporting, down to manipulation of the benefits system which sought to try to deny people their legitimate benefits. Faced with an attack by the whole apparatus of the state and its allies it is no wonder that the communities felt some bitterness over their defeat.

They were defeated, and only the most die-hard Scargill supporter would pretend otherwise. Despite, in some places, the march back to work behind the pit banner with the colliery band playing and the whole community clapping them in, this was a defeat on a scale unprecedented in British industrial history.

Some of the most touching moments of all the interviews I carried out occurred when I asked former miners and NUM officials how they felt when the strike collapsed. Their reactions were by and large the same. Their eyes misted up, a half smile came to their lips and it was as though they were picturing a return to work in much different circumstances. In this dream the banners were flying,

the bands were playing and the men were marching back in victory not defeat. Then the mood passes to be replaced with one of bewilderment that even sixteen years after the strike finished; they still cannot understand how they lost.

It is perhaps for this reason that the collective memory of the strike is still structured around a search for the factor, the person or the group that so harshly upset their expectations of the strike's outcome. Unwilling to search for explanations in the history of the industry, in the structure of energy markets or in the failing of their own union they found it in the actions of those who betrayed them. They remain angry about this. Betrayal has become the theme that explains much of their collective experience and draws deeply on larger collective memories stretching back to 1926 and beyond.

This inability fully to comprehend past failures has a parallel in the contemporary uncertainty about what the future of East Durham should be. The defeat of 1984/5 and the demise of deep mining not only brought all narratives about the past to an unsatisfactory end. It destroyed the future, too. How people in East Durham learned to develop new expectations for the future during this period, is a subject for another study.

## HISTORY, MEMORY AND RESEARCH

The account of the strike adds to the prevailing literature about it in several ways. Firstly, the emphasis on a particular locality is a necessary corrective to large-scale generalisations about the strike nationally. Each coalfield had its own unique experience of the strike that reflected different traditions, geology, politics and patterns of community life. This study has illuminated how these factors inter-acted in one mining area.

Secondly, the use of oral historical methods has added local insight without which the underlying support for the strike could not be understood. This is particularly necessary in making sense of the relationships between the NUM and the communities of East Durham. The majority of people interviewed had never previously talked about the strike in this manner. As an outsider I was

able to put questions to them that they had not previously considered and whose answers had not till now been confined to close friends, family and former colleagues. The process of research therefore clarified much that was taken-for-granted during and after the strike. The process of reflection, during the period of interviewing, some twelve to fifteen years on provided both interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to share and discuss interpretations of events. This deepened the understanding of both parties.

Thirdly, it has been possible to relate local events, experiences and memories to wider narratives about the strike and to see in the East Durham case the playing out of wider changes in society and politics. The 1984/85 strike generated conflicts and actions that no one – unions and government alike – had previously experienced. As the strike developed, it challenged all previous interpretations of industrial conflict, the role of the state and the labour movement. At each stage of the unfolding story we see desperate efforts to make sense of it and to interpret it. This study has shown that this process is refracted through very local institutions and experiences.

The moral of the story is this : the 1984/85 strike must be understood against the unique circumstances of each coalfield, patterns of community and family life, structures of collective memory and against the unpredictable inter-play of the agents of government, miners and the NUM. Each player was under the spotlight of the media and battled to have their interpretation accepted in the public domain. The individual stories recorded here cannot be seen apart from this wider framework.

What history has shown is that no group fully appreciated that the struggle over the interpretation of the strike was a very unequal one. In retrospect this imbalance is being corrected. The pit closure programme of 1992/93 that saw the ending of deep mining in Durham undermined the economic base of local communities and started a process of reflection and re-interpretation of these events that still continues.

What this thesis has attempted, is to show the importance and need to study the strike in particular localities. The Durham coalfield was not Nottinghamshire or Yorkshire. This highlights the significance of issues such as the return of local leadership, the strengths, traditions and patterns of local communities and the role of local police and magistrates.

History weighs heavy on the present through popular memory as well as through social institutions, laws, resources and economic forces. People's memories are not just an historical given; they are constructed, developed, refashioned as times change and become embodied in myth and retraced and embellished through every telling. The locality cannot be understood however on its own terms. East Durham has to be seen in the sweep of history and politics and the wider social spectrum.

The history of the 1984/85 strike cannot stop at accounts of politics and industrial relations. It has to incorporate accounts of the structures and feelings that lay behind it, feelings such as anger, regret, a sense of betrayal, pride, loyalty and a sense of justice or injustice are powerful forces at work. These feelings must be understood as they explain the determination, structure and rationale of the strike itself.

Popular memory and experience developed through a complex interpretation of images and events, and the 1984/85 dispute was a particularly public strike. The images portrayed by the mass media played a political role and fashioned the way people interpreted the struggle. Miners not closely involved in the strike, or not sympathetic to it, could keep themselves informed merely by watching television. Television created the set on which the activists performed and battled over the control of the images. The media simplified and deharmonised, and in mining communities was not trusted. Future research into this strike in other areas will need to focus sharply on the role of both national and local media in maintaining particular narratives within the public discourse of the strike.

The strike involved the community out of which were formed support groups without whose contribution the strike would not have been sustainable. But there is an element of risk here too. Activists felt that total support from the communities was not forthcoming; the strike needed total support, but within the communities there were pockets of apathy and scepticism of the support groups work. As Pat McIntyre acknowledges,

‘The self presentation of support groups as viable and successful often conceded the reality of very small groups of people who took on disproportionate amounts of work which a majority of others, for a variety of reasons, decided not to offer help.’  
(McIntyre 1992 p63)

The 1984/85 strike is still being remembered and re-interpreted through memories, both personal and popular and the arts. At this time it is still a potent memory within the now almost extinct Durham coalfield. This vast untapped archive of memory framed with regret, loss and animosity is still to be explored from as many angles as there are interested groups and diverse historical perspectives. Unlike a library it is not a static archive for the memories and experiences are being constantly re-ordered as time passes.

The thesis argues that to fully understand the 1984/85 strike the events need to be studied locality by locality. Historians need the stories (narrative) of individual miners, policemen, magistrates, families and others to understand fully the events of that year long dispute. The experiences of those individuals was forged through events, actions and structures that go well beyond the locality in which they lived. They featured in the history of the industry, of the labour movement and changes in post war British politics and society and the challenge is to see how the local is simultaneously the national and indeed the international.

This study is not a narrative history of the 1984/85 strike. Rather it seeks to be analytical : to explore the ways in which the events of the strike have to be understood and interpreted against the conditions and political circumstances of the mining industry. What was unique about this dispute was that it challenged all previous assumptions. The key actors had their own objectives but none

could actually predict or determine the outcome of those objectives. The strike is peppered with intriguing counter factials. What would have happened had a ballot been called? Had NACODS not settled? Had Nottinghamshire have come out on strike? Had Paul Wilkinson actually lived in Easington? The course of the strike could have been very different and so too, therefore, the course of subsequent memory.

But the 1984/85 strike is still the subject of much historical writing and speculation by journalists, academics and former mining union activists. Recent examples of these writings include works by Temple (2000).

In looking at the events of the strike through the twin themes of betrayal and legality I have attempted to bring into view, through the methods of oral history, those faces and voices who, with a few exceptions, have never been asked to tell their story. These voices have enabled me to explore the unique story that has been so far untold.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

The strike could have been viewed from a number of different angles such as the role of women, the effects of the strike on the economy, the policies within the NUM both at national and at local level.

All of these angles will highlight differences between the events in the different coalfields. However no matter where future research is carried out, be it in one or more coalfield it is essential that the actions of those coalfields and their communities are placed within the historical context of the narrative resources and memories of events going back to the nineteenth century. This provides the framework of meaning and understanding that enabled people in mining communities to make sense of their experiences.

This account of the strike focused on one area of East Durham and further research could be carried out into the effects of the strike on different communities within East Durham. Research should also be carried out into the

policy, tactics and costs of policing the strike and an attempt made to unravel some of the myth surrounding the alleged covert operations by the police. In addition community and union relationships during the period of the strike, the pit closure programme and their relationships today could also provide a study for further research.

Each of the British coalfields and their communities dealt with the strike in its own way and each needs its own account in order to arrive at any common trends running through the strike on a national basis. Many generalisations were made about the strike, but for them to stand up each must fit into what actually took place in East Durham and in other localities from March 1984 to March 1985.

Of those major players in the strike, on a national level, Margaret Thatcher was deposed as Prime Minister in 1990, Neil Kinnock became a European Commissioner, resigning as leader of the Labour party after the 1992 General Election defeat. Ian McGregor died in 1998, his obituary in the *Independent* describes him as being,

‘... uniquely ruthless and hard-nosed both in business and manner.’  
(*Independent* 15 April 1998 p 17)

Mick McGahey died in 1999, his obituary in the *Times* pictured him as,

‘An austere, soberly dressed man – often likened to a Calvinist minister he continued to preach the virtues of militancy.’  
(*The Times* 1 February 1999 p 14)

but Arthur Scargill lives on, still playing a highly contested role in British public life. Depending on perspective, he remains hero or villain. Still President of the NUM, he formed the Socialist Labour party in time to fight the 1997 General Election where they won no seats. However in the expected General Election in 2001 he is tipped to stand in the Hartlepool Constituency against the sitting Labour MP Peter Mandelson. However, The *Independent* of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1998 reported that Dave Rix the new left wing leader of the train drivers’ union ASLEF, was a member of the Socialist Labour party and,

‘was prominent in supporting the miners during the strike of 1984/85. He [Dave Rix] regards Mr Scargill as one of the great heroes of the Labour movement and himself as a true socialist.’  
(*The Independent* 7<sup>th</sup> May 1998)

After 37 years of marriage he and his wife Ann separated.

On a local level David Guy and David Hopper still work for the Durham Area NUM. Easington’s Alan Cummings is retired on invalidity benefit, but very prominent in community circles, while Billy Stobbs has retired after working for a time for Thompsons the Newcastle Solicitors retained by the NUM during the strike. Tommy Callan has also retired; Joe Mills is now Chairman of Sunderland Health Authority and Paul Wilkinson having vanished, has now returned to the area and lives in a Guest House in Durham. For each of the principal players locally there are thousands of other individual stories to tell. The strike still plays a role in the way the people of East Durham mark out their careers, interpret their fate and tell their stories. The post strike history of East Durham mining communities demands to be written. Among other things, this study has shown how vital the tool of oral history will be to recover that history properly.

The socio economic problems left as a legacy of the miners’ strike are described in Chapter 8, and economic regeneration is still a problem left behind by the demise of the coal industry. The First Regional Economic Strategy for the North East produced by The Development Agency for the North East of England in August 1999 acknowledges that the regeneration of the Coalfield Communities in Durham is a key priority.

The retrospect of the strike is itself passing into history, and the meaning of the strike will alter again as political circumstances change and new generations of historians examine and pass comment on it.

## APPENDIX A

## LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

DAVID ASTON	- MINER EASINGTON
ALAN BARKER	- MINER EASINGTON AND DISTRICT COUNCILER
JOE BENHAM	- GENERAL SECRETARY OF NACODS
NANCY BONE	- EX-SOLICITOR
BILL BRENNAN	- RETIRED POLICE INSPECTOR
BILL BROWN	- MAGISTRATE
MICK BROWN	- MINER DAWDON
TOMMY CALLAN	- RETIRED DURHAM AREA NUM SECRETARY
ALAN CUMMINGS	- RETIRED MINER AND EASINGTON NUM LODGE SECRETARY
STAN DAVISON	- POLICE CONSTABLE
RONNIE DIXON	- RETIRED DEPUTY - MURTON
FRED GRIEVES	- RETIRED MINER - DAWDON
PETER GRIFFITHS	- RETIRED POLICE INSPECTOR
REV TONY HODGESON	- VICAR EASINGTON
BILL HORSFIELD	- MAGISTRATE
JOE MILLS	- FORMER TGWU REGIONAL SECRETARY
JIMMY MOUTTER	- MINER EPPLETON AND MURTON
JOE MOUTTER	- DEPUTY HERRINGTON
CHRIS NAIRNS	- MINER EPPLETON
JIMMY PATTERSON	- MINER EPPLETON
RAY PYE	- MINER MURTON
JOE SANDERS	- SOLICITOR

MICHELE SCOTT - RESIDENT OF MURTON

GARY STANGER - POLICE CONSTABLE

NEIL STEPHENSON - POLICE CONSTABLE

BILLY STOBBS - DURHAM NUM EXECUTIVE DELEGATE AND  
EASINGTON MINER

DAVID TEMPLE - DURHAM MECHANICS DELEGATE AND  
ELECTRICIAN MURTON

PAUL WILKINSON - MINER EASINGTON

TOMMY WILKINSON - BROTHER OF PAUL

PAMELA WRIGHT - RESIDENT OF HETTON

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