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THE UNIVERSITY OF RHEIMS, FRANCE
and
THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT at CANTERBURY, ENGLAND.

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMUNITY AND
MILITANCY IN TWO COALMINING SETTLEMENTS
IN BRITAIN.**
Volume II.

Doctoral thesis presented by Adrian PARK -
under the direction of Professor Michel DELECROIX, University of Rheims
and Dr. John LOVELL, University of Kent at Canterbury.
1999.

Chapter Six.

(Un)Parallel Histories: Kent and Leicestershire 1974 - 84.

The common idea that success spoils people by making them vain, egotistic and self-complacent is erroneous; on the contrary it makes them, for the most part, humble, tolerant and kind. Failure makes people bitter and cruel.

W. Somerset Maugham, *Summing Up*, 1938, 187.

To combat may be glorious, and success
Perhaps may crown us; but to fly is safe.

William Cowper, *The Task, Book 3, "The Garden"*, 1785, line 686.

Introduction.

The successes of 1972 and 1974, resulting in the fall of a Conservative government, had opposite effects on the Kent and Leicestershire miners. For Kent miners the replacement of a Conservative administration by a Labour one, with such an old ally as Michael Foot at the Ministry of Employment charged with ending the miners' strike, was indeed the crowning glory on all their efforts. It also had the effect of widening their political outlook and indeed their viewpoint on extra-parliamentary activity. Nobody in the Kent coalfield spoke anymore about keeping politics out of union affairs. The two were inextricably linked. In Leicestershire, however, the feeling was that union activity had reached its limit and, indeed, may already have gone too far in bringing about the downfall of a democratically elected government. Perhaps this once it may have been justified, but never again. So when Arthur Scargill was proposed for the NUM leadership in 1981, the Leicestershire Area was against him, believing that it was his intention to use the miners for ulterior political motives. Kent miners, on the other hand, were among the most vociferous and active in their support for Scargill. It seems that there may be even less agreement about the effects of success on people's behaviour than there is about the definition of community.

The methodology of this chapter will follow that of Chapters Two and Three: tracing the history of the Kent and Leicestershire miners during a particular period, looking at events in each area separately and within the context of national events. The period in question in this chapter will be the ten years between the victorious ending of the 1974 miners' strike and the beginning of the disastrous 1984-85 miners' strike. The historical information will be more detailed as precise events, which it is felt merit fuller treatment, are covered. These specifically will be: the introduction of the productivity scheme; the pit closures programme and the government's 'U-turn' of 1981; the overtime ban and countdown to the 1984-85 miners' strike.

Leicestershire: The Aftermath of 1974 and the Introduction of the Productivity Scheme.

Colin Griffin argues that the introduction of the NPLA in 1966 had dramatic effects on the attitude of Leicestershire miners towards the idea of industrial action. It was:

... one of the factors making them increasingly militant in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The origins of Leicestershire's eventual commitment to the first national strike since 1926 are at least, in part, to be found in the events of 1966-67.¹

Despite the logic of a uniform system of wages and the potential it promised for greater solidarity in the National Union, miners in Leicestershire, as well as in Kent, clearly felt anger and frustration at the introduction of the NPLA. This, combined with an effective ceiling being placed on their wage demands for five years, created a smouldering mass of discontent which erupted in 1972 and again in 1974. However, once the bitter memories of 1966 had faded and been largely assuaged by the pay awards of 1972 and '74, the temporary nature of Leicestershire's militancy was revealed.

An issue on the agenda at the pay negotiations of 1972 and 1974 had been the introduction of some form of productivity scheme. Left-wing areas, among which Kent could now be numbered, were implacably opposed to any such scheme. However, Joe Gormley at

¹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 132.

the NUM Annual Conference in 1974, declared that he was not against the principle of an incentive scheme, and negotiations between the NUM and the NCB began in July 1974, just a few months after the strike settlement.² The NUM Executive was itself divided over the question along traditionally left and right-wing lines, the left, led by McGahey, being adamantly opposed to any such scheme on the grounds that it would destroy the unity of the NUM.

In September 1974, there was a National Delegates' Conference during which McGahey made clear his intentions to have a massive publicity campaign, financed by his Area, against any form of productivity scheme. Jack Jones of Leicestershire, who was very much for such a scheme, persuaded his Area Union not to allow the distribution of any "Scottish Literature" in Leicestershire, and neither would it accept any outside speakers coming into the Area.³ So within just a few short months of its involvement in a national strike which had proved, like the previous one, the power of solidarity, Leicestershire was once again acting independently, exercising its federal rights in pursuit of higher wages for Leicestershire miners. It must also be said that Scargill behaved similarly when he led the Yorkshire delegation out of the conference chamber in September 1974 and threatened to block the distribution of a NCB leaflet explaining the details of a productivity scheme.⁴ Presumably, however, he would argue, that his action was in defence of the Union.

In October 1974, about a hundred Leicestershire miners, alongside miners from Nottinghamshire and South Derbyshire, participated in a mass delegation to London in opposition to the Yorkshire miners' call for all talks on this question to be broken off.⁵ The whole question was very emotive especially when Josh Ellis, from North Wales, while speaking at the rostrum, threatened to take off his shirt and show Conference the blue scars on his back caused by working under the piece-rate system.⁶ The green shoots of division were clearly as visible as Ellis' mining blue scars.

Talks were broken off, but only temporarily. The subject was hotly debated at the 1977 NUM Annual Conference. High production, low cost areas, principally Nottinghamshire,

² Ashworth, 371.

³ Griffin, *Volume III*, 175.

⁴ Ashworth, 371.

⁵ Griffin, *Volume III*, 175.

⁶ Hall, 235.

South Derbyshire and Leicestershire were naturally in favour of an incentive scheme. Their principal arguments were financial - miners should not have to wait for annual pay rises which forced them into overtime and week-end working. They also argued that such a scheme was the only method of improving output which was vital for the survival of the industry. The opposition, principally in Scotland, South Wales, Yorkshire and Kent, argued for unity and safety, both of which they believed would be endangered by a divisive payments system. However, what both sides were acutely aware of was the decreasing value of miners' wages under a Labour Chancellor who, by his own admission, had abandoned Keynesian economic policies, as early as 1975, in favour of strict control over incomes and the adoption of right-wing economic theory which held that irresponsible unions were particularly responsible for the growing malaise.⁷ This led to a policy of imposing a three per cent maximum wage increase in 1976 while inflation was running at twenty per cent.⁸ As a result, calls from Scargill for a minimum of £100 per week for faceworkers, implying a hundred per cent pay rise, seemed totally unrealistic to the NUM Conferences of 1975 and 1976. Even Scotland, South Wales and Kent, while arguing against pay restraint, did not support Scargill's demands for the immediate application of the pay rise, though they accepted its legitimacy in principle. The NUM's industrial passivity during the period 1974-77 and the government's prices and incomes policy meant a real fall in miners' wages. These factors, combined with Scargill's 'unrealistic' pay claim, caused more and more miners to become convinced that the only way of improving wages in the present economic climate was a productivity bonus scheme.

At the end of 1976 Leicestershire NUM lost, through retirement, one of its longest serving, and sometimes controversial, officials - Frank Smith. Once a member of the Communist Party and blacklisted in the 1920s, his later career served to cause most people, including himself, to forget his 'murky' past. Not everybody forgot, however. Blanche Holmes, a Bagworth miner's wife, who was a barmaid at the Bagworth Welfare Club during the 1970s, remembers with distaste Smith's arrogance in the Club and how she wished she had 'informed on him', telling others about when he and her father, whom she also hated, were Communists

⁷ Healey, 378-79.

⁸ Morgan, *People's Peace*, 378.

in the 1930s.⁹ Clearly this was a terrible thing for Blanche. Smith himself spoke of his reputation in a short speech at one of his final meetings as a Union official:

He had been branded as a *moderate* but bridled at that description as he regarded himself as a realist who was prepared to look for solutions to problems.¹⁰

In 1977 the government's pay rise ceiling was ten per cent but this excluded any productivity deals. Even Tony Benn, Energy Secretary, now firmly situated on the left of the Labour Party, argued for a productivity scheme believing it to be the only way of keeping up wage levels. However, the Annual Conference of that year once again threw out a proposition from Ken Toon, South Derbyshire Secretary. This infuriated those in favour of the idea, not least Jack Jones who was one of the first to consider negotiating a separate Area-based incentive scheme. In August 1977, he presented to his Area a nine-point commentary on the incentive scheme which, among other things, criticised certain delegates who voted 'no' for not being in line with their own membership;¹¹ attacked McGahey for hypocrisy, accusing him of having changed his mind on the issue; outlined the benefits to the industry and the miners of an incentive scheme; and discounted as nonsense claims that accidents would increase as a result of such a scheme being introduced.¹² As a consequence Jones was authorised by his Area union to enter into negotiations with the NCB South Midlands Area, with a view to formulating a workable local scheme. However, before such talks could take place events at national level moved in another direction.

In September the NUM Executive Council met and some members very cleverly used the recent Conference decision, which had formally accepted the possibility of an incentive scheme, as a loophole to opening new discussions with the NCB. Gormley, at a meeting of the Joint National Negotiating Committee (JNNC), also refused to allow another national ballot. At this meeting Ken Toon argued:

⁹ Blanche Holmes, personal interview, 22 July 1993.

¹⁰ Minutes of Meeting of the Area Consultative Council, South Midlands Area. 13.12.76.

¹¹ This is the traditional argument used by union leaders to criticise each other. Being out of touch with the membership is the cardinal sin.

¹² Griffin, *Volume III*, 183.

"... increased production would bring more benefits to the Industry, and, of course, higher wages were a part of it. The sooner the membership got the proposals with the amendments - the sooner the better." Jack Jones seconded this.¹³

Scargill called for a Special Conference but this was refused by Gormley. The left-wing members of the NEC were furious at the tactics being employed and demanded that the Executive should adhere to the Conference decisions. But Gormley, Toon and others went ahead and finalised a deal with the NCB on the principle of the scheme. There would be a ballot only on concrete proposals. The NEC then agreed to put to the membership the productivity scheme with a recommendation to accept. It was at this point that the Kent Union played a significant role with regard to this issue of a ballot, and in so doing, learned a few lessons about 'democracy' in the NUM which informed their actions in 1984.

Kent Miners: Champions of the Left.

Encouraged by their successes in 1972 and 1974 and determined to live up to their 'glamorous' reputation as a militant Area, the KNUM adopted a specifically vanguardist and internationalist position with regard to working-class issues. In just one meeting that followed the end of the 1974 strike, support was expressed for the Shrewsbury Workers' Campaign and the release of three of their imprisoned men was demanded; invitations were sent to speakers from Poland and France; and a letter of protest was sent to the Greek Embassy over the military regime's oppression and imprisonment of trade unionists.¹⁴ And, following the 1974 April revolution in Portugal, the KNUM agreed:

That a letter of congratulations and support be sent to the leaders of the Portuguese Socialist and Communist Parties.¹⁵

¹³ Kent Minutes, 14.10.77.

¹⁴ Kent Minutes, 18.3.74.

¹⁵ Kent Minutes, 6.5.74.

On the issue of the productivity scheme Kent miners were very decided. In September 1974 the KNUM "expressed considerable concern on decisions taken at national level without consultation with the membership" over this question.¹⁶ And in the November national ballot the results were:

Nationally:	for the scheme	77,119 (38.47%)
	against the scheme	123,345 (61.53%)
Kent:		
Betteshanger	against - 71%	
Snowdown	against - 66%	
Tilmanstone	against - 68%	

Source: NUM Kent Area Minutes, 25 November 1974.

This convincing victory for the 'No' vote placed Kent firmly in the Yorkshire camp and set it on a course which would bring it into conflict with the NEC and end up in the High Court before the Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning. However, before all that occurred an administrative change took place which united Kent with Leicestershire at least on paper, if not politically.

On 18 August 1975, Jack Lewis, Kent Area General Manager, met with and informed the Kent Union and Branch officials that the Kent Area was to be merged with the South Midlands Area from 1 September 1975.¹⁷ The KNUM was furious that once again the NCB were making critical decisions without consulting the unions. It also informed Lewis that no merger could take place until the NUM and other unions involved had received full information about the consequences of such a proposal and given the chance "to present a considered reply." On 21 August, Sir Derek Ezra, NCB Chairman, had visited the Kent Area and disputed Jack Dunn's claim that the Union had not been consulted. Dunn showed him a letter from Lawrence Daly which insisted that:

¹⁶ Kent Minutes. 9.9.74.

¹⁷ The information in the following four paragraphs is taken from the very lengthy Minutes of the Kent Area Conference held on Tuesday 4 November to discuss the merger proposals.

Not only had they not been consulted but the union took great exception to the arrogant approach of the Board officials on this matter.

Clearly there was bad feeling between the NUM and management, and the KNUM insisted on further meetings before any proposals were implemented. The NCB agreed to produce a detailed document on the merger proposal to be discussed at a meeting of the Special Coalfield Consultative Council on 22 September.

The meeting on 22 September was a disaster as the Union was dissatisfied with the document, regarding it as too shallow, and C. Shephard, Chief Industrial Relations Officer for the NCB, was unable to give detailed information as it had not yet been fully prepared. The various union representatives asked him how he could, therefore, claim that a merger would benefit Kent miners. The meeting ended with no decision or agreement, even for another meeting as the KNUM refused to discuss the issue until full details were available.

A detailed document was finally prepared and another meeting took place on Friday 31 October. At this meeting there was a full discussion on the consequences of the merger. The KNUM was assured that there would be no loss of pits or jobs in Kent and that the Area Union's organisational structure, responsibilities and autonomy would be unaffected. Advantages included being able to benefit from the South Midlands' larger resources, particularly scientific and technological. Administratively, life for the NCB would be easier if the small Kent coalfield was absorbed into the larger South Midlands Area.

The KNUM met alone on Tuesday 4 November to discuss the merger proposal and hear Dunn's report of his meetings with the NCB. At the end of the conference a vote was taken which showed the distinct lack of enthusiasm for the merger as did the wording of the resolution agreed to:

That we accept the merger subject to the proviso that assurances already given by the Board shall be contained in writing; also that full protection be given to those members of other unions who will be affected by the proposed merger.

Voting for 16

Voting against 10

Abstentions 6

The merger went ahead on 1 December 1975.

1975 had also seen the KNUM continue its policy of involvement in other workers' disputes and political organisations. Workers supported by the KNUM included the Glasgow dustmen¹⁸ and the National Union of Railwaymen.¹⁹ In April it affiliated itself with the Kent Anti-Fascist Committee, and during the period May to July it decided to support the anti-Common Market Campaign in the coming referendum.²⁰ However, it was the anti-productivity scheme which dominated the Union's time and energies at this time.

Once the NEC had decided to go ahead with its decision to negotiate an incentive scheme with the NCB, the KNUM reacted quickly. Indeed, it led the way in the campaign against the introduction of such a scheme, and, as a mark of how far Snowdown miners had changed their political stance, it was their branch which insisted on legal proceedings. A letter, dated 28 September 1977, was sent from the Snowdown Branch to the Area Council:

... stating that their Committee demanded that this should be a test case through the Law Courts and requesting speedy action on this matter.²¹

Both Betteshanger and Tilmanstone branches supported Snowdown over this question. Thus on 10 October the Area Council, for once not leading, but following rank-and-file opinion, agreed on the following resolution:

The Area Council at its meeting on Monday 10 October 1977 unanimously decided to seek legal advice about the National Executive Committee allegedly acting contrary to

¹⁸ Kent Minutes, 17.3.75.

¹⁹ Kent Minutes, 16.6.75.

²⁰ Kent Minutes, 14.4.75.

²¹ Kent Minutes, 14.10.77.

the rules of the Union in respect to Union policy on Wages and Production Incentive Schemes.²²

At a meeting of the JNNC in September, Sid Vincent, General Secretary of the North Western (Lancashire) Area insisted that Kent should not be allowed to use any National funds in its expensive decision to go to court.²³ And, at a meeting of the NEC on 10 November, after Kent had lost its action, Gormley said he hoped that other Areas would not help the Kent Area financially.²⁴

Legal advice was sought from a firm of London solicitors, Walker and Irvine, and on their advice the KNUM asked for an injunction on the NEC.²⁵ The case was heard on Thursday 20 October. Lord Denning ruled that the NUM Conference may not have been reflecting the true opinions of all its members and therefore a national ballot on the issue was both reasonable and democratic.²⁶ Consequently, all Areas were now forced to hold a ballot on the incentive scheme. This took place at the end of October and the result was, once again, fairly decisive: 87,901 for the scheme; 110,634 against it.²⁷

The KNUM had won, and not just a moral victory. Surely now that the membership had spoken all talk of incentive schemes would end? It was not that simple. Fifteen of the twenty-two NUM Areas had voted in favour of the scheme, some with very large majorities such as that in Leicestershire - seventy-one per cent.²⁸ These Areas now decided to go ahead anyway, and negotiate their own local schemes. Jim Watts, Branch Delegate from Ellistown Colliery, expressed the direction in which the Leicestershire NUM was going and its attitude towards the left-wing:

How long are we prepared to sit back and be exploited? The feeling of his members at Ellistown was that the Leicester Area should go it alone and organise their own

²² Kent Minutes, 10.10.77.

²³ Kent Minutes, 14.10.77.

²⁴ Kent Minutes, 14.11.77.

²⁵ Kent Minutes, 17.10.77.

²⁶ Hall, 236.

²⁷ Taylor, 271.

²⁸ Griffin, *Volume III*, 178.

productivity deal. If men were willing to produce coal, then it was only right and proper that they should receive the wages for that coal. He could not see that we should sit back and allow the Scargills and McGaheys to rule us in this way.²⁹

Jack Jones agreed:

He felt that the National Union should not be dominated by personalities who were more interested in battling about politics rather than the economics of the Union and the Coal Industry.³⁰

The Leicestershire miners' support for an incentive scheme is understandable when one looks at their production figures. OMS by 1970 had reached 69.9cwt. and remained around that level throughout the whole of the decade.³¹ At Bagworth Colliery OMS could be as high as 82cwt.³² Conditions at Bagworth were exceptional: less than 1000 feet deep with high ceilings and the coal "just falling off".³³ In Kent, however, the situation was very difficult and always had been. OMS was erratic, rarely going above 30cwt. and usually hovering around 25cwt. So on a purely pecuniary level the standpoints of the Leicestershire and Kent miners vis-a-vis the incentive scheme were self-explanatory. But this ignores the aspect of working-class solidarity so famed among miners. Clearly it didn't exist beyond Area level and sometimes was limited to individual collieries. Watts at Ellistown knew that geological conditions in Leicestershire were very favourable, while those in Kent were notoriously bad. His comments about men being willing to produce coal is a slander on miners who were not so 'fortunate' as to be in pits where the coal was just waiting to be got. Payment for production sounds logical, but producing a fair and uniform scheme for an industry dependent upon such geologically diverse conditions was virtually impossible. And local schemes were bound to divide and fragment the new unity of the NUM. Also, while criticising certain leaders because one did not

²⁹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 178.

³⁰ Griffin, *Volume III*, 178.

³¹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 14.

³² Griffin, *Volume III*, 177.

³³ Andy Webb, personal interview, 25.7.93.

agree with their views is perfectly legitimate, criticising them for being anti-democratic in this particular situation was more than a little unfair. The issue of the ballot in 1977, and its being ignored by certain Areas because it did not go their way, was an important educating process for the KNUM and a significant harbinger of future events.

Jack Jones went ahead with local negotiations following the example of Toon in South Derbyshire where an NUM/NCB agreement began as early as 14 November 1977.³⁴ The speed with which this deal was concluded suggests that negotiations were already taking place behind the scenes even before the result of the ballot was announced. By the end of November an agreement was in place for Leicestershire, and official authorisation for these schemes to go ahead, all of them based on the rejected national plan, was given by the NUM Executive on 8 December.³⁵

Overtaken by events, and with the distinct possibility that no pay rise would be forthcoming, the KNUM, with obvious aversion, issued a statement:

The Area Council recommends acceptance of an Area Incentive Scheme. This recommendation is made with extreme reluctance in view of the blatant undemocratic actions by a section of the Union's national Leadership who have consistently disregarded policy decisions at Annual Conferences - on Ballots and Union Rules. Their actions have been endorsed by legal decisions that have more regard for the establishment than for democratic rights and the logic of Law. Conference condemns those Leaders who have brought the Union into disrepute, and pledges that Kent Miners will not give up the struggle to restore democratic authority within the Union.³⁶

The frustration and anger of the KNUM is barely contained, and Jack Dunn's speech to miners at Elvington Welfare Hall on Friday 23 December was not so much prophetic as a comment on the current situation within the NUM:

³⁴ Ashworth, 372.

³⁵ Ashworth, 372.

³⁶ Kent Minutes, 22.12.77.

Historically, miners for many years had demanded a daywage payments system - not only to obtain equity and justice but also to rid ourselves of the piecework jungle... Now there is the threat of destroying that structure and the unity created by it and the decisive actions in 1972/1974.³⁷

That miners had long called for a national wage system is not in any doubt. The now famous pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step* published in 1912 demanded a minimum daywage of eight shillings "for all workmen employed in or about the mines",³⁸ and it emphasised with great simplicity the merits of this system while pre-empting the disadvantages of incentive schemes:

A man either receives the minimum or he does not. There is nothing to conciliate or negotiate upon. There is further in the minimum wage two diverse tendencies. On the men's side it will tend, as the organisation develops its power, for the minimum to be increased as to become the maximum possible to be earned on the price lists. On the employers' side, the tendency will perforce always be to offer some inducement to the men, to earn something above the minimum, in order to expedite production and thus maintain profits.³⁹

And, in a far-sighted passage which could have been written about the machinations of the NUM leadership during the wrangling over the productivity scheme, the authors of this influential little pamphlet address, with great clarity, the issue of conferences and ballots:

Conferences are *only called*, and ballots *only taken* when there is a difference of opinion between leaders. The conference or ballot is only a referee... In the main, and on things that matter, the executive have the supreme power. The workmen for a time

³⁷ Kent Minutes. 23.12.77.

³⁸ The Unofficial Reform Committee. *The Miners' Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, (Reprints in Labour History. London: Pluto Press, 1973). 23.

³⁹ *The Miners' Next Step*. 24.

look up to these men and *when things are going well* they idolise them. The employers respect them. Why? Because they have the men - the real power - in the hollow of their hands. They, the leaders, become 'gentlemen', they become MPs, and have considerable social prestige because of this power.⁴⁰

The Miners' Next Step informed the thinking of many a miner's leader, including the likes of Aneurin Bevan, throughout the pre- and post-nationalisation period, and it became a favourite text for grass roots leaders who were critical of the national leadership. In 1912 the prime target was William Abraham, 'Mabon', the South Wales miners' leader and M.P., who was severely criticised for his closeness to Liberals and coalowners. One of the principle authors of *The Miners' Next Step* was Noah Ablett, a self-educated Marxist and confirmed syndicalist who did not believe in nationalisation - the mines for the nation, but in a radical form of pit-gate democracy - the mines for the miners.

Men like Jack Dunn were almost certainly aware of Ablett and his ideas, largely through their attendance at Ruskin College where Ablett himself had been a student. Dunn's criticism of certain members of the NUM Executive over the question of incentive schemes and (mis)use of ballots was directly in line with the syndicalism of Ablett. Gormley, Toon and Jones had not got what they wanted through the democratic process and thus reverted to the use of their executive power. It was a lesson in political manoeuvring which the left learned well and to a large extent used, brilliantly or devastatingly, depending on one's political viewpoint, in March 1984.

What Dunn was less sure about, and with good reason, was the unity of the NUM. National unity was a novel concept for miners. The history of the MFGB and then the NUM is one of division. Even those great industrial protests of 1893, 1898, 1910-12 and, of course, 1926, were largely conducted at grass roots level. In 1926 Arthur Cook tried desperately, with his national speaking tour, to weld the fragmented federation together. He failed, as did the action, as men began going back to work region by region. As this account of miners and their (non)militancy has repeatedly tried to show, their loyalty has always been to their branch, then

⁴⁰ *The Miners' Next Step*. 15.

their Area (often reluctantly) and finally to the National Union (even more reluctantly). The introduction of the NPLA did go some way towards papering over the cracks, but only temporarily. The incentive scheme did not create divisions within the NUM, it simply resurrected them.

Not surprisingly the Kent Area was one of the last to finalise an incentive scheme, the agreement being signed on 22 March 1978 and coming into force on Monday 3 April.⁴¹ However, this was not the end of the matter. If the NCB had hoped, which presumably it did, that higher earnings would lead to greater productivity and more harmonious industrial relations, it was to be severely disappointed, particularly in the first year of the scheme. In 1978-79 the amount of coal lost through disputes was higher than in any year since 1970-71, excluding the strike years.⁴² Most of these disputes arose out of attempts to operate the scheme and various interpretations of the very complicated bonus payments. In the first month of its being in place in Kent there were disputes at all three collieries. Snowdown Colliery could not agree on terms, and both Betteshanger and Tilmanstone Collieries had serious doubts about whether to go ahead with the scheme.⁴³ There were also problems at Bagworth Colliery where there was a two-day strike in February 1978 over incentive payments and the inability of management and the union to understand fully how to implement the scheme.⁴⁴ And the introduction of an incentive scheme did not stop five wages resolutions being proposed at the NUM Conference at Torquay in July 1978. Among those resolutions was one from South Wales which demanded "... basic wages of £110 under NPLA irrespective of bonuses earned under the Incentive Scheme."⁴⁵ The problems were eventually ironed out in Kent as in other Areas, and thereafter the number of disputes began, steadily, to fall. However, the KNUM made clear its political position within the NUM by giving its full support to Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey's candidatures for the TUC General Council NUM Representatives.⁴⁶ The issue of the incentive scheme, its method of introduction and its

⁴¹ NCB South Midlands Area, *Kent District Incentive Scheme*, March 1978.

⁴² Ashworth, 375.

⁴³ Kent Minutes, 28.4.78.

⁴⁴ Griffin, *Volume III*, 180.

⁴⁵ *Miner*, March-April, 1978.

⁴⁶ Kent Minutes, 30.5.78.

political and industrial implications continued to rankle in the Kent coalfield. In 1979, during the annual pay negotiations, Dunn "attacked 'will 'o the wisp' productivity schemes which ... had split the men."⁴⁷

Nationally, the forecast for the British coal industry in 1978 was fairly optimistic. A government document indicated the following expectations:

Coal production is estimated to grow broadly in line with the estimates which have been set out in the Coal Board's strategic programme and embodied in Plan for Coal and Plan 2000. This points to a level of output of about 135 million tons by 1985 and 170 million tons by the end of the century... For some time to come the main market for coal will be in electricity generation... By the end of the century, however, it is possible that coal will be too valuable to be used in this way and that it will increasingly tend to move into the manufacture of substitute natural gas ... while its role in electricity generation would be increasingly taken by nuclear power and renewable sources.⁴⁸

The NCB, allying with the Department of Energy, was already working on new techniques to liquify coal, copying and improving upon those used elsewhere, such as in South Africa. The result of this liquifaction of coal is a kind of synthetic crude oil which has been termed *syncrude*. However, the authors of the document did not envisage a total change in domestic energy policy, even if they had not presumed upon the continuation of a Labour administration.

The overtly political divisions within the NUM were rapidly becoming glaringly obvious, indeed, perhaps more tangible than at any time in the NUM's history. And the fracturing unity of the NUM was soon put to the test over the one issue which, besides wages, Scargill and the left hoped would bring about a new outbreak of solidarity: pit closures.

⁴⁷ *D.E.*, 9.3.79.

⁴⁸ *Energy Policy*, Cmnd. 7101.

1981 - Pit Closures: A Shut and Open Case.

As a leader in an industry and union so inured to contraction as the coal industry and the NUM, Scargill may be accused of not a little naivety in believing that a new round of pit closures would re-unite a rapidly fragmenting organisation. However, the events of February 1981 and Scargill's subsequent election to the presidency of the NUM, went some way towards informing his outrageous confidence, in March 1984, that the Thatcher Government could be halted in its tracks by the united force of a re-vitalised National Union.

The arrival of Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street in May 1979, heralded a new era of political conflict between a Conservative Government and the NUM. However, with the incentive scheme in place and miners' wages rising, Thatcher could be forgiven for believing that there would be no opposition from the NUM to her insistence that the NCB should be economically independent by 1983-84, even if this did entail further contraction on a large scale. After all, the proposed closure of Langwith Colliery in Derbyshire in February 1976 had provoked the NUM Executive into a 'U-turn' on an overtime ban after it became clear that grass roots support was not forthcoming. The overtime ban had inspired hostility among Leicestershire miners who did not see why they should fight to save other Areas' pits when nobody had offered to help save Leicestershire pits in the 1960s.⁴⁹ However, the KNUM had been angered at the NEC reversal and lodged an official criticism:

Area Council members expressed their deep concern at the NEC's action in ignoring Union policy in respect to colliery closures and their subsequent actions which had reversed previous decisions which had been reached democratically.⁵⁰

Such divisions over pit closures continued and were highlighted, once again, when Deep Duffryn Colliery, Mountain Ash in South Wales, was programmed for closure in the summer of 1979. Its miners took their case throughout the British coalfield trying to drum-up

⁴⁹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 188.

⁵⁰ Kent Minutes, 1.3.76.

support for a campaign to save their pit. But, although they did win a six-week reprieve, the colliery was closed with not a whisper of any national action to fight the decision.⁵¹

Thus it was that the Thatcher Government passed the Coal Industry Act of 1980. This proposed a drastic reorganisation of NCB finances within a very short period of time. All operating and regional grants to the industry were to be phased out completely by 1983-84.⁵² In order to achieve this there would have to be a massive increase in sales at a time of worsening economic recession with British industry contracting and demand for coal falling. As such targets became increasingly unlikely and economies had to be made by the NCB. On Tuesday 10 February 1981, it met with the unions and laid before them its four-point plan to improve efficiency. It was the fourth point which caused consternation among the unions and nearly provoked a national pit strike:

To bring supply and demand into better balance by maximising sales, expanding output at pits with viable reserves, and diminishing capacity where realistic reserves were exhausted or where, for geological or other reasons, there could be no long-term financial contribution from a pit.⁵³

The verbosity of the language could not hide the intentions of the NCB. It was about to embark upon another round of pit closures, but Derek Ezra was very reluctant to give specific numbers on how many pits would close. Eventually, under pressure from the unions, and advised by Gormley, Ezra admitted that in the short term (six months) between twenty and thirty pits could close, but that it could be as many as fifty over the next two to three years.⁵⁴ The pits planned for immediate closure would be announced at Area level.

Immediately the NUM Executive and associated unions began to plan their campaign against the closure plan. The NEC was, for once, totally united, with even right-wingers like Sid Vincent recommending a strike ballot if the Government refused to back down. Indeed, the

⁵¹ Hall, 254.

⁵² Ashworth, 415.

⁵³ Ashworth, 416.

⁵⁴ Hall, 258.

Government was deeply impressed by the solidarity of the NUM over this issue. Clearly the numbers of pits involved and the rapidity of their closure, by-passing all the traditional and statutory requirements, including consultation with the unions, had served to resurrect the ire of the NUM against another Conservative administration. Only a Labour Government could have got away with such an announcement. On Thursday 12 February, the NEC passed the following resolution:

The NEC of the NUM is unanimous in its total opposition to the NCB's plans to reduce the capacity of the industry with its resultant effects on manpower and warns of the danger of industrial action starting in various Areas.

If any attempt is made to put these plans into effect either in individual Areas or collectively, the NEC will recommend, through a Ballot Vote, that the members take national strike action...

In the meantime, an urgent meeting should be arranged with the Government, together with the NCB, NACODS and BACM regarding the Government's commitments under the *Plan for Coal*, the need to stop coal imports, and for equal treatment for the British Coal Industry with that afforded to other European Coal and Steel Community Industries.

If no satisfactory response is made to our representations to the Ministers, the NEC will ballot its members on strike action, and proceed in line with our Tripartite arrangements with the Rail and Steel Workers' Unions.⁵⁵

The NEC obviously meant business and had invoked the historical threat of the Triple Alliance. Although had that been put to the test in 1981 the colour of the Alliance's response on this occasion - red or black - remains a piece of pure conjecture. Arthur Scargill made clear his feelings and political objectives in a speech before miners' delegates at the Friends' Meeting House, across the road from Hobart House:

⁵⁵ Kent Minutes, 14.2.81.

We are in a battle to save our jobs and in the process bring about the conditions for an early general election in Britain, and an end to the Tory government once and for all.⁵⁶

Mick McGahey, evidently wary of historical precedents becoming traditional, demanded that the Triple Alliance not turn into the "cripple alliance", and he made this self-confident declaration:

I'm not warning of industrial action. I'm predicting it is going to happen... If the Scottish miners come out against the threat of closures in the British coalfield, I'll not be telling them to go back, I'll be leading them out.⁵⁷

On Friday 13 February, the South Midlands Area Director, Ralph Rawlinson, called a meeting with the Kent unions and informed them that Snowdown Colliery would close at the end of June 1981.⁵⁸ The NCB announcement outlined the financial and geological reasons for the closure of Snowdown and promised that everything possible would be done to avoid compulsory redundancies. This would include arrangements to transfer 450 men to Betteshanger and Tilmanstone Collieries, while offering early retirement, from fifty-five, to men at all three pits.⁵⁹ Jack Collins, NUM Kent Area General Secretary since Dunn's retirement in February 1980, expressed the anger of the Kent miners, accusing Rawlinson of:

... acting like a feudal baron deciding who will eat and who will not, and that he was acting as an agent of a Tory Government putting men on the dole.⁶⁰

Collins, who had already experienced closure at Chislet and had been transferred to Snowdown, led his men in walking out of the meeting with the NCB officials. An Area

⁵⁶ *Morning Star*, 13.2.81.

⁵⁷ *Morning Star*, 13.2.81.

⁵⁸ *Personal Diary*, Philip Sutcliffe, 13.2.81.

⁵⁹ NCB South Midlands Area, Press Statement, 13.2.81.

⁶⁰ Kent Minutes, 13.2.81.

Conference was called for the following day and the following resolution was unanimously agreed upon:

That this Conference of the Kent Area NUM meeting on Saturday, 14 February, 1981, rejects the attack that is now being launched against miners and their jobs and agrees to call upon the membership to take strike action on an Area basis when called upon to do so by the Area Council and to ban overtime from 6.00 a.m. Monday, 16 February, 1981, in order to retain jobs and pits and in no circumstances will the NUM become involved in discussions with the NCB in matters that deal with transfers or redundancy payments.⁶¹

The response of the rank-and-file in Kent was to give complete support to the Area Union. Indeed, in the ensuing days, they took the lead, the Kent Area President, John Moyle, admitting that he "had to bow to pressure from the branches."⁶² On Sunday 15 February, there was a mass meeting in Aylesham at the Welfare Club which voted unanimously for an immediate overtime ban and an Area strike when called for. However, on Tuesday 17 February, the Snowdown Branch called an immediate 'unofficial' strike to begin on Wednesday 18 February, after it had received a telegram from the South Wales Area informing it that South Wales miners were already on strike and twelve of them were being sent to Kent to solicit support.⁶³ Following the lead of the Snowdown miners there was a Special Area Executive Meeting, on 18 February, to make strike arrangements which included picketing details and strike payments. Tilmanstone and Betteshanger Collieries were also now on strike.⁶⁴

On the same day, 18 February, the *Daily Mirror* front page story (apart from that of John Lennon's son being in love) fanned the embers of rumour with its report that the NCB in

⁶¹ Kent Minutes, 14.2.81.

⁶² *Kentish Gazette*, 20.2.81.

⁶³ Personal Diary, Philip Sutcliffe, 17.2.81.

⁶⁴ Kent Minutes, 18.2.81.

fact intended to shut sixty-three pits over the coming five years. Miners were to be bribed out of taking industrial action with generous redundancy payments.⁶⁵

In this tense and heated atmosphere the meeting of the Tripartite Group, NUM, NCB and the Government, originally planned for Monday 23 February, was hurriedly brought forward to Wednesday 18 February. Thatcher, said to be "concerned but not panicking",⁶⁶ had insisted that her Energy Minister, David Howell, attend a "listening session" with the NCB and the NUM.⁶⁷ However, this "listening session" transpired into a government announcement heralding one of Thatcher's most celebrated 'U-turns', just four months after the Conservative Party Conference when she had famously declared "the lady's not for turning." Howell had been instructed by the Prime Minister to inform the NUM that the Government were prepared "to discuss the financial constraints with an open mind, and also with a view to movement."⁶⁸ Implicit in this opaque 'official-speak' was the intention of the Government to withdraw the pit closure programme. However, the lack of a clear promise to do so made the left on the NEC suspicious. At its meeting on Thursday morning 19 February, Gormley gave a report on the discussions of the previous day. He explained how the Government had agreed to withdraw the financial restraints imposed by the 1980 Coal Industry Act, and the NCB would cancel its pit closure programme. It was, in Gormley's opinion, "a complete victory."⁶⁹ McGahey was less enthusiastic saying that he preferred to wait and see the Government's concrete proposals. Jack Collins was even more hostile demanding "that the man who sacked the men must come down and unsack the men at the pit".⁷⁰ He also stated his belief that there was still a 'hit list' of pits to be closed. For that reason he joined McGahey and Scargill, and other left-wing members of the NEC, in voting against acceptance of the NEC report and for a continuation of the industrial action. The vote on whether or not to accept the outcome of the Tripartite talks was:

⁶⁵ *Daily Mirror*, 18.2.81.

⁶⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 18.2.81.

⁶⁷ Hall, 263.

⁶⁸ Hall, 264.

⁶⁹ Kent Minutes, 19.2.81.

⁷⁰ Kent Minutes, 19.2.81.

15 for
8 against
1 abstention

Source: NUM Kent Area Minutes, 19.2.81.

Collins spoke to the waiting journalists and expressed what he felt about the Government's plans and the position of the Kent coalfield:

The Government is looking for a breathing space and after the dust has settled they will pick us off one at a time. We stay out.⁷¹

Following the NEC in the morning, the KNUM met in the afternoon, and after hearing Collins' report agreed that:

... the position of the Area is that we are still solid on strike and that we have given an invitation to the Board that we will meet them wherever they may choose.⁷²

The Branch committees were solidly behind the Area Union, Snowdown miners voting to remain on strike until written assurance of the colliery's future had been received by the Board. However, news that the Scotland, Yorkshire and South Wales Areas were recommending a return to work, without written assurances left the Snowdown miners feeling isolated. A Branch meeting, on Friday 20 February, requested that the Kent Area Council reaffirm the strike until such assurances had been received.⁷³ Collins also called a mass meeting at the Winter Gardens, Margate, for Sunday 22 February, in order to decide upon a course of action. Meanwhile, the press, nationally and locally, reported the Government's action as a climbdown and a victory for the miners. The *Daily Mirror* commented acerbically:

⁷¹ *Morning Star*, 20.2.81.

⁷² Kent Minutes. 19.2.81.

⁷³ Personal Diary, Philip Sutcliffe, 19-20 February 1981.

The Government gave in to the miners without a fight because the alternative was to give in after a fight. Call it what you will. Retreat, surrender, U-turn, about-turn, capitulation, cartwheel, somersault, reversal, withdrawal or collapse. It was all of those things. It was also commonsense... Mrs. Thatcher's loud insistence that the Government was not for turning had concealed the fact that the turn had already begun, with the vast handouts to British Leyland and British Steel. Beneath the tough words, the Iron Maiden has a velvet fist. Two and a half million unemployed makes anything else impossible.⁷⁴

It was such commentaries that caused many miners, particularly those on the left, to believe that the solidarity of 1972 and 1974 was still there, just beneath the surface. All it needed was for a *Conservative* Prime Minister to pick a fight with the NUM on an issue such as wages or pit closures and miners from all over would put their differences aside and unite in front of a common enemy. The left believed this because it wanted to believe it and because it needed to. Collins' statement about the Government "looking for a breathing space" was widely believed. Certainly Snowdown miners like Arthur Loomer were very suspicious:

In 1981 they tried to close Snowdown ... and there was gonna be a national strike on that issue... Jack Collins sent delegates from Kent to Wales and Scotland and the North and the Midlands to drum-up support. Myself and Moggie [Bryan] went to Northumberland... When she stepped back, she was bloody cleverer than we thought, like. When she stepped back I think the feeling from '81 to '83 was that "Yeah, she's gonna come again" ... Within the industry we used to say... "She'll come again and she'll be in a position of power", which was proved during '84 and '85.⁷⁵

Another Snowdown miner, Paul Jones, speaking about the events of February 1981 expresses the same idea, but more succinctly: "They knew she'd be back. Most definitely."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 20.2.81.

⁷⁵ Arthur Loomer, personal interview. 17.8.93.

⁷⁶ Paul Jones, personal interview. 13.8.93.

As the left wing was convinced about having won only a battle, not the war, it believed that a left-winger should succeed Joe Gormley upon his retirement on 4 April 1982. The natural choice of the left was Scargill. But if it took a reactionary right-wing government to unite the miners, it took a revolutionary left-wing National President to split them again. Just as only a Labour government could have imposed a pit closure programme so only a Joe Gormley could have persuaded Areas like Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire to come out on strike against pit closures in Kent, Scotland, South Wales and Yorkshire. The *Daily Mirror* may well have been correct, therefore, in its concluding editorial advice to the miners:

As for the miners, they won a great victory. But will they throw it away now if they listen to Arthur Scargill instead of Joe Gormley.⁷⁷

But most Kent miners were, in fact, of the same opinion as this unnamed Snowdown miner:

I think we would do better to follow Arthur Scargill rather than Joe Gormley.⁷⁸

The local press of Dover and Canterbury were very sympathetic to the Snowdown miners. Recognising the link between pit and community the *Kentish Gazette* declared: "Aylesham Reprieved."⁷⁹ And the *Dover Express* in a similar vein announced: "Reprieve Delight at Snowdown."⁸⁰ However, both newspapers were keen to stress that the miners did not believe the reprieve was necessarily permanent and that they were still on strike. Danny Deary, Snowdown Branch Treasurer, was adamant:

We are staying out on strike until we hear the full details of Snowdown's future. We have not heard anything yet.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 20.2.81.

⁷⁸ *The Sunday Telegraph*, 22.2.81.

⁷⁹ *Kentish Gazette*, 20.2.81.

⁸⁰ *D.E.*, 20.2.81.

⁸¹ *D.E.*, 20.2.81.

The KNUM, for the first time also expressed its belief in the relationship between the life of the colliery and the community:

The Area Council would never be a party to agreeing to close any pit or to destroy any of the mining communities like Snowdown, Aylesham or Woolage. We are totally opposed to pit closures and job losses and creating dead villages.⁸²

Clearly there had been a psychological change in the attitude of miners to pit closures. No such utterances were heard at the closing of Chislet Colliery in 1969. Previously all that had mattered was whether other jobs were available, and as there had been no compulsory redundancies there was very little opposition. Nothing was said about preserving the community life of Hersden, the village which served Chislet Colliery. But, by 1981 'community' had emerged.

The mass meeting took place at Margate on Sunday 22 February with over two thousand Kent miners in attendance.⁸³ Realising that they were alone now, the rest of the British coalfield having returned to work, the Area Council proposed the following recommendation to the men:

In order that the NCB are made aware of our serious intention to oppose the closure of Snowdown Colliery and our determination to have that colliery developed, the Area Council are recommending that work resumes at 6 a.m. on Monday 23 February, 1981, and that the present ban on overtime working should remain in operation.⁸⁴

The recommendation was carried and the strike in Kent was ended. The overtime ban was lifted on Wednesday 25 February. Kent miners were now firmly established as 'militant', with Snowdown Colliery's past reputation for moderacy gone, if not forgotten. This was a small but vociferous coalfield upon which Scargill could rely for support in his campaign for

⁸² *D.E.*, 20.2.81.

⁸³ *Personal Diary*, Philip Sutcliffe, 22.2.81.

⁸⁴ *Kent Minutes*, 21.2.81.

the national presidency. In fact he visited Snowdown Colliery on Wednesday 7 October 1981, and spoke that evening in Aylesham at the Welfare Club. His speech, naturally, concentrated on pit closures, and he was given a rousing reception. Official endorsement of Scargill's candidature was given by the KNUM on 23 November.⁸⁵

Throughout the debacle of February 1981 Leicestershire miners continued working. There was no plan for accelerated closure of any of their pits, and a new pit was being prepared at Asfordby in the Vale of Belvoir. This offered a lifeline to miners at the old pits of Bagworth, Ellistown, Snibston and Whitwick. The miners at those pits had accepted the inevitability of their closure in the not too distant future, believing the NCB point of view that workable reserves would be exhausted within ten years. Keith Mellin, a Snowdown miner who transferred to Ellistown Colliery in 1981 after he had married a Leicestershire woman, found the prospects for the future very bleak:

Most Leicestershire miners knew that their area only had a limited life anyway... When I went to Ellistown they told me that it had twelve years... Reserves were going down.⁸⁶

John Tomlinson, a miner at Whitwick and then Bagworth, cited the rundown of the Leicestershire coalfield as the reason why its miners were latterly reluctant to take industrial action:

Because the pits in the Leicestershire Area ... had only got about four or five years left anyway... So what was really the point of striking?⁸⁷

And Frank Gregory, a Desford miner, was quite convinced of the NCB justification for pit closures in Leicestershire:

⁸⁵ Kent Minutes, 23.11.81.

⁸⁶ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

⁸⁷ John Tomlinson, personal interview, 10.8.95.

Nobody's got any grouse round here about the pits closing because they run out of coal.⁸⁸

However, Peter Smith, a faceworker at Bagworth and the last Leicestershire Area Secretary, has a more sceptical attitude which, nonetheless, does not hide the fact that he knew the Leicestershire coalfield was going to be closed down:

In the Leicestershire coalfield we had got a rundown plan. We knew our pits were going to close... There is coal, but whether it's viable, or proven viable...⁸⁹

The rundown of the Leicestershire coalfield was formal, an agreement between management and unions having been drawn up. *Coal News*, the official mouthpiece of the NCB reported it in a very matter of fact way:

Mining unions and the Board have agreed on a streamlining programme for Leicestershire collieries... It balances the remaining workable reserves in the coalfield between the six collieries involved - all of which will run out of coal by the end of the decade - coupled with a reduction in manpower. Redundancies are included in the programme, but the aim is to give the pitmen the best possible deal while protecting skills which will be needed in future developments in the new North East Leicestershire coalfield.⁹⁰

The new coalfield was the Vale of Belvoir with just one colliery at Asfordby offering employment to about 1100 men, enough to accomodate many of the younger generation of Coalville miners who wished to remain in mining. A joint statement of the NCB and the unions was issued which was remarkable for its concord, especially when compared with the situation in Kent:

⁸⁸ Frank Gregory, personal interview, 23.7.93.

⁸⁹ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

⁹⁰ *Coal News*, (South Midlands), June 1982.

In order to protect the majority of jobs for as long as possible ... transfers and redundancies need to take place during the year, over and above national wastage which will occur ... we are down to the last few million tons of reserves, which are not evenly spread among the six pits... There was no point in solely relying on natural wastage - inevitably this occurs where we do not want it.⁹¹

This widespread acceptance of the inevitability of the closure of Leicestershire pits does, of course, go a long way towards explaining the complacency of Coalville miners in the 1980s over the NCB's general pit closure programme. And it was certainly a contributing factor to their refusing to strike in 1984-85, wishing to earn as much as possible in the time that was left to them while improving their final redundancy payments. But it was not the only factor, as we shall see. The reluctance of Leicestershire miners to participate in NUM action against pit closures is typified by the following conversation at a meeting of the Leicestershire Area Council in October 1982:

Some felt that strike action would seriously damage the prospects of their particular colliery. Thought also had to be given to the men coming up for redundancy should a lengthy strike ensue ... they had, too, also agreed to a closure programme in this area, albeit a slow death and should that be jeopardised?⁹²

The apparent complacency of the Leicestershire miners about their future was not mirrored by the local county and district councils. They estimated that fifteen per cent of male residents in the North West Leicestershire area were miners, and that in some communities the figure was as high as thirty per cent. In 1981 this meant a total of 3,900 Coalville miners working at the six pits still in operation. By November 1982, this had fallen to 3,550 and would be just over 3,000 by April 1983. As a result, unemployment forecasts for the region by the end of the decade were between 22 per cent and 28 per cent.⁹³ This in comparison with a

⁹¹ *Coal News*, June 1982.

⁹² Griffin, *Volume III*, 192.

⁹³ *The Closure of the Leicestershire Coalfield. A Submission to the Secretary of State for the Environment*.

national unemployment rate of 6.2 per cent in April 1981,⁹⁴ which had risen to over nine per cent by January 1983.⁹⁵ While the *Submission* attempts to warn of the seriousness of the impending situation it also accepts without question the NCB's decision over the coalfield and bases part of its reasoning for government assistance on the moderate loyalty of the Leicestershire miners over more than one hundred years:

Whilst the local authorities accept the inevitability of the closures, they also consider it essential to take action now to mitigate the economic and social problems which will follow from the closures... For more than one hundred years the Leicestershire Coalfield has fuelled the furnaces of Britain's industry. During the whole of that period the coalfield has enjoyed an enviable reputation for profitability and the reliability of its work-force ... the Leicestershire men ... are renowned for their moderation and reasonableness. Now that this area, which has given so much to the nation ... is falling on hard times for no other reason than its coal seams are exhausted, a little modest assistance for a few years is surely no more than its due.⁹⁶

After February 1981, "slow death" is an apposite phrase to be applied to NCB policy towards some regions in the coal industry. Of the twenty-three pits earmarked for accelerated closure, nine were in fact closed by October 1981 and most of the others were closed by March 1983.⁹⁷ Snowdown Colliery miners celebrated their reprieve as a temporary victory and the NCB treated it as a temporary setback. Losses at Snowdown were enormous. Between 1976 and 1980-81 the colliery lost £21 million, £7 million of which was for the year 1980-81.⁹⁸ Clearly, in the eyes of the Board, this could not be allowed to continue, but if the unions would not accept closure then there had to be some form of serious reorganisation. At a joint meeting of unions and management it was suggested that a new face could be opened at Snowdown at

(Leicester: Leicestershire County Council, North West Leicestershire District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, February 1983.)

⁹⁴ Official Census, 1981.

⁹⁵ *Submission*.

⁹⁶ *Submission*.

⁹⁷ Ashworth, 418.

⁹⁸ *Kentish Gazette*, 20.2.81.

a cost of £3.5 million, taking three years to develop. However, the Colliery had lost over £1 million in just the first two months of 1981-82 (April -May), and at this rate would lose in the region of £18 million while development took place. In order to persuade the Board of the need to invest the money required to open a new face such losses would have to be contained through streamlining.⁹⁹ In concrete terms this meant reducing manpower at Snowdown Colliery from 960 to 450 through a process of transfers to Betteshanger and Tilmanstone Collieries and voluntary redundancies to men over fifty-five at all three pits. The KNUM insisted that before such proposals could be implemented all three Branch unions would have to be consulted. John Moyle also stressed NUM opposition to the Kent coalfield having less than three thousand men working at three pits.¹⁰⁰ At a meeting of the KNUM Executive in August 1981, Jack Collins indicated his opposition to transfers and redundancies, but he, along with the rest of the Executive, agreed that:

... because of the actions taken by the membership last February, the Kent miners had won the right for Snowdown to be developed.¹⁰¹

Tilmanstone Branch accepted the NCB proposals providing certain guarantees were given, but Snowdown and Betteshanger Branches were less enthusiastic. The Area Council simply agreed to continue talking with the Board on the issue.

This was a very difficult period for Snowdown miners who were, understandably, quite nervous about their future. While they were consistently blamed for losses, they were adamant that there were good reserves at Snowdown Colliery and that it was a combination of geological faults and bad management planning which halted production. Collins stated:

That to accept the Board's proposals would be to allow all of their bad management and planning mistakes to be covered up.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Minutes, Joint Union Meeting, 29.6.81.

¹⁰⁰ Joint Meeting, 29.6.81.

¹⁰¹ Kent Minutes, 18.8.81.

¹⁰² Kent Minutes, 24.9.81.

By the end of 1981 the KNUM had decided that the NCB proposals on transfers and redundancies from Snowdown Colliery were acceptable in principle but that the scale of the streamlining was far too large. An Area Conference in January 1982 agreed to accept a reduction in manpower at Snowdown to seven hundred men, but no less. It also insisted that all men transferred be given the opportunity to go back to Snowdown once development was completed. A resolution, agreed by the Conference, shows the determination of the KNUM over this issue:

The Area Council are determined to maintain the three pits in the Area and will, if necessary, defend any pit that comes under attack in the future in the same way that Snowdown was defended last February and further we are opposed to mass redundancies.¹⁰³

With the KNUM taking such a hard line the Board had no option but to submit its proposals to Hobart House without the formal agreement of the unions to either job losses or transfers. And without such an agreement there was very little likelihood that the NCB would give the go-ahead to expensive development plans at Snowdown Colliery. An impasse had been reached and NUM/NCB negotiations were halted by the NCB. The KNUM was worried and irritated at this sudden rupture in the consultation machinery and repeatedly insisted on further talks.¹⁰⁴ Collins, suspicious of the Board, suggested that this might be a deliberate tactic by them to create divisions among the men.¹⁰⁵ The mood in the Kent coalfield was one of anger, the miners being convinced that closure of Snowdown Colliery was what the Board really wanted. They began to talk about one-day and even all-out strikes with delegations being sent to other Areas in order to solicit support.¹⁰⁶ The arrival of Scargill to the National Presidency, combined with the example of February 1981, persuaded the Kent miners that they could preserve all three pits, but that the only way to do so was to oppose both the NCB and

¹⁰³ Kent Minutes, 9.1.82.

¹⁰⁴ Kent Minutes, 15.3.82 and 25.3.82.

¹⁰⁵ Kent Minutes, 25.3.82.

¹⁰⁶ Kent Minutes, 19.4.82.

the Government head-on. This uncompromising attitude was reflected in a letter authorised by the Area Council to be sent to all the unions involved with, and traditionally in support of, the miners. The letter spoke of plans to hold a one-day strike at all three Kent pits on 2 June 1982, and asked the other unions not to handle Kent coal on that day or cross picket lines. It concluded:

... no cost or effort will be spared in securing the future of that colliery whilst at the same time retaining the jobs of our miners.¹⁰⁷

In May 1982, a joint meeting of unions and management took place at which the plans for Snowdown Colliery were announced. They were even more drastic than had been anticipated. Ralph Rawlinson began by reporting recent losses in the Kent coalfield:

1977-82 - £56 million

1981-82 - £20 million

Snowdown Colliery losses:

1977-82 - £30 million

1981-82 - £8.9 million

Source: NCB South Midlands Area General Colliery Review Meeting - Kent Colliery - 26 May 1982.

Rawlinson announced that the NCB were prepared to invest £3.2 million in developing No. 7 seam at Snowdown Colliery, but during the construction period coal production would cease and the Colliery would become a 'development only pit'. Consequently, the workforce would be reduced from 850 to 200 men. One hundred miners would be transferred to Tilmanstone and fifty to Betteshanger. There would be five hundred redundancies, voluntary and compulsory. The NCB would only invest in Snowdown if the KNUM accepted the transfers and job losses. Not surprisingly the miners refused, Collins saying he was "disgusted" at the

¹⁰⁷ NUM Kent Area: *Campaign to develop the huge coal reserves at Snowdown Colliery, Kent*. Letter to Various Unions, 19.4.82.

Board's proposals which had "set the NUM on a strike course", and he made clear his suspicions about the Board's overall intentions:

It seems to me they are paving the way for the closure of the Kent coalfield.¹⁰⁸

Collins declared that he would be seeking support from the National Union and then led his delegation out of the meeting. Members of the other unions present also declared their disappointment at the plans for Snowdown which they maintained was a viable pit. T. Webster of NACODS asked if rejection of the proposals would result in Snowdown closing. Rawlinson replied that this had not been a consideration and that the promise of massive investment in Snowdown Colliery was proof of the Board's ultimate faith in the colliery and the coalfield. However, it must be noted that losing a £3.2 million investment was arguably more acceptable than the £8 million which Snowdown was losing annually. Rawlinson almost admitted as much:

Closure of the present workings will reduce losses but there will still be a heavy financial burden keeping the pit open in addition to the cost of the new development.¹⁰⁹

The NCB had now thrown down the gauntlet to the Kent miners which they were not slow in picking up. On 2 June, during the one-day stoppage, a mass meeting was held at Aylesham on the Welfare sports ground. Jack Collins, addressing the crowd, accused the NCB of deceit and treachery, and rallied the miners with this call:

We have got to convince them that we will not see mining communities destroyed at the whim of a pen pusher in London.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *D.E.*, 28.5.82.

¹⁰⁹ *Coal News*, June 1982.

¹¹⁰ *D.E.*, 4.6.82.

There was an overwhelming majority, although not unanimity, in favour of strike action, and Collins agreed to send a circular to all NUM Areas asking for support. As part of the letter Collins included the two most important resolutions passed at the meeting:

1. That as from the 19 June this coalfield will come out on a total strike and,
2. That men from the Kent Area should go into other areas to meet the leadership and as many members as possible, in order to announce the date of the proposed stoppage and at the same time seek support from your membership.¹¹¹

Despite the majority in favour of strike action, there were fears among the Kent leadership that there could be splits, especially among the older membership, due to the redundancy payments on offer. The mass meeting at Aylesham had not been totally united, especially after Collins had said that the Union would stop men taking redundancy payments. Many of the older men were outraged and made their feelings known by shouting and heckling.¹¹² Collins explained to local journalists:

Their reaction is understandable. If they have worked for years down a pit they want to take the money that's offered... I will not be a party to selling miners' jobs, they are not our jobs to sell.¹¹³

David Garrity, a young faceworker at Snowdown Colliery, expressed the young miners' worries about the attractions of redundancy:

It looks good to the people who have been down there a long time, but it is there to split the men.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ NUM Kent Area: *Action to Develop Snowdown Colliery*, letter, 2.6.82.

¹¹² *Adscene*, 10.6.82. Telephone conversation, Philip Sutcliffe, 26.8.98.

¹¹³ *Adscene*, 10.6.82.

¹¹⁴ *D.E.*, 4.6.82.

Lawrence Knight, Snowdown Branch President in 1982, confirmed this idea that the redundancy question, as far as he was concerned, was a deliberate ploy to split the miners:

After '81 the first thing the Government did was change redundancy. That was designed to make sure that a certain percentage of your support was alienated... They were being told, "Well, look, there's a nice little redundancy package here for you. Don't worry about pit closures because you'll be okay." That was the psychology behind redundancy.¹¹⁵

Garrity's and Knight's fears seemed well-founded. Vic Roycroft, a fifty-five year old Snowdown faceworker, expressed sentiments typical of Lockwood's 'privatised' worker, which show the inherent dangers in generalising about levels of militancy/moderacy in particular industries or areas within an industry:

He takes home £120 a week and reckons he would receive £114 a week for five years plus a lump sum of £11,000 if he took redundancy, which he hopes to do. He accused the unions of holding information back from the miners over the redundancy terms ... the men should decide for themselves whether to take redundancy - it should not be a matter for the union.¹¹⁶

Such attitudes expressed by a Kent faceworker would probably come as a shock to people with notions about the typicality of militant Kent miners. Indeed, as this study has attempted to show, the reputation of Kent's militancy was largely based on the activities of Betteshanger Colliery and could only very recently be accurately applied to the whole Kent coalfield. Lawrence Knight worked at Chislet Colliery at the time of its closure and was then transferred to Snowdown Colliery. He joined the Communist Party in 1966, after becoming a miner, and

¹¹⁵ Interview, Lawrence Knight, 29.9.89.

¹¹⁶ *D.E.*, 4.6.82.

came into contact with the likes of Dunn and Collins. Like them he worked to make Kent a militant coalfield, which it certainly was not in the 1960s:

Kent hasn't always been a left-wing area. Chislet wasn't exactly a left-wing pit. Nor was Snowdown.¹¹⁷

However, the birth of militancy at Snowdown Colliery in the early 1970s and its coming to maturity in the 1980s, exhibited by the miners being prepared to take industrial action to protect jobs and communities, is in direct contrast to the behaviour of Coalville miners, who, after a brief flirtation with militancy reverted to type and accepted the rundown of their coalfield. This disparity in industrial behaviour between two coalfields is, of course, at the heart of this present study. And, as we have already seen, aspects of (non)community, isolated mass, historical tradition, company towns and the pecuniary worker form the essence of the explanation for the Coalville/Aylesham dichotomy.

The all-out strike planned for the Kent coalfield from 19 June never took place. Kent miners had travelled throughout the British coalfield explaining their case, and, with Scargill's backing, much support was promised, especially from those areas also under threat. On 10 June the NEC met and Jack Collins wrote to the members. He thanked Scargill and demanded that the NEC uphold its strong line on pit closures and job losses. He also explained, once again, his view of the Board's real intentions regarding Snowdown Colliery:

I suspected all the time that they wanted the men removed from Snowdown Colliery in order that they could then, with only a handful of men left at the pit, refuse to develop it or "prove" that it was not now a viable proposition to do so... I feel certain that the same "negotiating" tactics have been employed by the Board in other areas.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Knight, personal interview, 29.9.89.

¹¹⁸ NUM Kent Area, letter to members of the NEC, 10.6.82.

A compromise deal between the unions and the Board was worked out whereby 450 miners would remain at Snowdown Colliery working on two faces while development work took place on opening up a new seam. The KNUM agreed to a limited number of transfers to Tilmanstone and Betteshanger and did not try to stop voluntary redundancies although its official position remained opposed to such a policy.¹¹⁹ There was yet again an uneasy truce, the Snowdown miners firmly believing that the 'big one', a national strike to save the whole British coal industry, was just around the corner. They could not have been more right.

Countdown to Crisis: Background to the 1984-85 Miners' Strike.

The Government's climbdown in February 1981 convinced nobody, not even the Leicestershire miners, that that was the end of the story. Scargill had set the tone of the NUM/NCB/Government relationship in one of his presidential campaign speeches, delivered in his traditional demagogic style:

If you want someone who will prostitute his principles for office, get someone else because I'm not interested...I'm sick to death of leaders who say one thing and do another. I will not compromise.¹²⁰

And Thatcher has made clear her view of Scargill, and what she believed his ultimate goal was, on several occasions:

... a Marxist revolutionary - going under the guise of a normal trade union official¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *East Kent Mercury (E.K.M.)*, 2.11.83 and 16.11.83. Telephone conversation with Philip Sutcliffe. 26.8.98.

¹²⁰ Huw Beynon, 9.

¹²¹ McGregor, 12.

In a later interview with the BBC she expanded upon this in a clear attempt at self-justification for her government's behaviour during 1984-85:

Mr. Scargill was a real militant trade unionist. The militants weren't content to use strikes merely to further their own people and the standard of living of their own people. They wanted to use them to bring down a government. They were quite open about it. If they could not get what they wanted by democracy they would take the fight to the streets.¹²²

However, blaming Arthur Scargill is only one side of the argument. If he was prepared to use the miners as the shock troops of the labour movement in a full-frontal assault on the state, he found an equally determined Prime-Minister as reactionary as he was radical. As we saw in Chapter Three, Thatcher was part of the Heath Government which collapsed in 1974, an event which many have described as a turning-point in the psyche of the Conservative Party. Eric Heffer, a prominent left-winger in the Labour Party, assessed the effect of 1974 thus:

The ruling class, especially that section which looked to the 'radical right' as the answer to Britain's problems, never forgot or forgave this. Once the Conservatives regained political office, this time under Margaret Thatcher, they determined to bring the miners to heel and, if possible, inflict a major defeat on the entire trade union and labour movement. They prepared well for the struggle...¹²³

The most convincing, and widely cited, piece of evidence that the Conservatives were preparing very early on for a confrontation with the NUM is the "Ridley Plan" leaked to *The Economist* in 1978.¹²⁴ Nicholas Ridley was chairman of a group of Conservative back-benchers with responsibility for making policy proposals concerning the nationalised industries.

¹²² *The Thatcher Years*, BBC Productions, 1993.

¹²³ Heffer, "Preface" in Beynon (ed.). xi.

¹²⁴ "Appotomax or Civil War?" *The Economist*, 27.5.78.

In his final report Ridley anticipated that within two years of a Conservative government's life there would be a major dispute within a nationalised industry, probably the coal industry:

The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories in a field they think could be won... The group believes the most likely battleground will be the coal industry.¹²⁵

Ridley therefore made some very specific recommendations in order to meet such a challenge:

- build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at power stations;
- make contingency plans for the import of coal;
- encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary;
- introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible;
- the group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be to cut off the money supply to the strikers and make the union finance them;
- there should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing;
- 'good non-union drivers' should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection.

However, Adeney and Lloyd refute the importance of the 'Ridley Plan', claiming that it had disappeared into obscurity by the early 1980s, Ridley himself having difficulty in finding a copy when asked for one.¹²⁶ This claim seems particularly lacking in credibility when one considers the facts.

Following her very public about-turn in February 1981, Thatcher commissioned an *ad hoc* committee, MISC 57, under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Wade-Gery, the then chairman of the Civil Contingencies Unit.¹²⁷ MISC 57 had the task of analysing the events of 1972 and

¹²⁵ *The Economist*, 27.5.78.

¹²⁶ Adeney and Lloyd. 73.

¹²⁷ Adeney and Lloyd. 78-79. The CCU had been established by Heath in 1973 to ensure the availability

1974 in order that history should not repeat itself - either as tragedy or farce, as far as the Conservatives were concerned. It was a clear case of contingency planning, and evidence that the Prime Minister was preparing for a showdown with the unions and almost certainly with the NUM. The recommendations of the 'Ridley Plan' were then followed to the letter, as Margaret Scammell has shown.¹²⁸

Coal stocks were built up from 37 million tons in 1980 to 58 million tons by 1983. Imports, despite Howell's promise to the NUM in February 1981 to limit them, were increased from 4.4 million tons to ten million tons by 1984. The person largely responsible for this strategy was Sir Walter Marshall, the ex-head of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), appointed as Chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) in July 1982. He replaced Glyn England whose political sympathies were in doubt, as far as Thatcher was concerned, as a result of his earlier membership of the Labour Party and his antipathy to the idea of building up coal stocks. Marshall was prepared to build up stocks and go even further, implementing a strategy whereby power stations could easily be switched, in the event of a crisis - a miners' strike - from coal to oil. Beynon and McMylor are convinced that Marshall's appointment was part of the Conservative Government's deliberate attempt to implement the 'Ridley Plan':

If England's sensibilities were inclined towards coal, Marshall - the key ideologist of the nuclear power industry - was as steadfast in his antagonism. Repeatedly in the early weeks he proclaimed the view that "seventy per cent dependency upon coal is excessive", repeatedly he talked of the "monopoly power of the miners". In Marshall, Thatcher had a protagonist who shared her political inclinations. MacGregor at the NCB was a similar appointment. Here were men who were willing partners in the task of operating the Ridley Plan...¹²⁹

of vital supplies and to form links between the nation's chief constables and the heads of the military districts. It has never been used.

¹²⁸ Margaret Scammell, *The Enemy Within: Government and the Miners' Strike 1984-85*, (Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics, No. 45, 1986).

¹²⁹ Huw Beynon and Peter McMylor, "Decisive Power: The New Tory State Against the Miners", Beynon. (ed.), 37.

Power stations were thus converted to dual oil/coal firing and the CEGB later announced that the 1984-85 strike had added an extra £1,769 million to its bill due to the increased use of oil. In November 1984, The *Financial Times* commented:

The CEGB is using slightly more oil in six weeks than throughout the whole of 1983... Oil is being burned not only on large oil-fired stations such as the Isle of Grain and Littlebrook on the Thames ... but also in coalfield stations.¹³⁰

Two other analysts of the strike, Jonathan and Ruth Winterton, also noted the importance of the increased use of oil in the battle against the miners, a battle which meant keeping industry going and domestic lights on at all costs in order to win the psychological warfare:

It was oil rather than coal which kept the lights on.¹³¹

The Conservative Government showed very quickly just how important it regarded cutting social security payments to strikers. Geoffrey Howe, Thatcher's first Chancellor of the Exchequer, commented:

The social security payments a striker may claim on behalf of his family can be one of several factors which sometimes tilt the balance of industrial power against employers and responsible union leadership alike. The payments have helped sustain some very damaging strikes.¹³²

Consequently, two social security acts were passed in 1980 which ended the right of strikers to claim benefits for themselves and automatically reduced by £16 the amount payable to strikers'

¹³⁰ *The Financial Times*, 28.11.84.

¹³¹ Jonathan Winterton and Ruth Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict. The 1984-85 Miners' Strike in Yorkshire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 149.

¹³² *The Sunday Times*, 5.10.80.

dependents on the, wrongful, assumption that this was how much strike pay was being given by the unions. This measure caused particular hardship for miners and their families during 1984-85, and hit the single striking miner the most as he had absolutely no income during that period. He was, therefore, the most vulnerable, as far as the NUM was concerned, and nothing was said or done about those men who, rather than being active on the picket line, found alternative work during the strike. Jack Collins commented:

Some of our people said those who were not active were not entitled to food parcels. I said the ones who were picketing should take second place, because we had already won them over.¹³³

This moderate, compromising, attitude in the middle of a dispute where the word *compromise* was very rarely heard, was confirmed to have been terribly pragmatic, at grass roots level, by branch leaders such as Philip Sutcliffe:

We knew about it. We wouldn't make a big fuss of it because all the time they were doing that they were getting some money and they wouldn't be ... go[ing] back to work, to put it bluntly. And that's what we were told, unofficially, by Jack Collins ... "The people that are not picketing, that are doing this fieldwork, are the ones that are more likely to be drawn back to work if they have problems... Just as long as they don't go to them pits."¹³⁴

Finally, Ridley's advice to create a well-equipped mobile police force capable of containing mass picketing was taken very seriously. Tony Bunyan has traced the development of a para-military style police force through the 1970s and into the 1980s as a response to the growing civil unrest in the form of mass picketing, political demonstrations and riots. The

¹³³Adeney and Lloyd, 222.

¹³⁴ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.89.

apogee of such policing techniques was reached during the miners' strike at Orgreave coking plant.¹³⁵

Whether or not the Thatcher Government, by accepting the inevitability of a miners' strike and preparing for such an eventuality, provoked the strike is now an irrelevancy. The Thatcherism/Scargillism debate over who started it has gone on for too long and is symptomatic of the, largely media-inspired, disease which wishes to analyse events by personalising them. That the strike happened and was one of the pivotal episodes of the 1980s and in the whole of labour history, is in no doubt. The events leading up to March 1984 are, of course, important in the same way that events leading up to any major event are. Historians need to understand the *whys* and *hows* in history as much as the *whens* and *whats*. Concentrating on the big personalities, interesting and important though they may be, tends to lead to an ignorance of the dynamics of the social and populist movements. Wars do not happen without soldiers and a civilian population ready to fight and put up with the inconveniences. And, while people may be manipulated by state propaganda, there is usually a willingness already in place which allows the propaganda to have its effect. The 'great' twentieth century dictators could not have had their revolutions and wars without a compliant civilian population which had already been battered into submission by various social and economic forces. So with Thatcher and Scargill. Neither of them could have fought the 1984-85 miners' strike without grass roots support, conditioned by history into believing that the other side was out to destroy them. Paranoia or justified fear? The results are just the same.

On 1 September 1983, Ian MacGregor was appointed Chairman of the NCB. Scammell has called this decision "... either foolish or provocative."¹³⁶ In fact it was both. MacGregor's reputation as a right-wing, union-busting businessman was well-established on both sides of the Atlantic. It was not only provocative to a leader like Scargill, it was also foolish and insensitive to those miners who had rejected strike ballots over pay and pit closures. After what MacGregor had done to the British steel industry during his brief chairmanship of the British

¹³⁵ Tony Bunyan, "From Saltley to Orgreave via Brixton", (Journal of Law and Society, Vol. 12, No. 3, Winter 1985), 293-303.

¹³⁶ Scammell, *The Enemy Within*.

Steel Corporation (BSC), 1980-83, earning him the epithet 'Mac the knife', nobody could be left in any doubt about the Government's intentions regarding the coal industry. That became glaringly obvious just a few months later in March 1984. The previous month MacGregor had met all twelve Area Directors and given them their production targets and budgets for 1984-85. George Hayes, the South Yorkshire Area Director, was told to cut half a million tons from his annual capacity of 7.6 million tons. Thus, on 1 March, without following the bilaterally accepted procedure for pit closures, Hayes announced the closure of Cortonwood Colliery. This by itself may not have provoked a major dispute. Polmaise and Bogside Collieries in Scotland had been closed in February 1984 with only limited opposition. But, on 6 March, after the Cortonwood announcement, the NCB announced its plans to cut back four million tons of production capacity through the shutting of twenty pits and the loss of 20,000 jobs.¹³⁷ This was February 1981 all over again, or so the NUM thought, and strike action was now inevitable. Indeed, miners had already walked out on unofficial strike, and a meeting of the NUM Executive on 8 March sanctioned individual Area action through Rule 41, the same rule which had been used to introduce the incentive scheme on an Area by Area basis. The left-wing of the NUM had learned its lesson well and the miners' strike had begun.

If one Area was in a state of high alert for a strike against pit closures, it was Kent. The 'victory' of February 1981 was so temporary that Kent miners had hardly had time to celebrate. Within a year the NCB had put forward new plans involving transfers and redundancies for Snowdown miners. As we have seen, the KNUM had been forced into compromise over this issue and the men remained convinced that the closure of Snowdown Colliery was the ultimate objective of the NCB. Evidence to the contrary, however, came in the form of a feasibility study, conducted by the CEGB in August 1983, into the possibility of converting oil-fired power stations to coal. It recommended that Kent coal be used at Richborough and Isle of Grain power stations, thereby guaranteeing the existence of the Kent Coalfield into the 21st century.¹³⁸ This, of course, was contrary to government policy and that favoured by Sir Walter

¹³⁷ Adeney and Lloyd, 86-87.

¹³⁸ *E.K.M.*, 10.8.83.

Marshall, but the NCB had been forced at least to look as if it was searching for new markets for Kent coal. Had the power stations been converted, which they were not, it would have been the fulfillment of KNUM demands ever since Richborough Power Station was made oil-firing in 1970. However, while discussions were taking place, events overtook both the miners and management which put paid to any idea, serious or not, that the NCB and the Government may have had about expanding the market for Kent coal.

In October 1983, the NUM put in a wage claim for 23 per cent increases across the board. The NCB offered 5.2 per cent which was immediately rejected by the National Union as well as the Area unions. The Kent Area Council, meeting on Monday 12 October, rejected the offer while donating £1000 to Scottish miners who were on strike against pit closures.¹³⁹ This act of generosity on the part of the KNUM was hardly pure altruism. It knew that Kent miners would probably be in the same situation as those in Scotland, and very soon. The three Kent Branch unions supported the local Executive at their meetings on Sunday 16 October, and they voted to support an overtime ban if called upon to do so by the NEC. Jack Collins said the Kent miners were prepared "... to fight if necessary to defend our jobs and our future."¹⁴⁰

The overtime ban came into force on 31 October, and it included a ban on maintenance and safety work at week-ends.¹⁴¹ An overtime ban was widely regarded as the prelude to a strike, it being a tactic to reduce coal stocks and remind miners of just how basic their wage was. In Kent the miners were sure that they were on a countdown to a national strike, some of them even forgetting that the official reason for the overtime ban was a dispute over wages. Paul Jones was one such miner:

It was to try and make them use their stocks up a bit ... before you went on strike because their stocks would be down... Because that's the way they always did it.

Everyone knew what it was, didn't they?¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *E.K.M.*, 12.10.83.

¹⁴⁰ *E.K.M.*, 19.10.83.

¹⁴¹ *D.E.*, 28.10.83.

¹⁴² Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

And Kevin Mellin, another young Snowdown miner, seemed to be very aware of what was going on when the overtime ban was called:

Everyone thought it was to try and get the coal stocks down ... to try and run the coal stocks down.¹⁴³

Because they knew they were on a collision course with the NCB/Government, there was never any question of miners breaking the overtime ban. That would have been counter-productive in the long term. Indeed, some young, single miners never did much overtime anyway. Kevin Fraser, another of the last generation of Snowdown miners, explains why in typically frank terms, tinged with a sense of humour:

I never really done overtime at the pit. Five days was overtime. That was overtime for me.¹⁴⁴

At the beginning of November 1983, there was further evidence to suggest Snowdown and Tilmanstone Collieries were due for closure. *The Times* reported that these pits were classified by the Monopolies and Merger Commission (MMC) report, published in June 1983, as "no hope" because they produced coal at £60 per ton or more. This was £22 per ton higher than the selling price.¹⁴⁵ The MMC report on the coal industry criticised the corporatist method of management and called for a new approach dominated by private and international business. It also recommended high cost pits, such as Snowdown, be closed, this being the only chance the coal industry had of returning to profitability. Not surprisingly, MacGregor adopted the MMC report in its entirety upon his arrival at the head of the NCB, sometimes going so far as to call it his "bible".¹⁴⁶ The NCB said *The Times* article was mere conjecture and that it was going ahead with the redevelopment plan at Snowdown.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

¹⁴⁴ Kevin Fraser, personal interview, 18.8.93.

¹⁴⁵ *The Times*, 5.11.83.

¹⁴⁶ Adeney and Lloyd, 27.

¹⁴⁷ *D.E.*, 11.11.83.

On Wednesday 23 November, Scargill himself visited Snowdown Colliery and went underground to look at the development work. Predictably, he demanded more investment in the Kent Coalfield, but somewhat unrealistically, he called for the sinking of up to five new pits in the region.¹⁴⁸ The NCB did not even bother to reply to this, especially as there was another blow to the Kent Coalfield's prospects at the beginning of December 1983, when a contract to sell Kent coal to a Belgian steel plant was lost. This meant a further fall in the annual revenue of £3 million.¹⁴⁹

Area meetings were becoming regular events in Kent as the Union was concerned to maintain solidarity in the coalfield. Nationally known speakers were often invited to address the miners. The speakers were always on the left of either the NEC or the Labour Party, such as when Peter Heathfield, the North Derbyshire Area Secretary, and Dennis Skinner M.P., were invited to speak at Deal Welfare Club on Sunday 16 December. The theme was always the same: the NCB was about to embark upon another round of pit closures, the most serious in the industry's history, and that such a programme must be opposed and defeated, by industrial action if necessary.¹⁵⁰ Local leaders always spoke too, to reiterate the point, to press home the implications for the Kent Coalfield and to reinforce the link between Area and National unions. The KNUM was determined that the rank-and-file would feel a sense of inclusiveness which it knew would increase solidarity at all levels. A distant leadership creates alienation resulting in a weakened/diluted sense of solidarity. At such meetings there would often be reports of what was happening in the coal industry in other countries. The KNUM was keen to adopt an internationalist approach and, under the leadership of Dunn, and then Collins, regularly sent men to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. The objective was to give the men a different, wider outlook on their own industry and, hopefully, to see how much better miners in 'communist' countries fared. The result was, in fact, not always the one desired by the KNUM leadership. Kent miners were somewhat ambiguous in their appreciation of industrial life under alleged communism as Philip Sutcliffe shows in this assessment of his

¹⁴⁸ *D.E.*, 25.11.83 and *E.K.M.* 30.11.83.

¹⁴⁹ *D.E.*, 16.12.83.

¹⁵⁰ *D.E.*, 23.12.83.

visit to Cuba in July 1983. Keen to be honest, but concerned not to criticise communism or give any comfort to capitalism, his account tries to be an apology for Cuba:

I went down the pits in Cuba... They were right on the doorstep of America and America had put this embargo on. So they couldn't get anything - materials or knowledge or expertise that they needed in their pits... Everything that they had had to come from half way across the world from Russia. And that was explained... The conditions were horrendous for a miner like me. But they said that people there understood why they had to work in them conditions... Cuba is a country that has only just come out ... from a sort of feudal system ... a Third World country... They are more socialist than here because you didn't have the massive differentials in pay... A miner wouldn't get a lot less than a doctor ... and they say that stops the incentive to be a doctor, but that isn't the case, because people fully understand and accept the situation they were in.¹⁵¹

Sutcliffe, along with Lawrence Knight and Jack Collins, was one of the local leaders who spoke at the Deal meeting. Collins accused the NCB of stockpiling coal while old people were freezing to death in their homes.¹⁵²

1984 began with an election campaign in the NUM. Lawrence Daly had decided to take early retirement, and a replacement General Secretary was sought. John Walsh, from North Yorkshire, was the right-wing candidate, and Peter Heathfield represented the left-wing choice. The KNUM supported Heathfield.¹⁵³ Voting, on Friday 20 January, was very close, Heathfield winning by a whisker majority of just 3,516 votes.¹⁵⁴ This was a significant result because it delivered the top echelons of the NUM leadership into the hands of the left while confirming the obvious political divisions within the NUM as a whole. The election result should perhaps have served as a warning to Scargill and the left of the dangers of embarking

¹⁵¹ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 2.9.93.

¹⁵² *D.E.*, 23.12.83.

¹⁵³ *D.E.*, 20.1.84.

¹⁵⁴ Goodman, 36.

upon a national strike at the present time. It may have helped inform their decision not to hold a national ballot over the issue.

By February 1984, the atmosphere among miners and other trade unionists was very tense. Thatcher had shown very clearly her distrust of unions by banning them from GCHQ (Government Communications Head Quarters) Cheltenham, in January 1984. This decision, taken against the advice of Sir Robert Armstrong, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service, was a delayed response to the civil servants' strike of 1981.¹⁵⁵ Trade unionists were furious and, for once, totally united in their opposition to what was a slander on their loyalty and patriotism. But the union ban was enforced, and the TUC did nothing except fume. Scargill tried to tap into this angry frustration at a joint union meeting at Dover Town Hall on Sunday 26 February. Representatives of the NUM, NACODS, the TGWU, NUR, ASLEF and the NUS were present, principal speakers being Scargill, Ron Todd, General Secretary of the TGWU, and Jimmy Knapp, leader of the NUR.¹⁵⁶ Scargill, playing on the justified paranoia created by Thatcher's overt hostility to the unions, demanded unity in the trade union movement. He claimed that the NCB was planning to import Polish coal from Gdansk in the event of a miners' strike. Knapp pledged support from the NUR with the promise that his members would not move the imported coal.¹⁵⁷ Scargill also reiterated his allegation that the NCB had a 'hit list' of seventy pits to be closed, and he said that coal stocks would be exhausted within seven weeks.¹⁵⁸ Both claims proved to be very painful for the miners: the first for its understating of the number of pits to be closed and the second for its optimistic exaggeration.

The period of another 'phoney war' in the history of coal mining came to an end at the beginning of March 1984. After the NCB announcement of 6 March that twenty pits would be closed during the coming year, Jack Collins demanded to know if Kent pits were on the list. The NCB refused to comment.¹⁵⁹ By this time, however, miners in Yorkshire and Scotland were already on unofficial strike, and it was just a matter of time before Kent joined them. On

¹⁵⁵ Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall*, (London: Fontana Press, 1989), 684-85.

¹⁵⁶ *E.K.M.*, 29.2.84.

¹⁵⁷ *E.K.M.*, 29.2.84.

¹⁵⁸ *D.E.*, 2.3.84.

¹⁵⁹ *D.E.*, 9.3.84.

Sunday 11 March, pithead meetings took place at all three Kent pits, with an Area recommendation to strike immediately. The voting at Snowdown and Betteshanger was unanimous; at Tilmanstone there was a small minority against striking.¹⁶⁰ Arthur Loomer, another Snowdown miner transferred to Tilmanstone during the redevelopment period, also noted the less than enthusiastic response to the strike call. He had his own explanation for this which lays great emphasis on the important role of 'community' combined with the power of Branch officials in instilling and controlling thought and behaviour in pit villages. His analysis is just as pertinent to the days when Snowdown Branch and Aylesham village were "controlled by Catholics" as it is to the more recent regime of the militants:

Betteshanger and Snowdown, they've got a village and the pit's next to the village. Tilmanstone, all their workers used to come in from Dover, Canterbury and all the surrounding villages. I don't think their Branch had such a tight hold on them as we did in Aylesham, or they did at Betteshanger... Tilmanstone would have a meeting. They'd all come into the meeting and they'd say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah", and they'd all go home and that's it. You wouldn't see them again... The Branch never seemed to have control on them as what we did in Aylesham and what they did in Betteshanger.¹⁶¹

The significant phrases, of course, are "tight hold" and "control", and Loomer recognises the importance of propinquity, "the pit's next to the village", in establishing such union power. Throughout this study of Snowdown Colliery and Aylesham village that relationship between colliery and community has been evident. The changing fortunes and political behaviour at the pit have determined the nature of the community of Aylesham. Now that relationship would be tested, strained and strengthened in the coming year in what was, without doubt, the most important twelve months in the history of the village.

On Monday 12 March 1984, the Kent Coalfield went on strike. Jack Collins declared that:

¹⁶⁰ Gerald Marley, personal interview, 30.8.89. Marley was a Snowdown miner until being transferred to Tilmanstone in 1983. *D.E.*, 16.3.84.

¹⁶¹ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 12.8.93.

There is no turning back. Kent miners can only go one way now.¹⁶²

Arthur Loomer expressed the vibrant enthusiasm that Snowdown miners had had for the strike:

March '84 - Cortonwood - and that was it. We was away, up and running... We were ready to go from Day One, virtually.¹⁶³

And Hazel Norton, an Aylesham miner's wife, set the tone for the involvement of the women over the coming year:

I know a lot of the miners' wives in the village and we are all behind the men in what they are doing - they have had to come out to fight for their jobs.¹⁶⁴

There was just one small, but significant, error in Mrs. Norton's remark: the women were not "behind" their men in this particular struggle, they were to be alongside, and sometimes, even leading them.

Unlike the Kent miners, who based their belief in the NCB's intention to close their collieries on rumour and conjecture, albeit well-founded, the Leicestershire miners had no doubts about the rundown of their coalfield because by mid-1983 they were in the thick of it. In September 1983, the decision to close Desford Colliery was brought forward to February 1984.¹⁶⁵ The men at the colliery were angry because closure had originally been planned for 1985. However, they seemed resigned to their fate and accepted the NCB argument that the colliery was exhausted. They voted for closure and the date was set for 10 February 1984.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² *E.K.M.*, 14.3.84.

¹⁶³ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 12.8.93.

¹⁶⁴ *D.E.*, 16.3.84.

¹⁶⁵ *Coalville Times*, (*C.T.*), 16.9.83.

¹⁶⁶ *C.T.*, 23.9.83.

Snibston Colliery was also set for closure on 16 December 1983. Again there was no opposition.¹⁶⁷

Although compliant with the rundown of their coalfield, the Leicestershire miners were prepared to fight for improved pay in an attempt to boost wages in the time remaining to them. Consequently, there was a majority in support of the national overtime ban to begin on 1 November 1983.¹⁶⁸ And on the first day of the ban there was a strike at Bagworth Colliery over the management's deployment of men. Ellistown Colliery joined in the dispute, accusing local management of adopting a "hardline attitude" in its reaction to the ban thus contributing to a deteriorating relationship with the men.¹⁶⁹ This was bad tactics on the part of the Leicestershire management as they risked alienating the miners thereby pushing them into the militant camp. Keith Mellin made a very intelligent and accurate observation on Leicestershire miners and their capacity for industrial action, an observation which could be applied to the whole history of the Leicestershire Coalfield:

They weren't afraid to down tools... They weren't afraid to strike... I think they wanted cast iron reasons to go on strike.¹⁷⁰

Jim Cowan, the NCB Deputy Chairman, threatened the Bagworth and Ellistown miners with the cancellation of the new Asfordby development if their action continued and said, in a less perceptive comment on the Leicestershire miners' industrial militancy:

These are good men acting out of character.¹⁷¹

This was a patronising comment which completely missed the point. That Leicestershire had a history of moderacy and peaceful industrial relations was not due to some genetic disposition. Rather, as we have seen, it was a product of good working conditions, high wages and a co-

¹⁶⁷ C.T., 16.9.83.

¹⁶⁸ C.T., 28.10.83.

¹⁶⁹ C.T., 4.11.83.

¹⁷⁰ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

¹⁷¹ C.T., 11.11.83.

operative management that included the unions in the decision-making process. This, combined, of course, with the watered-down homogeneity of the town of Coalville which meant that miners did not always work, live and play in the same strictly limited geographical area. However, if any one of these 'ingredients' were to alter, such as a fall in the miners' economic prosperity (viz. 1972 and 1974), or a change in the management's willingness to consult, then the political make-up of the coalfield could also veer in a very different direction.

MacGregor visited Bagworth Colliery on Monday 21 November, by which time the dispute had ended amicably. He praised the good man/management relations in the Leicestershire Coalfield and announced the go-ahead for Asfordby.¹⁷² This was to be a determining factor in the Leicestershire miners' decision not to strike in 1984-85. Those who did not wish to go to Asfordby wanted to work out their time in Coalville, in peace; and those who did want to go did not want to jeopardise either the pit or their chances of being transferred by being branded troublemakers.

Another dispute broke out in Leicestershire in November 1983, this time involving winders. They were used to large overtime payments and, complaining that they were disproportionately affected by the ban, demanded a national ballot on the 5.2 per cent pay offer and an immediate end to the overtime ban.¹⁷³ They also threatened to resume overtime working on a unilateral basis from 5 December. Jack Jones warned that any breaking of the official overtime ban would result in disciplinary action being taken, and if management encouraged such behaviour there would be an all-out Area strike.¹⁷⁴ The dispute was postponed, rather than settled, during the Christmas period.

Meanwhile, on Friday 16 December 1983, Snibston Colliery closed according to schedule. It was the oldest Leicestershire colliery, having opened in 1832 and being the *raison d'être* for the town of Coalville. NACODS Overman, Fred Rush, understanding the link between colliery and community, but exaggerating it as far as Snibston Colliery and Coalville were concerned in 1983, commented:

¹⁷² C.T., 25.11.83 and 2.12.83.

¹⁷³ Griffin, *Vol. III*, 193.

¹⁷⁴ Griffin, *Vol. III*, 193.

A whole community dies when a pit closes.¹⁷⁵

This was a somewhat sentimental remark, based on some vague historical notion of Coalville as a community. Indeed, the whole concept of 'community' as an abstract construct had a very different practical realisation in Coalville. Everybody knowing everyone else and an 'open door' neighbourhood policy, common in some pit communities, like Aylesham, was not part of the psyche of Leicestershire miners. Camaraderie certainly existed down the pit. John Tomlinson, a Whitwick miner, cites that aspect of colliery working as the reason why he would return to mining, if given the chance:

I loved it. Open Whitwick pit now, I'll be back down tomorrow... Definitely. I had too many friends down the pit. I've got one in here, works with me, no problem whatsoever. But I ain't got four to five hundred round me... It was comradeship... That's what I miss.¹⁷⁶

Ivor Whyman, a face worker who worked at four pits in Leicestershire, had the same experience:

Comradeship? That was there... A lot of good friends. Pitmen stuck together and worked well together. That was one of the good points of it.¹⁷⁷

But, unlike in Aylesham, the attitude down the mine did not extend beyond the pit gates. The solidarity dissipated as men went in their separate directions to the various towns and villages around the collieries. Peter Smith believes that closing the pits in Leicestershire did not affect 'community':

Because I don't think there was ever a close-knit community.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ C.T., 23.12.83.

¹⁷⁶ John Tomlinson, personal interview. 10.8.95.

¹⁷⁷ Ivor Whyman, personal interview. 14.8.95.

For him there was only a community of miners, based on work relations, which did not extend into families or neighbourhoods:

It's once you find out where the miners are that community feeling is still the same... If I went working in a car factory, if somebody started talking to me... "What you been doing?" Ten times out of ten ... the first thing I'd be back into would be mining.¹⁷⁹

With the closure of Snibston Colliery, it was not "the beginning of the end for Coalville" as the local newspaper tentatively suggested.¹⁸⁰ Rather, it was the continuation of a process which had begun almost as soon as Coalville was built in the 1830s: the diversification of local industry away from coalmining. Coalville had long since ceased to be a town based on coal and the local population had been conditioned into accepting that fact. Closing collieries in the Leicestershire Coalfield was never as traumatic on a large scale as in other coalfields and provoked no outbursts of popular discontent, sentimental or otherwise.

The high-handed attitude of management in Leicestershire continued into 1984. When Ellistown miners returned to work, after the Christmas break, on 3 January, they discovered no banksmen present and were unable to descend the pit. They waited for two hours from 7.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. when a banksman finally arrived. However, management informed the men they would only be paid from 9.00 a.m. Once again the miners felt aggrieved at management's hostile disposition and this time it affected their already reduced wage packets. They walked out.¹⁸¹

Problems with the winders also continued into the New Year. They threatened to work overtime on Sunday 14 January. Jack Jones appealed for unity but said that if the winders broke the overtime ban there would be pickets at the gates with the Leicestershire Area Union divided against itself.¹⁸² On Monday 16 January, MacGregor held a press conference at the Royal Hotel in Ashby de la Zouche, just five miles west of Coalville. He cited the winders'

¹⁷⁸ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Smith, personal interview. 10.8.95.

¹⁸⁰ *C.T.*, 23.12.83.

¹⁸¹ *C.T.*, 6.1.84.

¹⁸² *C.T.*, 13.1.84.

dispute as evidence of cracks in NUM solidarity and said that the overtime ban simply enabled the NCB to get rid of some of its large surplus stockpile. "There's coal all over the place", he declared.¹⁸³ Cowan, alongside him, repeated the NCB argument that uneconomic pits must close, but promised:

There will be no savage cutbacks in manpower.¹⁸⁴

Jones managed to persuade the winders not to break the overtime ban, but that issue very quickly became an irrelevancy. On Friday 10 February 1984, Desford Colliery closed as part of the inexorable rundown of the Leicestershire Coalfield.¹⁸⁵ Once again there was not a murmur of protest, and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that Leicestershire miners, who did nothing to protect their own pits, should not feel in the least inclined to come out on strike to save pits in other areas. So when large sections of the British coalfield exploded into industrial action in the first two weeks of March 1984, Leicestershire miners continued working, still enforcing the overtime ban.

The Kent and Leicestershire coalfields had been thrown together by the reorganisation of the NCB in 1975. But the 'unity' imposed by the Board remained stuck at the administrative level. The industrial fortunes of the two Areas seemed remarkably similar as well, with the NCB wishing to rundown production capacity in both, through closures. But there the similarity ends. The political path adopted by the KNUM was widely divergent from that of its counterpart in Leicestershire. This chapter has attempted to trace how those two varying paths were trodden, so that by March 1984, the reaction of Kent miners to the pit closure programme was completely at odds with that of the Leicestershire miners. The next chapter will attempt to show what happened when those two Areas were brought together again, this time in head-on collision.

¹⁸³ *C.T.*, 20.1.84.

¹⁸⁴ *C.T.*, 20.1.84.

¹⁸⁵ *C.T.*, 17.2.84.

Chapter Seven.

The Miners' Strike 1984-85: History Re-visited.

History repeats itself. Historians repeat each other.

Philip Guedalla (1889-1944), 'Some Historians', *Supers and Supermen*, (1920).

If historians today, out of methodological necessity, are forced to repeat each other, originality being a notoriously elusive concept, then the least they can try to do, in their attempts at historical analysis, is avoid the farcical. The methodology of this chapter will be in Part I to present a review of the literature on the 1984-85 miners' strike under the heading "Reviewing the literature on the 1984-85 miners' strike." Part II will trace the events of the strike at national and local level, following the methodology of previous chapters in attempting to place the micro-studies within a macro-overview. Part II will also contain a special section devoted to the role of women during the strike. Finally, Part III will conclude the chapter with an analysis of the importance of the strike nationally and for individual miners, their families and their communities.

Part I - Reviewing the Literature on the 1984-85 Miners' Strike.

The modern day penchant for instant news and analysis meant that while the miners were marching defiantly, but defeated, back to work in March 1985, numerous articles, books, theses, documentaries and even plays were already in preparation. The voluminosity of the literature on this subject is quite astonishing, guaranteeing its place in labour history. Indeed, its place in general history is also secure, no review of the "Thatcher Years" being complete without mention of the miners' strike. In September 1996, *The Economist*, in a twenty-three page survey on Britain's "New Politics", in which it comes out in full support of Tony Blair and "New Labour", includes a review of what it calls "The Thatcher Revolution". According to *The Economist* the two greatest political achievements of the 1980s were the Tories' crushing

of the unions and the privatising of the principal nationalised industries. And the journal is in no doubt about the significance of the miners' strike:

In 1984, in an event of enormous symbolic importance, the government took on the union that had paralysed the country and broken Edward Heath's administration in 1974 - the National Union of Mineworkers - and, thanks partly to the incompetence of the union's leadership, crushed it.¹

It is interesting to note that *The Economist* regards the defeat of the miners as being first and foremost of "symbolic" rather than economic importance, the macro-economic case for pit closures, so widely publicised in 1984, having been conveniently forgotten and largely discredited. The article goes on to explain how the defeat of the miners in particular, and the unions in general, led to a more co-operative (read: subservient, deferential) attitude of workers vis-à-vis management.

Within months of the strike ending Andrew Green had compiled a bibliography of publications on the miners' strike which included 283 items.² Green divided his list into sections on: Books and Pamphlets; Articles; Economics; Politics; Women; Local Studies; the Police and the Courts; Social Security; the Media; the Aftermath. He also admits, with some candour, that he had not personally inspected all the items included. Since 1985 the list has grown considerably, and it is not the intention of this researcher to provide an up-to-date exhaustive list of publications. However, he can promise that nothing will be reviewed which has not at one time or another passed beneath his eyes. This review of the literature will be divided into sections, adopting a chronological approach, on: The Strike's Origins and Ideology; The Progress of the Strike and Support Groups; The Strike's End: Why did it Fail? Other methodologies might well have been adopted, such as a more thematic approach, reviewing the literature on the histories and articles of a general and specific nature; locality studies; media coverage; (auto)biographical accounts; and the police and the judiciary; as well

¹ "Britain's New Politics," *The Economist*, 21 September, 1996.

² Andrew Green, "Research Bibliography of Published Materials Relating to the Coal Dispute 1984-85," *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Winter 1985): 405-14.

as including sections on the Nottinghamshire question; the women's groups and the role of government. Whatever the method employed, there would still be the problem of the "extreme fragmentation" of the literature, as Peter Gibbon describes it, in his analysis of the strike. He writes:

Practically all of it confines its objectives to fairly narrow boundaries: usually describing, commenting on or passing judgement over some particular aspect of the strike.³

This specificity of the majority of the studies also means, somewhat paradoxically, that whichever headings are used to analyse the literature, there is always bound to be some overlap. Locality studies also deal with women's groups and policing; personal recollections deal with most aspects of the strike, and so on. Thus it is that a literature review of this nature is, to coin a phrase, a veritable minefield, and we can only do our best to tread softly but fearlessly, and with respect for the still contentious nature of the issues at the heart of the strike.

The Strike's Origins and its Ideology.

The earliest accounts of the strike to appear in book form were published quite speedily in 1985 and 1986 and, perhaps not surprisingly, were written by journalists who had been closely involved in reporting the events of 1984-85. The first was *The Miners' Strike* by Geoffrey Goodman, industrial editor on the *Daily Mirror*,⁴ and the second was *The Miners' Strike 1984-5: Loss Without Limit*, by Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, industrial editors for the BBC and the *Financial Times*, respectively.⁵ The political and tonal difference between the two books is immediately evident: Goodman dedicates his book partly "... to the British miners

³ Peter Gibbon, "Analysing the British miners' strike of 1984-85," *Economy and Society*. No. 17, (1988): 139-94.

⁴ Geoffrey Goodman, *The Miners' Strike*, (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

⁵ Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike 1984-5: Loss Without Limit*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

whose courage I salute"; while Adeney and Lloyd attempt to justify their sense of irony in their subtitle "Loss Without Limit". This is, in fact, a quotation from Arthur Scargill addressing the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy in November 1982 when asked about his opinion on uneconomic pits. He replied:

As far as I am concerned, the loss is without limit because I am more interested in the investment which our men have put into this industry.⁶

The subjective/objective nature of both books, Goodman's being distinctly in favour of the miners, if not the NUM leadership; and Adeney and Lloyd's attempting to be so balanced that it criticises all sides equally, leaving the reader irritated at the authors' inability to take a stance, is perhaps mitigated by their proximity to the events they are describing. Occasionally they drop their 'objective' guard as when they allow criticism of Scargill as being at the "root of all the ills which beset the NUM", and delight in referring to him as a "modern equivalent of King Arthur and his knights."⁷ This, of course, is the danger of attempting to pass off journalism under the guise of history.

On the origins of the strike Goodman and Adeney and Lloyd propose a fairly straightforward and traditional view that this was a contest between the corporatist approach to government/union relations, and the more right-wing, free-market approach which believes in returning to managers the right to manage. Goodman adopts, uncritically, the archetypal proletarian view of miners and their communities in his somewhat simplistic binary analysis of the strike's origins:

These were the old-style social communities, buttressed, oddly enough, by deeply conservative attitudes, reluctant to entertain change and held up by notions of labour welfarism that, in Thatcher's curiously Victorian view, had contributed much to the backwardness of British industrial performance since 1945. To her ... [this] was a major

⁶ Adeney and Lloyd, vii.

⁷ Adeney and Lloyd, 28-29.

example of sentimental welfarism... Moreover, she saw the political need to defeat the NUM - the Coldstream Guards of organised labour - if she was to succeed in her self-appointed role of kicking the whole trade union movement into the Tory future and away from the principles of Labour Party-style corporatism.⁸

Corporatism indicated a pluralistic, co-operative approach to man-management relations and, in general, is the correct adjective to apply to the period 1945-79, at least as far as the coal industry was concerned. The NUM rapidly became accustomed to being consulted on all issues, including policy. This led the union into a form of complicity with the NCB and successive governments, even to the point of assisting in a peaceful rundown of the industry during the 1960s. And if Mrs. Thatcher's arrival on the scene tolled the death knell for corporatism then one might say that she had found her ideal sparring partner in Arthur Scargill who, ironically, was also determined to end the cosy relationship which existed between union leaders and government representatives. John Lloyd argues this point in his own pamphlet, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*. He quotes Scargill:

It is impossible to have workers' control within a capitalist society... What we *can* have within our society is class collaboration and compromise with the mixed economy.⁹

Of course, Scargill's ultimate objectives in rejecting corporatism were markedly different from Thatcher's.

Goodman also makes the inevitable allusions to 1972 and 1974 being formative events in the early political career of Thatcher determining her "never to tread the Heath path"¹⁰ of conciliation and climbdown.

Adeney and Lloyd's analysis of the strike's origins is more detailed in its historical overview than Goodman's, but is essentially the same. They detail NCB/NUM relations since

⁸ Goodman, 17.

⁹ John Lloyd, *Understanding the Miners' Strike*, Fabian Society Pamphlet 504 (June 1985): 6.

¹⁰ Goodman, 19.

1947 and the arbitration machinery which developed to avoid industrial strife. Indeed, the incestuous or nepotistic family nature of the industry is stressed:

The practice grew up that the board's industrial relations department should be run by former officials of the NUM or other established trade union officers... The insular nature of the board was reinforced by a recommendation from the Fleck committee of 1955 that board members should normally come from within the industry.¹¹

Although the term "corporatism" is never used by Adeney and Lloyd this is essentially what they mean by their use of phrases like "collaborative management" in their summary of the roots of the 1984-85 conflict, and "Morrisonian-socialist ideology" in their assessment of the implications of the miners' defeat. Adeney and Lloyd argue that the strike was in essence a simple dichotomy facing the government and the miners:

It was the struggle to resolve this, a choice between relying on rapid, if brutal, adjustment to market forces or the bi-partisan *collaborative management* (my italics) which characterised the 1970s, which now became acute and which brought about the 1984-85 miners' strike.¹²

And on the results of the strike they argue that management had won the right to manage and the NUM had lost, by implication, its privileged relationship with the NCB - it was the end of corporatism:

MacGregor had succeeded in one thing above all others: in burying forever the *Morrisonian-socialist ideology* (my italics) which permeated the board, and which encouraged a progressive advance of the unions, especially the NUM, into a position of joint authority over the industry.¹³

¹¹ Adeney and Lloyd. 13.

¹² Adeney and Lloyd. 17.

¹³ Adeney and Lloyd. 4.

Despite their attempts to be objective, Adeney and Lloyd cannot hide their satisfaction at the miners' defeat in general, and Scargill's in particular. They state the obvious when they say that the miners got their money "*but they got it for producing*"¹⁴ (their italics). The use of italics gives the impression of Adeney and Lloyd screaming from the page that the miners had not been fulfilling their part of the bargain, which, of course, could not have been further from the truth. If the strike was not political then it was about reducing capacity precisely because too much coal was being produced. The miners' case was simply that they wanted to go on producing. And, without any sense of irony, Adeney and Lloyd accuse Scargill of insisting too much that his men be "*so well rewarded*"¹⁵ for doing their job. It would be interesting to know if they speak of their journalists' salaries, probably far greater than any coalminer's, as "rewards"?

A rather more theoretical methodology is adopted by David Gilbert in his study of pit communities and collective action. He takes a more dangerous approach to understanding the origins of the strike by seemingly adopting a determinist methodology, implying that history was bound to repeat itself. His comparative study of the South Wales and Nottinghamshire coalfields looks at the period 1850-1926, but his book begins with a comparison of the objective factors in British industrial history in 1926 and 1984. Most notably this included the personalising of the disputes which occurred, the media referring to them as "Cook's strike" or "Scargill's strike"; the divided TUC leadership and an ambiguous and, at times, an embarrassed Labour Party leadership; the rediscovery of 'community' and the effectiveness of local rank and file political organisation; the part played by the women, although undoubtedly greater in 1984-85; and finally the breakaway miners' union formed, on both occasions, in the Midlands¹⁶ and, it is important to note for this study, narrowly avoided each time by the Leicestershire miners. Gilbert's concluding comments on the parallels actually appear as his introductory phrase in another reworking of Marx's oft quoted maxim:

¹⁴ Adeney and Lloyd, 4-5.

¹⁵ Adeney and Lloyd, 5.

¹⁶ Gilbert, 1-6.

During the 1984-85 miners' strike there were many times when history seemed to be repeating itself; not first as tragedy, then again as farce, but as tragedy twice over.¹⁷

The 1926/1984 parallels are drawn more vividly by David Howell in his acerbically titled essay "Where's Ramsay MacKinnock?"¹⁸ Howell takes his title from a banner seen at a miners' rally in Aberavon on 13 November 1984. The banner showed at least one miner's keen sense of history, Ramsay MacDonald having been M.P. for Aberavon at the time of the 1926 lock-out, and his contemporary contempt for the 1984 Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, whose support for the miners was notable for its paucity. Howell quotes from Kim Howells, Research Officer to the South Wales NUM at the time of the strike:

It ill becomes Neil Kinnock to forget what the dispute is about. South Wales miners note that he is very ready to condemn retaliation by pickets to police provocation, but is far less willing to involve himself in arguing the case for the continuation of mining in places like South Wales.¹⁹

This quotation is particularly interesting, not only for its relevance to an understanding of miners' reactions to one of their own - Kinnock, but also for the ironic foretaste it gives us of what would become of Kim Howells. Within eighteen months of making this attack on the Labour leadership Howells was helping to write Kinnock's speeches, one of which included a scathing attack on the NUM leadership at the 1985 Autumn Labour Party Conference. In his keynote conference speech Kinnock bemoaned the end of corporatism as the NCB now had,

... a power, a prerogative, a force that no mining management in Britain has enjoyed for one day since 1947.²⁰

¹⁷ Gilbert, 1.

¹⁸ David Howell, "Where's Ramsay MacKinnock? Labour Leadership and the Miners." Huw Beynon. (ed.) *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*, (London: Verso, 1985), 181-98.

¹⁹ Howell, 181.

²⁰ Adeney and Lloyd, 295.

Kinnock gave as the source of his information a lodge official from his own constituency, revealed to be Howells by an investigative *Private Eye* article.²¹ Howells went on to work very closely with Kinnock helping to reformulate Labour's industrial policy after he had become M.P. for Pontyprydd in 1989. He was also at the forefront of the calls for Scargill's personal financial affairs to be investigated by the Fraud Squad.²² This Brutus-like act was particularly tasteless as it was in support of the late Robert Maxwell's campaign, through his newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*, to get Scargill convicted for embezzlement.

David Howell's choice to include Kim Howells' judgement on Kinnock was, of course, made on face value in 1985, Howell being not a political prophet but a political historian. However, Howell's principal concern is in establishing the 1926/1984 link and he does so by looking at parallels under the headings of "The Miners", "The Party", "The Leaders" and "The Responses". In each section Howell succeeds in showing the remarkable similarity between the two disputes, and, although he takes into consideration the totally different natures of the economy and the coal industry in 1926 and in 1984, he argues:

Both confrontations raised issues that went far beyond the immediate dispute. They served as foci for grievances central to the societies in which they took place and touched sensitive nerves in ways that few socialists could ignore.²³

The effort made by various writers to prove the historical bond tying 1926 with 1984 may well be interesting but is singularly fruitless in any real attempt to understand what led up to the 1984-85 strike. And such writers ignore or fail to point out the one significant difference between the two disputes: while in 1984-85 the miners were on strike, in 1926 they were locked-out. Arguing for the inevitable re-enactment of history demands an almost spiritual belief in the Hegelian "Hidden Hand of History" school of thought. This is not particularly

²¹ Adeney and Loyd, 296.

²² Seamus Milne. *The Enemy Within: MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair*. (London: Verso, 1994), 69 and 203.

²³ Howell, 194.

relevant to the events of 1984-85. A more productive approach is that adopted by Raphael Samuel.

On the issue of grass roots radicalism Samuel notes, with painful irony, that it was the strength of this feeling in Nottinghamshire which broke the strike.

The *failure* of the strike in Nottinghamshire, like its initial success elsewhere, seems likewise to have been the result of local initiative, the miners there refusing to follow either the area leadership or their own delegate conference.²⁴

Samuel's history of the strike follows precisely the Ruskin school of history, hardly surprising to anyone who knows Raphael Samuel's work, in that it attempts to analyse and portray the strike through oral accounts of the experiences of the rank and file. Samuel's analysis of the strike is based on his first-hand knowledge of miners and their families; he lets them do most of the talking through interviews, speeches, poetry and extracts from diaries and letters. He is always keen to show the link between past and present:

In the miners' strike of 1984-85, the concrete and immediate issues were continually being overlain with the symbolic reverberations of the past, both the historical past of remembered struggles, and the timeless past of 'tradition'. Memories of earlier conflicts structured the strategy and tactics of the strike, and its progress was measured by analogy.²⁵

For Samuel 'community' and its re-discovery was at the heart of the strike. But, as with other writers who dare to use this term, he gives his own and rather metaphysical definition of the concept:

²⁴ Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloemfield, Guy Boanas. (eds.), *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike 1984-85*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 20.

²⁵ Samuel, 5.

... it was a community of spirit rather than place, a social rather than a physical nexus...²⁶

This distinctly untraditional definition of community is given by Samuel with reference to the women's support groups which emerged and played such a vital role, both physically as well as psychologically, throughout the strike, and sometimes beyond. It is a theme to which we shall soon return.

It is necessary now to turn to a rather less academic but very popular idea concerning the strike's origins: the 'conspiracy theory'. Whenever important and controversial political events occur, there is usually a conspiracy theory. The miners' strike does not disappoint those who conspire to look for, or create, one. At grass roots level, many of those involved believed passionately that the strike was purely and simply Thatcher getting revenge for 1972 and 1974. This idea gained momentum in the final months of the strike when the miners' chances of winning receded with the winter sun and each new NCB report showing the number of miners returning to work. And, although the figures were disputed by the NUM, nothing was more soul destroying than miners having to abandon attempts at picketing-out Notts. and Leicestershire miners in order to fight a rearguard action at their own pits.

Documentary evidence for the 'revenge' motive does not exist, but several writers have tried to 'prove' that the strike was engineered by the Prime-Minister. The adoption of the Ridley Plan; the 'phoney war' of 1981 when Thatcher attacked and then retreated over pit closures; the replacement of the pro-Labour chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) Glyn England by the more radical pro-nuclear energy, Sir Walter Marshall; and finally the appointment of Ian MacGregor, 'Mac the knife' of the steel industry, as chairman of the NCB, have all been interpreted as Thatcher preparing for, indeed, 'picking a fight' with the NUM. Michael Crick adopts this line when he writes:

By the summer (1983), with a 141 seat majority behind her, Mrs Thatcher seemed to be preparing for a battle which looked increasingly inevitable. In the post-election Cabinet

²⁶ Samuel, 9.

re-shuffle Nigel Lawson was replaced at the Department of Energy by Peter Walker, who as Industry Secretary under Heath had been involved in the coal disputes of 1972 and 1974. "Peter, I want you to go to Energy", Walker is said to have been told by the P.M. the day after the election. "We're going to have a miners' strike."²⁷

This is one of the most cited phrases in Crick's slim volume and yet it is without any supporting reference. And, having given the impression that Thatcher was determined to be in control of a seemingly pre-determined destiny he writes, a few pages later, about Scargill's role:

Arthur Scargill simply outmanoeuvred the right with a move that Joe Gormley would have been proud of... In the course of five weeks Scargill and the left had pulled off a brilliant piece of political footwork. They had been able to call a national strike but without holding a national ballot.²⁸

Crick cannot have it both ways. Thatcher and Scargill cannot *both* have been responsible for starting the strike. Crick places too much emphasis on the individual in history, seeing him or her as a visionary in control of events. That both Thatcher and Scargill were visionaries, in the sense of having clear ideas about what the future *should* hold, is in no doubt. But that they were grand-master players in a huge game of political chess is the stuff of fictional melodrama. Indeed, the obvious failure of the strike for the miners proved that Scargill could not 'walk on water', as his many ardent followers, jokingly, liked to claim. And Thatcher has had her supporters' claim that she produced an economic 'miracle' laid increasingly open to severe criticism and rebuttal by the likes of leading economist, Christopher Johnson. He writes:

²⁷ Michael Crick, *Scargill and the Miners*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 96.

²⁸ Crick, 106-07.

The Government's record was thus, like the curate's egg, good only in parts. It was nothing like the brilliant success that Mrs Thatcher and her entourage persuaded many voters she had achieved... Mrs Thatcher is likely to go down in history more for her political and military than her economic and social record.²⁹

Concentrating less on individuals and more on general political and economic Conservative policies, Colin Sweet, in his article, "Why Coal is Under Attack", nonetheless pursues the conspiracy theory line when he opens with the following affirmation:

The dispute in the coal industry is not about 'uneconomic pits'. It is demonstrably about this government's determination to gain total control over the industry in order to force down real wages and to 'reorganise' it, a euphemism that almost certainly implies privatisation.³⁰

Such confident dogmatism may well have been justified in the light of what has happened to the coal industry since the strike. But Sweet was writing in 1985 and what appears as fact for him, could, at best, have been informed conjecture. Sweet continues his anti-government line:

For the present government, faced with increasing dependence on coal and a resolute trade union with a militant leadership, breaking the miners has become more than a key issue. It has become an obsession.³¹

One is forced to wonder where the obsession really lies? The government was not increasing its dependence on coal, on the contrary, its reductionist policies were taking the CEBG further away from coal-based power stations towards the cleaner and, arguably

²⁹ Christopher Johnson, *The Economy Under Mrs Thatcher 1979-1990*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 263.

³⁰ Colin Sweet, "Why Coal is Under Attack: Nuclear Powers in the Energy Establishment." Beynon, (ed.) 201-16.

³¹ Sweet, 201.

cheaper, atomic, oil and gas-fired power stations. And nor was the government faced with a resolute trade union, the NUM being more divided in 1984 than ever before in its forty year history. Conspiracy theories are all very well in that they make interesting reading and provide grist to the mill of those wishing to interpret the miners' strike in the simplistic light of nasty brutish government wreaking revenge on poor democratic mineworkers. But, traditionally, conspiracy theories remain stuck at the level of 'interesting reading' for, by their very nature, they lack hard empirical evidence. Sweet accidentally concedes this methodological problem when he writes that Thatcher refused to air her energy policy in public for fear of alienating her own supporters. Consequently:

... secrecy has become an important part of policy for Mrs Thatcher.³²

With events and policies shrouded in such acknowledged secrecy one is forced to ask how Sweet can make sweeping generalisations about the government's intentions, and how he can say that they are demonstrable.

Alex Callinicos and Mike Simons in their analysis of the strike and its origins have the distinct advantage of being published by the Socialist Workers Party. The reader is immediately made aware of the authors' objectives and Callinicos and Simons do not disappoint. Conspiracy theory, naturally, figures large in their interpretation of the strike's origins and throughout the rest of the book. They begin with a rapid overview of the history of the mining industry from 1926 and attempt to show how the militant power of the grass roots had been systematically emasculated by incentive schemes, right-wing leadership, Labour governments and Conservative-style corporatism.³³ And, as part of their conspiracy theory, they argue that Thatcher's aim was not to destroy the miners and hence the trade unions, but to weaken and control them:

³² Sweet, 205.

³³ Alex Callinicos and Mike Simons, *The Great Strike: The Miners' Strike of 1984-5 and its Lessons*, (London: Socialist Workers Press, 1985), 18-46.

What she wanted was a weaker, more bureaucratic, less political trade union movement closely policed by the courts. Her model was the trade unions in the United States... The Americanisation of the British trade union movement could be achieved only by taking on and decisively defeating a powerful group of workers. The obvious candidate was the miners.³⁴

Again we find writers stating opinion as fact. Callinicos and Simons conveniently ignore, when it suits their political purpose, and then remember, when it suits another interpretation, the conciliatory role of the trade unions in general, and the NUM in particular, since 1945. No other union had so actively complied in its own demise as the NUM did from 1957-70. And the twentieth century history of the British trade union movement shows clearly how the state had nothing to fear from that quarter. The 'Americanisation' of unions took place in Britain long before it did in the U.S.A. Granted, Thatcher's personal paranoia, verging on the hysterical, led her famously to refer to the miners as "the enemy within", thereby providing many a writer with a ready made title.³⁵ This attitude towards the unions had earlier justified her total ban on their existence at the government's communications centre (GCHQ) at Cheltenham in January 1984. But this kind of action does not lend itself to the notion that Thatcher wanted weaker more malleable unions, those she already had. Rather it would lead one to the conclusion that she would prefer not to have deal with unions at all.

Callinicos and Simons, using strictly revolutionary Marxist language, describe the closing of Cortonwood colliery in March 1984, as "a gauntlet thrown down to the NUM".³⁶ It was a gauntlet which, the authors say, the Yorkshire miners' leaders had no choice but to pick up:

³⁴ Callinicos and Simons, 39.

³⁵ This, now notorious, phrase first saw the light of day on 19 July 1984 when Thatcher was addressing the 1922 Committee of Conservative backbench M.P.s. Making a direct parallel between the Argentinians and the miners, she said:

We had to fight an enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty.

Young, 371.

³⁶ Callinicos and Simons, 11.

The Yorkshire miners' leaders understood that if they didn't fight now, they never would. No miner would choose to start a major strike in springtime, but the closure of Cortonwood left them no option.³⁷

Here, unlike previous writers, Callinicos and Simons are guilty of ignoring historical parallels, as the 1926 dispute also began at an infortuitous time for the miners - 3 May. However, despite the various attempts to prove otherwise, March 1984 was not May 1926, and Arthur Scargill was not the reincarnation of Arthur Cook. Scargill, unlike Cook, was rather swept along by the tide of initial enthusiasm for the strike, a tide which came from his own area, and which was rapidly supported by Scotland and Kent. The beginning of the 1984-85 strike was genuinely a rank-and-file response to what was widely believed to be a NCB/Government concerted attack on the miners, their jobs and their communities. The impression given by Callinicos and Simons that the miners entered the strike reluctantly could not be further from the truth as far as the aforementioned areas were concerned. Indeed, in Kent it was almost welcomed with relief as the end of the period of 'phoney war' which had been in existence since at least the overtime ban, implemented in November 1983, and perhaps even further back to Thatcher's untimely closure announcement and U-turn in 1981.

Finally, on the subject of the strike's origins, we must look at a form of writing which, in theory, should throw light on the matter, but which, in reality, is fraught with difficulties: the autobiography. Several autobiographical studies by people involved at various levels in the strike have appeared and many of them are disappointing for their narrowness and egotistical attempts at self-justification. Foremost among these is Roy Ottey's, *The Strike: An Insider's Story*.

The 'Pythonesque' "Eh, you were lucky" tone of the book is established, without any sense of irony, at the outset. Born in November 1924, Ottey speaks of his memories of the family hardships caused by the General Strike and how he, as a twenty-two month old child, would act as a beater for the local gamekeepers in order to earn a shilling a day:

³⁷ Callinicos and Simons, 11.

Mam would get me up early in order to get me ready. She used to cut strips of brown paper, wrap them round and round my legs and then tie them with string. In theory, this was to keep my legs dry; but by the end of the day, it was a soggy mess. Still, there was no money for Wellingtons, only rich people had them.³⁸

Ottey also remembers being shocked upon discovering that his neighbour, a winding engineman at the local colliery, Bagworth, Coalville, was *scabbing*, thereby explaining the neighbour's comparative wealth, which had always puzzled the young child Ottey.³⁹ This precocious young lad was clearly heading for greater things!

The total lack of irony and susceptibility to gross self-indulgence warns of worse things to come. His father's determination that he should not go down the pit led him to being interviewed, aged fourteen (at least the age is more plausible), for a job as an electrician on the surface. During the interview he was given a stick and told to draw and explain the workings of a bell circuit. Ottey recounts the tale:

Standing in the evening sunshine I drew the circuit in the dusty garden soil... I explained. I must have been right, for he asked me to report to the electricians' shop at half-past six the following Monday.⁴⁰

Ottey's political precocity, however, seems to have deserted him, as on his first day one of the men referred to his father as 'Bolshevik Joe' and Ottey admits that he did not understand the allusion.⁴¹

Under ordinary circumstances this dolorous account could be dismissed in two or three lines. But, if one thing is unquestionably true in the whole book it is the sub-title, *An Insider's Story*. Ottey had rapidly become involved in union matters becoming branch President of the National Union of Enginemen, Firemen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers (NUEFMEW)

³⁸ Roy Ottey, *The Strike: An Insider's Story*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), 5.

³⁹ Ottey, 5.

⁴⁰ Ottey, 9.

⁴¹ Ottey, 9.

which was known as the 'Power Group', and had a foothold in both the TGWU and the MFGB. In July 1965, he became District Secretary of the Midlands Area of the NUEFMEW and in October 1966, he was elected General Secretary of the whole union. Within one year of his taking over, Ottey achieved a remarkable feat when he successfully negotiated the dissolution of his own union, resulting in the mining section becoming a constituent association of the NUM, and the rest of the membership being absorbed into various sections within the TGWU. Ottey remained as General Secretary of the 'Power Group' within the NUM with a seat on its National Executive Committee (NEC). There he remained until his resignation on 8 October 1984, over the handling of the miners' strike. Thus, Roy Ottey was, without doubt, an 'insider', and, while we are, therefore, obliged to consider his story of the miners' strike, his historical method, as shown above, alerts us to the potential for inaccuracies and/or exaggerations.

Ottey's account is also very important for this particular piece of research because he originated from one of the coalfields under review, Coalville, and he exhibited all the signs of political moderacy associated with that area.

The account (there is no analysis) of the origins of the strike is a fairly straightforward rehearsal of the events leading up to March 1984. However, Ottey's attempt at objectivity in his narrative is betrayed by his insisting that he was a significant player in the politics of the NUM, but that he was not responsible for the direction in which it was going. The following is a typical example of Ottey's style:

I had long realised that I was in the middle of history-making decisions. Democracy within the NUM seemed to be slowly slipping away, and I felt helpless to stem the course of events which was destroying everything I had worked for throughout my career.⁴²

There is no discussion on the issue of pit closures and what the NCB meant by "uneconomic" with regard to collieries designated for closure. Ian MacGregor and the

⁴² Ottey, 59-60.

Thatcher Government are absolved of any responsibility by their absence in Ottey's report of the proceedings. Blame is placed squarely on the shoulders of Arthur Scargill:

It was clear he wanted strike action and he was determined not to be thwarted yet again by the members deciding for themselves.⁴³

And, Ottey gives special attention to the political nature of the Kent coalfield, quoting Wesley Chambers, representative for that area, at the NEC meeting of the NUM on 8 March 1984:

Wesley Chambers ... spoke next, his words reflecting the tough, undemocratic way in which that area always seems to operate: "It is a national situation, but if we have got to have ballots we are starting to lose. We have got to get a change in energy policy and the Kent area will be out from Monday."⁴⁴

Ottey's contempt for the Kent miners is hardly disguised. For him, militancy is synonymous with undemocratic, and solidary work relations are only valid when acting in support of moderate, preferably non-strike, action. He is guilty of believing that miners fall into two categories: those who are prone to strike action for whatever reason and those who are easily led by their more militant colleagues. The history of the miners in general and of his own area, Leicestershire, in particular, should have disabused him of that idea.

Officially on the 'other side', although one would hardly know it, is Ian MacGregor's autobiography, *The Enemies Within*.⁴⁵ MacGregor concurs with Ottey over the principal cause of the strike:

⁴³ Ottey, 69.

⁴⁴ Ottey, 66.

⁴⁵ Ian MacGregor (with Rodney Tyler), *The Enemies Within. The Story of the Miners' Strike 1984-85*. (London, Collins, 1986).

On 4 July 1983 Arthur Scargill declared war... It was another nine months before battle commenced: but Scargill left neither the Prime-Minister, nor me, nor any right-thinking people in any doubt ... of his intentions. His army of 'storm troopers' was ready to bring the government to its knees if it dared stand in his way.⁴⁶

For MacGregor, the strike was simply about "establishing the management's right to manage the business and make it a going concern",⁴⁷ clearly indicating his ignorance of the NUM's compliance, since nationalisation, in the efficient running of the coal industry, to the extent, as we have seen, of assisting in its *drastic contraction since 1957*. Of course, the arrival of Scargill did signify that such co-operation could no longer be taken for granted, but even he did not stop the closure of twenty pits during his first two years as NUM President. However, as far as MacGregor was concerned, Scargill was an ideological demagogue determined to manipulate the NUM for his own political ends. In that, MacGregor agreed with Thatcher's description of Scargill as "a Marxist revolutionary - going under the guise of a normal trade union official."⁴⁸

Like Ottey, MacGregor gives a portrait of his political formation starting with a homage to his two elder brothers who volunteered to drive tramcars in Glasgow in 1926, thus helping to break the General Strike. He goes on to describe, with obvious pride, his own professional career, spent largely in the United States, where, as part of management in various engineering companies, he helped to defeat union action and break strikes. He boasts of having even fought and defeated the Mafia.⁴⁹ The 'macho' style of his language and approach to management is reflected perfectly in the following passage:

I was a builder not a destroyer. But if a union leader wanted to challenge the good management of the business and wanted a scrap - then he would have it. I never backed away from that kind of confrontation.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ MacGregor, 11.

⁴⁷ MacGregor, 18.

⁴⁸ MacGregor, 14.

⁴⁹ MacGregor, 38.

⁵⁰ MacGregor, 39.

This auto-hagiographic work is, like Ottey's, important because of MacGregor's genuinely central role in the strike. Although, also like Ottey, his linguistic style often reveals less about the actual strike and more about the personality of the author than is intended. Throughout the book, MacGregor's confrontational tone is evident in the military terms he employs. We have already seen him accusing Scargill of "declaring war" and being prepared to use his "storm troopers", and he regularly refers to himself as the "second lieutenant" (Thatcher, presumably, being the first), and to his area directors as "field commanders". MacGregor clearly enjoyed his role, and, continuing the military metaphor, seeing himself in Churchillian terms, he speaks of being at the head of a "war cabinet".⁵¹ For him it seems to have been some kind of tactical game:

Just as in war misinformation is deliberately fed to the enemy, so both sides fed each other false stories from time to time during the strike, though I suspect we became somewhat better at recognising theirs than they did ours.⁵²

And for Scargill, MacGregor shows nothing but patronising contempt:

For all that he was only forty-two years old, he was 'older' than me. He was living in an earlier age - an age which he himself had never actually experienced, but had only heard about in the romantic mythology of the union movement or in tales of working-class glory at his father's knee.⁵³

This trivialising of the strike and concentration on the cult of personality does little to increase our comprehension of the real issues at stake such as jobs, communities and the macro-economics of the British coal industry. But it does help us to understand just how difficult NUM/NCB discussions must have been when such personal antagonisms were

⁵¹ MacGregor, 185.

⁵² MacGregor, 189.

⁵³ MacGregor, 118.

present. So far, Scargill has consistently refused to publish his own memoirs or authorise a biography.

Although not strictly auto-biographical, *Thurcroft* gives us the rank-and-file miners and their families speaking about themselves and giving their opinions on the origins of the strike.⁵⁴ The book is largely a collection of interviews with the inhabitants of the North Yorkshire mining village of Thurcroft. For these men and their families, the strike was overtly political and deliberately provoked by Thatcher and the Conservatives. They were convinced, as interview after interview shows, that this strike was about getting rid of the union out of malicious spiteful revenge for 1972 and 1974. The following are typical examples of the grass roots analysis prevalent in Thurcroft and, as we shall see, echoed in Kent:

"Maggie vowed that she was going to get us... That was the main issue, getting rid of the union."

"I thought right away that this was a different ball game from 1972 or '74. It was a political move wasn't it, by the Government?... This was about the future of the industry and of the union... Because they'd never forget, the Tories, the strength of the NUM in 1972 and 1974."

They'd been planning for this since 1974... Millions, billions had gone into this. Her main objective was to break the union.⁵⁵

In Kent, Philip Sutcliffe, vice-president of the Snowdown Branch in the 1980s, expressed the same idea:

I knew that the politics behind it was that we was fighting the Tory government that wanted to get their own back on the '72 and '74 strikes ... so there was no way they was gonna give in easily, although I thought we would beat them in the end... And I knew all the time that the main thing was to shut as many pits as they could, so that it'd

⁵⁴ *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners' Strike. An Oral History*, (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1986).

⁵⁵ *Thurcroft*, 45.

make it easier to privatise the ones that were left, the big profitable pits... I'm not saying that with hindsight because ... that's what we did believe in.⁵⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly, the women in Thurcroft took a less overtly political line, having not been so closely involved in the strikes of the 1970s and not sharing in the pit talk at lodge meetings and the working men's clubs. Their concerns were more social and their language exhibits their dependence on the 'community' which for them was central to what the strike was about:

"If they shut our pit, where do we go?... uproot yourself and move somewhere totally different. You'd lose your friends, you'd be too far away from your family..."

"I'm involved in the community. Thurcroft's a community and I'd like to see it stay that way. I don't want my kids to work down the pit more than anybody else, but if there's a choice between the pit and the dole, that's better than no choice at all."⁵⁷

The women also exhibit their fears for the financial future much more than the men, symbolising their traditional role as keepers of the family purse strings:

"Our only livelihood is the pit and if that shuts, we've nothing. What good is this house to me, if that pit goes?"

"This is a mining community and if that pit goes, there's nothing... Where would my husband go at fifty? Who'd buy our houses?"⁵⁸

This gender difference in emphasis on what were the principal issues of the strike was marked right at the beginning. The men, especially, believed that the successes of the 1970s could and would be repeated in 1984, and that non-striking areas would soon come out once their eyes were opened to the reality of the government's intentions. The women would play a

⁵⁶ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

⁵⁷ *Thurcroft*, 46.

⁵⁸ *Thurcroft*, 46.

traditional role, working in soup kitchens and looking after the material needs of their families during the ensuing time of hardship. However, as the strike progressed, 'traditional roles' became confused, with men often serving in the soup kitchens and the women joining picket lines and becoming honorary members of the NUM. The concerns, and even the language, of the protagonists changed, as shown by the police who did not hesitate to use sexual language to women on the picket lines, and by the miners themselves, many of whom dropped their usual reluctance to use pit slang in front of their 'womenfolk'. This also came about largely as a result of miners and their female support groups mixing with middle-class protest groups where there was no *gender distinction* in the use of 'bad' language.

The issues of women in the strike and *changing gender roles is an important one*, and one which marked this dispute out from most other cases of industrial action. It is an issue to which we shall soon return.

Similar to *Thurcroft* in its methodological approach is the aforementioned Raphael Samuel's *The Enemy Within* in that most of the book is reserved for the voices of the rank-and-file.⁵⁹ However, Samuel et al. differ in their approach in that they do not confine themselves to only one pit community, nor even to one coalfield. Instead, they include interviews, letters, diary extracts and pictures from all over Britain, from miners and their numerous support groups and even from working miners. But this is certainly not an attempt to give a balanced, objective view of the strike. Samuel's editorial is very much in sympathy with this comment from a miner at Tower Hill Colliery in South Wales:

Ian MacGregor's only been put there for one thing hasn't he? He was appointed by the Tory Government to do a job in the steel industry which he's done, and he's been appointed now to do a job in the coal industry, to butcher it. That is what he's going to do.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Raphael Samuel et al. (eds.), *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike 1984-85*. (London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

⁶⁰ Samuel et al., 63.

The debate over the origins or causes of the miners' strike is, then, almost as controversial as the strike itself, and remains unresolved. Accusing individuals on both the right and the left may provide interesting popular journalism for those seeking individual demons or conspiracy theories. But this ignores the genuine issue-led strength of feeling at grass roots level which at one and the same time swung into strike action in some areas and thwarted it in others. This national strike was, perhaps, more local in its emphasis and its direction than any previous coalmining dispute. That was certainly true as far as the miners themselves were concerned as they took local decisions on whether to support the action and what form that action might take. Such (in)action reflected the fragmentary, federal nature of the NUM which looked increasingly like the old, but not forgotten, MFGB.

The Progress of the Strike and Support Groups.

Once the strike had begun, spluttering into action as particular areas took unilateral action and then retrospectively demanded NUM authorisation under Rule 43 of the NUM rule book, the internal arguments which beset the union throughout the strike also commenced. The now notorious area of disagreement was the issue of a national ballot. Two ballots had been held during Scargill's first two years, both of which linked demands for pay rises with the question of pit closures. Right-wingers in the union regarded this as piece of political machination by Scargill and did not conceal their delight when the ballots demanding authorisation for strike action were rejected by majorities of sixty-one per cent. Responses to the NEC decision not to hold a strike ballot in March/April 1984, divided neatly into two camps: the right-wing, which was as much anti-Scargill as it was anti-strike, and believed a national ballot would go massively in their favour; and the left-wing which held Mick McGahey's "We will not be constitutionalised out of action" view, and which, it can be argued, was anti-ballot, probably because it too believed there would probably be an anti-strike vote, despite their regular protestations to the contrary.

The issue of the ballot was made much of in the media, with striking miners and the NUM Executive consistently being forced onto the defensive. Talk of miners having voted

with their feet and walking out on strike without waiting for official sanction for their action, may well have been true, and was certainly justification enough for those miners. But it was not sufficient for the media, particularly the press, which, well-versed in its own manipulative techniques, had its own agenda which included turning the miners against each other and their own leaders, more specifically, Scargill. However, the results of three independent opinion polls carried out in July and September 1984, by Harris Research Centre, MORI and Marplan, for ITN Channel 4 News, BBC Panorama and the *Sunday Express*, should have subdued the pro-ballot lobby. Each poll showed majorities in favour of continuing the strike of 61 per cent, 68 per cent and 63 per cent, the last two showing majorities of 56 per cent and 57 per cent against conducting a national ballot.⁶¹ It is also important to remember, and the Kent miners, in particular, found it rather galling, that the national ballot of 1977, which had rejected the pit productivity scheme, had been by-passed by the NCB in order to achieve the result it then wanted. Industrial democracy is clearly a double-edged sword.

There were some on the left who, after the strike was over, stated that a ballot should have been held and that it probably would have been in favour of a strike. One such was George Bolton, vice-president of the Scottish NUM, who is cited by Frank Watters:

In my view the NUM could have won a national ballot hands down within days of the Special Conference in Sheffield in April: and there is no doubt in my mind at that time a national ballot would have been decisive for the strike.⁶²

Watters' book does not concern itself solely with the miners' strike or even the mining industry, but it is significant because it devotes several chapters to these matters and it is one of the few autobiographical accounts coming from the hard left, Watters having been a full-time employee of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Similar in style to Ottey's and MacGregor's self-indulgent tomes, Watters dismisses the ballot issue, arguing that it:

⁶¹ *The Miners' Case*. (Labour Research Department, October 1984), 12.

⁶² Frank Watters, *Being Frank: The Memoirs of Frank Watters*. (Doncaster: Askew Design and Print, 1992), 140.

... would have been seen as abdication and a way out of a difficult situation by inviting a 'no' vote.⁶³

He also admits that, on the basis of the previous ballots, there probably would have been a 'no' vote, and he points out, as do many others on the left, that there had been no ballot of miners over the announced closure of Cortonwood, nor for that matter had workers at the Government Central Head Quarters at Cheltenham been balloted over Thatcher's decision to ban their unions, in January 1984.⁶⁴ However, the absence of a ballot for the miners was interpreted by many as an act of cowardice on the part of the NUM, and Scargill is 'credited' with having split his union by his anti-democratic behaviour. F.N. Foreman, a Conservative M.P., writing about traditions of rank-and-file loyalty, says that Scargill:

... succeeded only in splitting his union in 1984-85 when he persuaded his Executive to launch an all-out strike against threatened pit closures without first securing the support of his members in a union ballot.⁶⁵

For those on the left, it was the solidary nature of the action at grass roots level right from the outset, which marked out this strike from previous disputes. 1972 and 1974, although widely supported, and, of course, successful for the miners, had been NUM-led. Negotiations between the NUM Executive and the Cabinet had been a highly public feature of the build-up to action in the 1970s. And when those talks were seen to have broken down, then calls to action from NUM leaders to the rank-and-file followed. In 1984 the calls to action were reversed as miners on strike demanded official recognition from their leadership. It is this characteristic of the 1984-85 miners' strike which clearly excited Raphael Samuel as he tries to find reasons for what he terms "the peculiar energies of the strike".⁶⁶ Carried away on a wave

⁶³ Watters, 140.

⁶⁴ Callinicos and Simons, 64.

⁶⁵ F.N. Foreman, *Mastering British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 78.

⁶⁶ Samuel et al., 8.

of historical sentimentality, Samuel reverts to traditional archetypal proletarian images of miners and their solidarity:

The comradeship of the picket line and the readiness to stand up to police charges might more usefully be related to a working environment which privileges physical courage and endurance and makes reciprocity and trust a very condition of survival... More speculatively, the willingness of the miners to risk their all in the strike, and of the union to stake its very existence on it, might be thought to have some ultimate origin, however mediated, with the peculiarities of an industry on which the face-worker is engaged, in the last analysis, in a daily wager with death.⁶⁷

Samuel must have realised he was treading on very thin methodological ice in his analysis of the origins of miners' militancy and solidarity. His use of words like "speculatively" and "might" indicate an intelligent reticence on his part, aware as he was of the history of miners' regular moderacy and divisions, most notably in 1926 and then in 1984-85. He is also culpable of placing too much emphasis on that elite of mineworkers - the face-worker - ignoring the role of other underground workers and, indeed, surface workers. Where do they fit in in Samuel's ascriptive analysis?

Adopting a methodology similar to that of Samuel, South Wales miners' historian, Hywel Francis, argues that "the miners' traditional loyalty to their union and to their communities" is a result of their heightened sense of history, their awareness of political and union rights won in past struggles, and their ability to transmit such knowledge through the oral tradition.⁶⁸ Thus union militancy is self-perpetuating, miners not wishing or daring to break with such traditions. Francis maintains an elite view of miners' place in working-class history which can only be described as 'vanguardism':

⁶⁷ Samuel et al., 8.

⁶⁸ Hywel Francis, "The Law, Oral Tradition and the Mining Community." *Journal of Law and Society*. Vol.12, No. 3, (Winter 1985), 267-71.

More than any other section of the British working-class, the miners have engaged in struggles to protect their wages, their communities and their industry... Central to an understanding of this phenomenon is the strength and vitality of what has been called the received collective memory in maintaining solidarity.⁶⁹

How far back miners' memories go has always been a matter of interest for analysts wishing to prove miners' links with past struggles. Francis does just that, tendentiously stating that the miners' struggles of the nineteenth century were inextricably linked to the Chartist Movement, and that this tradition of protest continued into the twentieth century. This was true for the South Wales coalfield and seems to have been the case for other coalfields. Raymond Challinor has famously argued that Chartism and the Durham Miners Association were very closely linked;⁷⁰ and he has reiterated his position more recently:

Miners understood economic and political power were intermeshed... the coal-owners and government ministers thought that in Chartism and trade unionism they were confronting a two-headed working-class monster. Quite correctly, they thought it was significant the Durham county meetings of the Miners' Association and the National Charter Association were held at the same place, on the same day, one after the other - presumably because the composition of the two committees had a remarkable overlap.⁷¹

However, the Chartist/miners link is not proved for the whole country and was most certainly not the case for Leicestershire. What is undoubtedly true about miners in 1984 was that their collective memories went back at least to the 1970s, and it was the victories of that decade which served to inform their ultimately vanguardist view of themselves in the 1980s.

⁶⁹ Francis, 268.

⁷⁰ Raymond Challinor, *The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists*, (London 1968).

⁷¹ Raymond Challinor, letter to the editor, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 58 Part 1, 1993, 6.

Francis also argues for a form of 'isolated mass' which is more pertinent to this present study of (not)community and (non)collective action. He believes that where there is a vitality in the relationship between pit, community and lodge there will, inevitably, be increased levels of militancy.

Despite significant changes in employment and settlement patterns, aggravated by colliery closures since coal nationalisation, such a relationship has remained strong in South Wales, Kent and Durham unlike other coalfields where 'superpits' and dispersal of miners away from pit villages into larger urban centres has tended to fragment and erode solidarity.⁷²

This is an important point, borne out by the watered down/heightened levels of community consciousness in Coalville and Aylesham and their subsequent moderate/militant actions since nationalisation, and more specifically in the 1980s.

Coming from the same geographical and political background as Francis, Kim Howells, Research Officer for the South Wales NUM, basks in the reflected glory of the famed solidarity of Welsh miners.⁷³ He speaks of reporters asking about the origins of such militant solidarity, suggesting it may be due to the nature of the Welsh communities, hatred for the English dominated NCB and even genetics. Howells insinuates, without a glimmer of irony:

Maybe it was some or all of these things, mixed up in a stew of radical political consciousness, an area leadership which genuinely reflected rank-and-file thinking, a humorous, and free-and-easy strike administration, a superb string of fund-raising centres and back-up organisations.⁷⁴

This exaggerated and impressionistic tone continues as Howells details in heroic fashion the superhuman efforts of Welsh miners in picketing and fund-raising activities.

⁷² Francis, 268.

⁷³ Kim Howells, "Stopping Out: The Birth of a New Kind of Politics." Beynon. (ed.) 139-47.

⁷⁴ Howells, 139.

Reading Howells' article one has the idea that most other miners were doing nothing or very little, and that the NUM leadership and Westminster Labour politicians were totally out of touch:

... so hard did they search the small print of their constitutions and manifestos for guidance on how to relate Trotsky and Tawney to food-parcel distribution in Cwm Llantwit.⁷⁵

Having begun by asking the right questions, Howells descends into a mire of sentimentality about Welsh miners and their families which adds nothing to our understanding of the nature of their relationships and the genuine industrial militancy for which they are famous. Only once does he, almost incidentally, postulate a serious explanation, and in so doing he links South Wales with Kent:

South Wales and Kent are probably physically more remote from the big English coalfields than any others in these islands.⁷⁶

Unfortunately this is all we get in the way of attempts at explanation for Welsh miners' militancy. Indeed, Howells proposes an antithetical analysis of the consequences of the strike:

The coalfield had developed a new collective spirit which revived community life and re-awoke in ordinary people the understanding that it was possible to take the first, concrete steps towards creating a more humanitarian and socialist society now, in the dreary midst of Thatcherism, and that it was idiotic to assume that such steps were only possible after some special kind of electoral victory or a triumph on the barricades.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Howells, 146.

⁷⁶ Howells, 141.

⁷⁷ Howells, 146.

Howells is guilty here of putting the cart of militant industrial action before the horse of collective community life. It was precisely because community existed still in South Wales and Kent that those areas were able to mount such successful collective action in 1984-85, without having to worry, initially, about picketing their own pits. And, in the light of Howells' later career on 'New Labour's' front bench, his proclaimed mistrust of electoral politics and Westminster politicians sounds particularly cynical.

Aside from the ideological battles over saving jobs and communities, or managers' right to manage, was the ostensibly objective debate over the economics of the coal industry. And, while not forming a central part of this thesis on miners' (non)militancy and the role of community, it is necessary to look, if only briefly, at some of the literature covering the economic aspects of the debate. Ultimately, the economic argument was paramount to a government publicly obsessed with the free-market economy. Thus the economic question was outwardly at the heart of the debate over closures, although, as we have seen, *most miners* never believed economics had anything to do with the pit closure programme. In private, the Thatcher Government itself was less convinced of the virtues of monetarism and the free-market. Buying political success with give-away pre-election budgets became just as much a feature of Mrs. Thatcher's politics as her homespun 'you can't spend what you don't have' economic philosophy. Public spending was actually increased in the run-up to the 1983 election, when no-one was sure which way the political tide would turn:

During the run-up to the 1983 election Mrs. Thatcher seemed to have cast constraint aside with her famous exhortation to local authorities to 'Spend, spend, spend'... The £500 million of public expenditure cuts that the new Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, felt obliged to introduce in July 1983, just after the election, were seen as a symbolic admission that the pre-election spending spree had been somewhat overdone.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Johnson, 86.

Other events in the 1980s highlighted the willingness of Thatcher to intervene and tilt the economic market in her preferred political direction, the infamous Westland Affair of December-January 1985-86, was a case in point. And in the field of education, Thatcher broke with tradition and instigated a very hands-on 'Big Government' policy:

Traditionally ... the state has been very wary of interfering directly in what is taught in the classroom, spoken in the lecture hall or attempted in the lab... It was one of the great ironies of the Thatcher administration, a self-proclaimed hands-off government, that ... it should push forward state power so far and so firmly in the education field.⁷⁹

On the economics of the coal industry, Scargill's views were famously straightforward, and, like all his other policies, deeply rooted in politics and in the desire to safeguard the industrial strength of the miners:

Where there are resources of coal ... even if there is a loss on the production of that coal, then that coal should be produced.⁸⁰

Such dogmatism did not translate well onto the media. The public, and even Scargill's own industrial constituency, informed by five years of Conservative ideas, if not practice, did not take kindly to this flagrant profligacy with the public purse.

Aside from Scargill's emotionally charged interpretation of the economic issues involved, there were several attempts by some on the left to give a scientifically economic definition of the pit closure programme, designed to appeal to those who set great store by hard 'facts'. Pre-eminent among such left-wing economists was Andrew Glyn of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.⁸¹ Furnishing his reader with an array of statistics, Glyn shows that by closing the 'uneconomic' pits the government would save £275 million annually. However, this gain

⁷⁹ Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall*. (London: Fontana Press, 1990), 429.

⁸⁰ Adeney and Lloyd, 24.

⁸¹ Andrew Glyn, *The Economic Case Against Pit Closures*, (Sheffield: National Union Of Mineworkers, 1984).

would be offset by government losses of £480 million annually in redundancy payments, unemployment benefits and lost tax revenue. In another pamphlet, Glyn sums up his own argument quite succinctly:

... not one pit in the UK whose closure, and the consequent importation of coal, would benefit the rest of the country, even leaving aside the interests of miners. The extra cost of producing coal in even the highest cost pits was always less than the costs of keeping miners on the dole and paying for imports. Instructing the CEEB to buy only UK coal is entirely justified when the consequences of switching to imports would be lower living standards and longer dole queues.⁸²

The Glyn report was published in the middle of the strike, in October 1984. Unfortunately for the NUM it was also the time of the Labour Party Conference, and the popular press, much to Scargill's angry frustration, was more interested in reporting Neil Kinnock's attack on violence on the picket lines, wherever it came from. There was also the problem of Glyn's complicated economic analysis of the situation, making it fairly inaccessible to the vast majority of the population, as well as to a few tabloid journalists.

Following the Glyn line of argument, the Labour Research Department (LRD) produced its own case against pit closures.⁸³ It argued that the pit closure programme of the 1950s and '60s was disastrously short-sighted. The subsequent dependence on oil cost the economy dear in the wake of the quadrupling of its price following the Yom Kippur War in 1973. This well-rehearsed argument apart, the LRD employs Glyn-like statistics in its attempt to prove the fallacy behind the NCB argument about loss-making pits. Quoting Peter Walker, the Energy Minister at the time of the strike, the LRD points out that the government gave annual subsidies of £358 million to cover 'operating losses.' But, the LRD argues, this is a deliberately misleading term as it covers:

⁸² Andrew Glyn, *A Million Jobs a Year: The Case for Planning Full Employment*, (London: Verso Editions, 1985), 15.

⁸³ *The Miners' Case*.

... items which are not costs of production... They include £245 million for subsidence damage, and £130 million for payment of miners' pensions... Excluding these items, which are not costs of producing coal, the NCB made an operating profit in 1983-84.⁸⁴

The LRD also contests the NCB notion of making British coal profitable in order for it to compete in the international free market. Using NUM figures, the LRD shows that British coal is one of the least subsidised industries in Western Europe, and that it is, therefore, nonsense to speak of a fair and equal open market for coal:

Coal production in major coal producing EEC countries.

Costs and subsidies (£ per ton in 1982).

	Belgium	France	W.Germany	U.K.
Cost of coal production	61	45	47	41
Gov. subsidy	16.97	17.63	9.48	3.24

Source: *Report and Accounts, 1983-84; NUM Briefing notes.*⁸⁵

Despite their source, there is no reason to be suspicious of these figures as the NCB's own statistics for 1984, allowing for inflation, largely concur with those of the NUM's:

	France	W.Germany	U.K.
Gov. subsidy	19.19	12.06	4.11

(£ per ton 1984)⁸⁶

More accessible to the general public and coming much earlier in the strike was Philip Wright's analysis of the economics of the coal industry. He argues that the NCB use of the term 'uneconomic' is accurate only when it refers to its short-term profit and loss accounts. Wright believes that we also need to know about the coal industry's relationship with other

⁸⁴ *The Miners' Case*, 3.

⁸⁵ *The Miners' Case*, 4.

⁸⁶ Adeney and Lloyd, 24.

industries; its specific financial structure; and the long-term energy requirements of the country.⁸⁷

In 1982-83 the CEBG turned a loss of £85 million into a profit of £332 million by the simple tactic of imposing an 8.1 per cent price rise on electricity. But the price of coal, which supplied 75 per cent of the CEBG's energy requirements, only rose by 4.7 per cent, and at £49.40 per ton, coal remained the cheapest form of energy available. Wright continues his argument by showing that the largest part of the annual loss of the NCB was due to interest repayments to the government. In 1982-83 the loss was £485 million, but £366 million of this was in interest repayments. Thus it is nonsense to speak of government subsidies to the coal industry, rather we should speak of government *loans*.⁸⁸ Wright does not mention this, but it is also true that for the first decade after nationalisation, the NCB was crippled by interest repayments to the original owners on the very generous £164,660,000 the government paid in compensation terms. Wright argues that for a nationalised industry to be repaying debts to the government is a ridiculous situation, as the government is the owner of that industry. Thus there should be a rescheduling of debts. Finally he insists that with dwindling North Sea oil reserves, it would be both expensive and foolhardy to reduce coal production as this would make us dependant on high cost imports and put us at the mercy of foreign exchange rates.⁸⁹

On top of these statistics and various economists' definitions of 'uneconomic' pits, there was the actual cost of the dispute in lost coal, increased imports, the extra consumption of oil and the added costs to associated industries such as electricity, railways, steel and manufacturing, besides the huge costs of the nation-wide police operation to contain striking miners. Glyn calculated that in the first six months of the dispute there was a £330 million loss in output to the economy.⁹⁰ And the government's own estimates state that from March to May 1984, Gross Domestic Product was reduced by half a per cent, and from June to August by 1.25 per cent, these drops being a direct result of the miners' strike.⁹¹ This makes all the

⁸⁷ Philip Wright, "Bottomless Pits", *New Statesman*, 30 March 1984.

⁸⁸ Wright, "Bottomless Pits."

⁸⁹ Wright, "Bottomless Pits."

⁹⁰ Glyn, *Economic Case*.

⁹¹ *The Miners' Case*, 7.

more shocking than the then Chancellor, Nigel Lawson's comment in the House of Commons, that the costs were:

... a worthwhile investment for the good of the nation.⁹²

Such a comment also should have put paid to any idea that the government was not involved and that the issues were purely economic and not political. The economic arguments surrounding the coal industry, central at the time of the strike, are now largely forgotten, displaced by the ongoing debate about the social and psychological effects of the total closure of an historic industry on its one-time workers and their dependent communities.

One of the outstanding features of the 1984-85 miners' strike was the diversity of the support groups which rallied to the miners' cause, projecting their own sense of alienation and persecution onto a workforce not traditionally in need of bourgeois intellectual sympathy. These groups ranged from the Greenham Common Women's Camp to the Gay and Lesbian Movement, and from such unlikely international figures as Paul Getty Jr., who donated £100,000 to the NUM in October 1984, to Colonel Gaddafi, to whom Roger Windsor, the NUM Executive Officer, famously paid a visit in the summer of 1984. However, the support groups which have attracted the most attention and comment came from *within* the mining communities themselves, and they were the groups formed by the women.

Before 1984 most accounts of the position of women in pit communities tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, and almost devoid of any political or feminist ideology. *Coal is our Life* did much, not only to confirm widely held misconceptions about the miner as archetypal proletarian, but also about his mother/wife as archetypal *little woman*. The following extract is typical of the authors' over generalised view of women's role.

In a very consciously accepted division of labour, she must keep in good order the household provided for by the money handed to her each Friday by her husband. While

⁹² Hansard, Volume 65, col. 306, 31 July 1984.

he is at work she should complete her day's work - washing, ironing, cleaning, or whatever it may be - and she must have ready for him a good meal... Housewives boast of their attention to the needs of their husbands, and of how they have never been late with a meal, never confronted a returning worker with a cold meal, never had to ask his help in household duties.⁹³

Presented in this matter-of-fact unquestioning manner, such ascriptive accounts of women's role as duty served to inform outside opinion about what went on inside those strange closed mining communities. Indeed, the women themselves were led to believe that contentment and fulfilment came from the correct discharge of their female domestic and, of course, sexual, obligations. In that sense, Dennis et al. were accurate in their account of the women's role. There was a vicious circle at play where women were socialised into their role by other, older women, starting with their mother, and were never encouraged to question anything. A miner's wife was conditioned into accepting her 'lot' in life, almost fatalistically, uncritically. The strict gender division of roles was widely accepted on both sides and any deviation by either sex was very dangerous as it could provoke criticism of or, even more worryingly, doubts about, sexual inclinations. This was clearly to be avoided in such obviously heterosexual/homophobic societies such as mining communities where underground work was often, and at Snowdown Colliery always, performed totally naked except for the obligatory boots, safety belt and helmet. Thus it was, usually with some embarrassment, that men admitted to performing 'female' tasks such as cooking or child-rearing. The image of a father pushing his child in a pram, using only one hand, was/is classic in mining communities where men needed to distance themselves from such obvious domesticity in order to protect their macho image.

What Dennis et al. get wrong, in projecting this image of working-class women, is the notion that such images are historically universal throughout pit villages. They forget that just over a century ago women were equal co-workers with men *down* the pit and that women continued working on the surface, usually in the screening plants, right up to the 1950s, the

⁹³ Dennis et al., 181.

time of the survey of Ashton. Indeed, there were a few women surface workers extant, performing part-time work alongside old and disabled miners, as recently as the mid-1960s.⁹⁴ What then of gender relations and the division of roles in these families and communities? Dennis et al. do not allow such uncomfortable information to get in the way of their cosy, preconceived version of the women's role. For them women have always been subservient and powerless in a male dominated society. Recent research has, however, proved this image to be false. Angela John's study of pit brow lasses shows them to have been anything but subservient, many of them actively fighting, although ultimately failing, to preserve their right to remain in the public domain, gainfully employed.⁹⁵ John shows that much of the opposition to women workers at coal mines came from the miners themselves. Their argument was not based on any notion of morality or work suitability, but was purely pecuniary. Rather than fighting for higher wages for the women, the men desired their exclusion because the women's low wages tended to keep the men's wages down as well.⁹⁶ She cites a contemporary journal, *Comet*, of 4 May 1889:

No feelings of charity actuated the men who took up the cry; they had not chivalrous regard for the weaker sex; it was not that they deemed the labour too arduous or that it had a tendency to demoralise the worker; it was because they regarded pit brow women as rivals in the labour market and wished to have the field to themselves.⁹⁷

Sonya Rose, in her study of gender and class relations in the nineteenth century, goes further than the purely economic effects of the exclusion of women from the workplace. She believes that the trade union campaign against women workers resulted in the creation of a distinct male-breadwinner/female-mother/carer, dichotomy. Notions of domestic Victorian respectability followed on from this rather than being imposed by a moralising middle-class.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Angela V. John, *By The Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 229.

⁹⁵ John, 12-14.

⁹⁶ John, 195-202.

⁹⁷ John, 201.

⁹⁸ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*, (London: Routledge, 1992), ch. 7.

Margaret Stacey and Marion Price also attempt to show that the twentieth century image of powerless women is not historically universal.⁹⁹ They argue that legislation this century, enfranchising women and giving them equal pay and employment rights, is in fact restoring rights that previously women had long taken for granted. Politically this may be stretching a point, but it is true that the 1832 Reform Act was the first official piece of legislation which excluded women from the political process by the clever expedient of simply not mentioning them. Other feminist writers who have attempted to show examples of politically powerful women, have centred upon the rather obvious cases of female rulers who have inherited power rather than attained it through their own merit.¹⁰⁰

Concerning employment rights, it is true that, while ever capitalism needed workers, then women did have just as much right to be exploited as the men. However, what Stacey and Price, as well as Angela John, usefully do is to show that working-class women were just as capable as the men of *fighting for what they believed to be right, politically and economically*, as well as being the guardians of moral and familial values. Thus, they were active participants in the nineteenth century food riots, some trade unions and the Chartist Movement, even though the majority of its male members were not in favour of female suffrage.¹⁰¹ And it is well documented that two women were killed and over a hundred wounded at the infamous 'Peterloo Massacre' of 1819. So it seems that women have not always been powerless or absent from power struggles, applying Stacey and Price's definition of power:

... the ability of an individual or a group to influence the course of events in the direction they desire even against resistance by others.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Margaret Stacey and Marion Price, *Women, Power and Politics*. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History Of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, Vols. 1 and 11, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990). This two-volume work is brilliant and illuminating in its wide-ranging study of European women's role in society throughout history, but it largely confines itself to aristocratic women and bourgeois feminists when it refers to political women.

¹⁰¹ Stacey and Price, ch. 3.

¹⁰² Stacey and Price, 3.

Accepting this as a workable, if somewhat generalised interpretation of power, and considering the *truly* traditional role of working-class women, then their action during the miners' strike of 1984-85 was not so much radical as it was an attempt, albeit subconscious, to re-claim the past. However, much of the post-strike literature written on this subject tends not to view the women's role in 1984-85 in that light. Rather it inclines to follow another thesis postulated by Stacey and Price that women have recently lost control of the private domains of family and kitchen.

What was once the private domain of women has been undermined and invaded by professionals and agents of the state, advising and guiding; in the guise of the 'egalitarian democratic family' men have invaded, or been welcomed into, the kitchen, so that women no longer have a private territory to command nor belong to an organised group of female kin.¹⁰³

This has certainly been the case in the area of childbirth where historically, *wise women*, literally *sage femme* in French, were responsible for pregnant women and the birth of their children by dint of their having been through the experience themselves. But by the twentieth century this area had been taken over by the medical profession, doctors and psychologists, predominantly men. Only recently have women, in the shape of midwives, been re-allowed into the nativity scene.

Women have then, for political, as well as economic, reasons, been forced and are forcing themselves out of their private domains and into the traditionally male-dominated worlds of work and politics - the public domain - where public power is exerted. This is part of the theoretical and methodological base for the overtly militant action that many women took during 1984-85, and their comments, as we shall see in the interviews, show their determination not to be deprived of the one power that remained in their grasp - community power. This was the power to count for something and be someone in one's own right within a very special geo-political construct which had already disappeared in some areas - Coalville,

¹⁰³ Stacey and Price, 101.

and was under attack in others - Aylesham. However, we must always bear in mind that 'community' with its associated power structures is, like class, a dynamic concept which fluctuates in time and intensity in direct relation to prevailing political and economic conditions.

A more radical, overtly Marxist, analysis of women and domesticity is adopted by Pauline Hunt. Rather than accept the traditional sociological viewpoint of the family as a unit of consumption in a capitalist society, Hunt regards it as a production unit, arguing that nearly all goods brought into the home,

... require some additional work before they become consumable, as well as the domestic production and servicing of labour-power.¹⁰⁴

She continues, a little later:

The general function of the family is the reproduction of the social relations of production... Procreation is therefore only one aspect of the family's function. Of much greater importance is the process of socialisation including learning gender that goes on within the family, and the servicing of the labour force.¹⁰⁵

Hunt's methodology is a popular psychoanalytical structuralist approach to the role of the family unit, reaffirmed by her belief that gender identity is acquired rather than being innate, and that it stabilises at about the same age as language acquisition.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation of family and the prevailing socio-political ideology is certainly given form in the popular notion of model mining communities, like that described by Dennis et al. There, the outside world, the public domain, is quite definitely patriarchal, while the inside, unseen world of the private domain is specifically matriarchal.

¹⁰⁴ Pauline Hunt, *Gender and Class Consciousness*. (London: Macmillan, 1980), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Hunt, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, 9.

Two other Marxist writers on this subject, Pat and Hugh Armstrong, are quite categorical about the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism:

Patriarchy and capitalism are not autonomous, nor even interconnected systems, but the same system. As integrated forms they must be examined together.¹⁰⁷

This argument is reminiscent of and presumably informed by that of Engels' when he describes the circumstances in Manchester in the mid-nineteenth century when men were replaced by women in textile factories on the pretext that they were more nimble with the machines and the materials. As a result, familial relations were reversed but, due to the low(er) wages being paid, social conditions remained unchanged, and increased tension and frustration existed in working-class households:

Can anyone imagine a more insane state of things than that ... which unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness without being able to bestow upon the man true womanliness, or the woman true manliness...¹⁰⁸

Engels is anticipating a form of deconstructionist feminism or androgynism which believes that all distinctions between men and women perpetuate sexism of one kind or another. Thus we should reject or deconstruct gender stereotypes in favour of allowing men and women to develop their own natural and personal identities without the constraints of society which is determined to inform us about what we should or should not be like. This is surely what Engels means when he bemoans the unchanged social conditions of 1840s Manchester.

Returning to the hidden domestic world where women supposedly rule, even there the relationship between male and female children is such that girls are socialised into accepting the

¹⁰⁷ Pat and Hugh Armstrong, "Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex," *Studies on Political Economy*, 10, (Winter 1983), 109.

¹⁰⁸ Frederik Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (Chicago: Chicago Academy Publishers, 1984). 174.

walled limitations of their power and their fundamentally subservient role vis-à-vis boys/men. On the other hand, boys, while sentimentally respecting 'Mother', soon see their place outside the home, fighting to gain some kind of control, usually pecuniary rather than political, over their daily environment. And, of course, nowhere was this more true than in mining and fishing communities, where literally the work environment could, at any moment, rise up and take control showing just who was really 'boss'. With such daily danger threatening, it is little wonder that the women in such communities were in awe of their men's physical power(lessness), and subsequently the men's sole right to determine, through their unions, the amount of money the women would have to juggle with in order to balance the weekly household budget. It is, therefore, important to note that at no time during the 1984-85 miners' strike did women argue that wages were too low or inadequate. That really would have been breaching a boundary too far. The women's campaign was specifically about protecting jobs and what they perceived as *their* communities. They were then, fighting to preserve a power structure in which they had invested a great deal, and all the polemic, oral and written, about never being the same again, must be seen in the light of the actual limits of working-class women's power and the reality of what has happened to the women campaigners several years *after* the strike.

The (non)relationship of capital to domestic labour has been very thoroughly analysed by others besides Hunt.¹⁰⁹ Like Hunt, Oakley and Secombe adopt a fundamentally Marxist methodology in their analysis of the place of housework and the role of the housewife in a modern capitalist society. They both argue that with the way the wage system is constructed when a man asks for a pay rise he argues for it on the merits of *his* work and *his* production rate in relation to company profits. It would be considered ludicrous by all concerned, including almost certainly most wives, if their domestic labours were taken into consideration. Their daily task in servicing labour, by providing it with healthy and well-fed men, is definitely not part of the production/profit/wages equation. Secombe writes:

¹⁰⁹ Two prominent examples are: Anne Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Wally Secombe, "Housework under Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 83, January-February, 1973, 3-24.

The entire character of this labour is one of personal service - literally a labour so that others may live. This creates the standard attitude of a *good* housewife - self-denial for the sake of her family... In the absence of a pay cheque to justify her toil, the housewife must account for her work in non-economic terms. Hers is a 'labour of love performed out of devotion to her family'. A housewife who admits that she hates her work is not a *good* mother. Often therefore, her alienation from work must be repressed from consciousness, lest she implode with guilt and feelings of personal inadequacy.¹¹⁰

In a less psychoanalytical and more subjectively angry passage, Anne Oakley condemns the State's oppression of wives through official legislation:

Legal definitions current in our culture tie the status of 'wife' to the role of unpaid domestic worker. The husband is legally entitled to unpaid domestic service from his wife, and this is a right that courts of law uphold. National insurance and social security systems are based on the presumption that married women are financially dependent housewives... These legal constraints are, of course, supported by other economic, social and psychological pressures which weight the balance firmly in favour of the equation 'wife equals housewife'.¹¹¹

Finally, returning to Hunt on this subject:

... women's domestic work seems ... to be outside the contract between worker and employer, and thereby outside this venue of class struggle. Small wonder that the women as well as the men fail to recognise the social relevance of their work.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Secombe, 19-20.

¹¹¹ Oakley, 135.

¹¹² Hunt, 70.

Such seemingly radical ideas, at least for the 1970s, were, in fact, not so new. As early as 1942 official recognition of the economic importance of women, combined with their impecunious state, came in the now famous 'Beveridge Report'. Beveridge acknowledges women's position as workers who are servicing capitalism free of charge, and, implicitly, accepts that, should they ever withdraw their labour, the economic structure of society would collapse. He writes:

... the great majority of married women must be regarded as occupied in work which is vital though unpaid, without which their husbands could not do their paid work and without which the nation could not continue...¹¹³

Unfortunately, Beveridge's anachronistic analysis of women's role in the economy does not lead him to the conclusion that women's domestic work should be either paid or taken into consideration when men ask for pay rises. Recognising that employers are getting two workers for the price of one, Beveridge, stepping back from the brink, simply reverts to archetypal patriarch:

... In the next thirty years housewives as Mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world.¹¹⁴

Thus we are back to the sentimentalised image of 'Mother' with the added attraction of her being not just the protector of the family unit, but also of the greater 'family' of Britain. Such heroic realism, images of physically and emotionally powerful women, were employed in 1930s art in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. That women, especially working-class women, were conscious of their officially prescribed role in society, is clearly in doubt. But their sub-conscious assimilation of the role is in no doubt at all. Happily or not, women seemed only too ready to revert to type, once both world wars had ended, and they gave up their positions in

¹¹³ *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services*, (Beveridge Report, London: HMSO, 1942), para.107.

¹¹⁴ Beveridge, para. 117.

the public domain of work to returning soldiers, and regained their private domestic domain. Penny Summerfield writing about that period asks:

Where was the evidence of women taking mass militant action to retain both wartime work and the socialised forms of domestic labour (such as nurseries) which helped to break down their identification with unpaid work in the home?¹¹⁵

The question posed here is rhetorical. There was no such action. Women had tended to regard war work as enforced labour, if not in a male environment, in a male domain; and, consequently, demobilisation was:

... both an opportunity to return to women's work, and above all a chance to fulfil feminine expectations by getting married and having a family.¹¹⁶

Summerfield argues that this return to domesticity was much aided and abetted at the time by popular literature and cinema which portrayed women as happy once they were back where they belonged - in the home. Simone de Beauvoir has famously argued that notions of women being happy in their domestic domain belie the truth, and that the reality is that the woman prefers to stay:

... obstinately within the one realm that is familiar to her, where she can control things and in the midst of which she enjoys a precarious sovereignty.¹¹⁷

It is in the light of this theoretical background of women's place in society that the actions of women during 1984-85 must be interpreted. The strikes of the 1970s had been specifically about pay and conditions and the women who became involved then did so on a

¹¹⁵ Penny Summerfield, "' They didn't want women back in that job!': the Second World War and the construction of gendered work histories," *Labour History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 1, (Spring 1998), 83-104, 84.

¹¹⁶ Summerfield, 94.

¹¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 616.

traditional supportive basis. They set up soup kitchens and canteens and organised the distribution of food parcels. Some women involved in the 1970s miners' strikes informed Pauline Hunt that they enjoyed serving the men on the picket lines. Servicing *their* men in this situation was not an alienating experience as domestic labour traditionally is. Rather, the experience was inclusive as the women grew to understand that the men's battle was also theirs, and thus many women, for the first time, began to encounter the class struggle on a personal level.¹¹⁸ However, as previously stated, 1984-85 was different in that the fight was to preserve jobs and conscious communities, and in this battle the women's place was not behind but *on* the picket line. And it is interesting to note that many of the women on the picket lines in 1984-85 had been the same women *servicing* the picket lines in the 1970s. There is a direct link, in growing female political awareness, between the disputes of the '70s and '80s, and a natural progression for women to move from being behind their men to being alongside them.

One of the most common phrases used by women about the 1984-85 miners' strike forms part of the title of Susan Miller's article.¹¹⁹ She argues for the uniqueness of the women's action within the context of historically male-dominated societies and for its ability to challenge gender and familial ideologies in the capitalist construct. These are wide-ranging claims and typical of the 'never the same again' school of thought so prevalent in the immediate aftermath of the strike. While 1984-85 may have been a turning point in working-class women's use of direct action techniques (and even this, as we have seen, is debatable) Miller's argument that fundamental attitudes and prejudices about gender relations were questioned, is rather more controversial. She lays her methodological cards on the table at the outset by declaring her analysis to be:

... Marxist Feminist ... i.e. a materialist analysis of women's oppression in capitalism today.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Hunt, ch. 3.

¹¹⁹ Susan Miller, " 'The best thing that ever happened to us': Women's Role in the Coal Dispute," *Journal of Law and Society*. Vol. 12, No. 3, (Winter 1985), 355-64.

¹²⁰ Miller, 356.

Miller takes a traditional stereotypical view of mining communities, informed by Dennis et al. She states:

Men dominate in terms of work and public spaces, whilst women's space is circumvented by the home... For men the communities are built around them ... the cult of masculinity ... arises from and is constantly reproduced and re-created by, the dangerous nature of the work in the pit which fosters male solidarity... The men have long been, and still are, united by sex rather than by class; women's struggle is not seen as part of the struggle of the whole working-class. Mining communities are not equal communities.¹²¹

There are some important generalisations here which, like all generalisations, are weakened by the existence of so many exceptions. Miller's is an archetypal view of mining communities which does not allow for the many women who go out to work and who get involved in local politics. Dennis et al. are guilty of the same over simplification. Aylesham provides examples of both. Miller also accepts too readily the class-conscious and solidaristic notion of miners everywhere, without alluding to those miners with diluted archetypal proletarian self-imagery. Coalville readily supplies cases. And, finally, she declares, in an almost revelatory tone, that there is gender imbalance in the socio-political relations within mining communities. Even the participants in such communities, male as well as female, would, if pushed, probably admit to the social and political submission of women. What is important about Miller's description is that there is just enough accuracy in her account to establish that the women's action in 1984-85 was radical, even though its effects may not have been permanent.

Miller's concluding comments on the effects of the strike upon the women's socio-political position are evidently forced and derive more from her personal desire that things be this way rather than any hard empirical evidence. She argues that women are now at the centre of community life and occupy previously male-dominated public spaces. Unfortunately there is,

¹²¹ Miller, 357-58.

in most pit villages, no longer such a thing as 'community life', always assuming there to have been such a construct in the first place, precisely because there is no longer a pit. That was largely what the dispute was about, at least as far as the women were concerned, the men being more interested in protecting union political power. And as for women taking over public spaces, Miller gives no single piece of evidence to substantiate that claim. In Aylesham, there was a radical women's support group, led by Kay Sutcliffe; but when she stood for election to the Parish Council, in May 1986, on the Labour Party list, she was not elected, having received fewer votes than her husband, Philip, the Branch President at Snowdown Colliery. There is no evidence here of women's status having radically changed.

Other claims made by Miller are that women no longer identify themselves in terms of their men or their children; they have positively re-defined their relationships with other women while developing feminist instincts; they have begun to re-define (fe)male relationships in favour of larger inclusive working class unity; they have not only become politicised but have forced the whole labour and trade union movement to re-think its policies towards women. And, as if this list were not exhaustive enough, Miller adds an *etcetera*:

Women's role has achieved more change than discussion of these specific issues fully represent.¹²²

Miller's claims are more of a radical manifesto for change than a genuine list of achievements. In the harsh light of thirteen years of hindsight it is difficult to see that much, if any, of Miller's supposed transformations have come to pass. As we shall discover in our micro-studies of Coalville and Aylesham, women's working practices may have changed but this is due to wider economic factors, and their domestic and political position has remained largely similar to what it was pre-1984.

Similar in her political methodology to Miller, but much more realistic in her conclusive remarks about the long-term effects of the strike on women's socio-political position, is Bea

¹²² Miller, 363.

Campbell's analysis of the women's support groups.¹²³ As her title suggests, the miners were fundamentally conservative in their outlook, wishing to preserve a status quo of jobs, union power and stable communities which meant women in the home. On the other hand, women, while actually fighting for the same things were going about it in a manner which broke with tradition and in so doing they began to re-interpret their prescribed place within their communities and even beyond. They were, therefore, the *real radicals*, and, after initial hesitancy on the part of the men, the women and their action became:

... the more or less acceptable face of women's liberation.¹²⁴

This is a more reserved assessment and much closer to reality. Campbell does not contend that the women had moved into new domains, taking them over from the men; rather she suggests that the women had successfully contested the traditional right of males to dominate public domains. In this conclusion Campbell is correct, but the growing acceptance by men of women into the public world of work and union politics is largely a result of national trends and the change in women's status due to the dramatic decline in traditional factory work and the increase in white collar jobs requiring office and computer skills. In one sense, women are not re-interpreting their role but re-discovering it as they move back into the workplaces lost in the nineteenth century. However, the men are fighting a rearguard action. Even as young boys at school they are moving into 'traditional' female areas, learning office skills as the employment market changes and 'desk jobs' are becoming imbued with new economic and political status. Jane Lewis argues this point in her article on sex and class. She shows how conventional women's jobs, such as nursing, secretarial, cleaning and catering have, historically, had both low pay as well as low status. But, when any of these jobs are done by men, even the language changes in order to increase their status; thus 'cooks' become 'chefs' and 'cleaning ladies' become 'industrial servicing agents'.¹²⁵

¹²³ Bea Campbell, "Proletarian Patriarchs and the Real Radicals." V. Seddon. (ed.), *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike*, (London, 1986).

¹²⁴ Campbell, 253.

¹²⁵ Jane Lewis. "The Debate on Sex and Class." *New Left Review*, 149, January-February, 1985, 108-20.

A very significant aspect of women's involvement in the miners' strike were the contacts established with other, specifically middle-class, women's campaign groups. These included anti-sexist/racist groups such as the Greek Cypriot Women's Group in London which had the obvious connection with miners' wives of coming from a heavily patriarchal society. However, the group which inspired both men and women in pit communities was the Greenham Common peace women. By 1984 their peace camp outside the United States' nuclear military base at Greenham Common, had entered its third year and was internationally acknowledged, stimulating roughly equal amounts of respect and contempt among the general public. When the Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) campaign sprang up in mining villages throughout the country there was almost immediately a natural affinity between the two women's organisations. Loretta Loach cites one miner's wife from Bentley, in South Yorkshire, on the Greenham Common women, a comment echoed throughout mining communities:

It was only women that made peace camps, it was the women who made a stand for peace. I know men agree with it but it took women to get up off their arses and do something before things moved... They're brilliant those women!¹²⁶

Such admiration for these women was also evidenced in Aylesham. Kay Sutcliffe, leader of the Aylesham Women's Support Group, (AWSG), realised the wider political implications of the peace camp protest:

They have a tremendous fight on their hands but they can't be pushed into the background now. Greenham are fighting for us all.¹²⁷

Despite her exaggerated title, Jean Stead is, in fact, quite realistic in her account of relations between the Greenham Common women and the mining communities. Initially there

¹²⁶ Loretta Loach, "We'll Be Here Right to the End... and After: Women in the Miners' Strike," Beynon, (ed.) 176-77.

¹²⁷ Jean Stead, *Never the Same Again: Women and the Miners' Strike*. (London: Women's Press. 1987).

was suspicion and even hostility towards the miners whom the middle-class peace campaigners regarded as brutish and patriarchal. The whole point of the peace campaign was that it was a passive campaign even when provoked by police violence. The miners' picketing methods and their verbal and sometimes physical harassment of colleagues who broke the strike were also totally alien to the Greenham Common women. Even the miners' wives were initially regarded somewhat distantly by the peace campaigners because their tacit acceptance of their inferior position in mining communities was simply unacceptable in the political feminist ideology of most of the Greenham Common women. However, despite disagreements over methods, the joint objectives of the campaigners and the miners and the apparent growing awareness of wider gender-based ideologies among many miners and their wives, caused an increasing *rapprochement* between the two groups which resulted in their supporting each other's causes on various demonstrations.

Despite their connections with such expressly feminist groups, the WAPC groups were not, as Loach has pointed out, motivated by a pronounced feminist ideology. However, she does state that:

... the work they undertook and often the way in which they organised came from their specific situation as women.¹²⁸

Loach also believes that the WAPC has created a new consciousness among women which was certainly influenced and helped by the feminist movement; and she argues that the involvement of working-class women in the organised political arena has challenged many of the class prejudices of middle-class feminists. This, for Loach, is one of the most significant consequences of the women's action, although, unlike Stead, she does not support her claim with any concrete evidence. The reality, as we shall see, is that the close intra-class links, established in 1984-85, have since dissolved in all but a handful of cases, and the various classes have retreated into their traditional camps. Notwithstanding this pessimistic view, there is one irrefutable truth about the women's action in 1984-85 which will not go away and that is

¹²⁸ Loach, 169.

the continuing importance placed upon it by writers and researchers alike. Loach is correct in one of her conclusions when she writes:

It will not be because women were equal with men that their struggle in the 1984 miners' strike will never be obscured or forgotten. It will be because as women they were visible and active in their own right, separately and apart from men and not simply tagging along behind them.¹²⁹

Jean Stead writing in a similar vein to that of the theorists Hunt and Stacey and Price, cites cases of miners' wives who did not even bother to vote pre-1984, so alienated were they from the public political arena.¹³⁰ However, she then makes a giant consequential leap forward when she recounts how the women, thirsty for knowledge, made rapid and thorough progress in their political education, soon accepting public speaking engagements. While it is, of course, true that many women did become active and effective public speakers in Britain and abroad, in places like Belgium, Holland and Germany, Stead's universal claims for all miners' wives are somewhat exaggerated. She writes of the women's march in Barnsley on 12 May 1984:

It was a turning point not only in the strike, but in the working-class feminist movement as a whole.¹³¹

Stead explains that this was because working-class women (she doesn't even limit herself specifically to women in mining communities) had suddenly become aware of wider issues beyond the geographical confines of their pit villages. What Stead does, in fact, is, like Susan Miller, project her own feminist consciousness of women's situation, as a source of unpaid labour servicing capitalism, onto the general female working-class:

¹²⁹ Loach. 171.

¹³⁰ Stead. 13.

¹³¹ Stead. 20.

The women could see that what was happening in the destruction of their pit villages was a microcosm of what was happening in the world at large, where men had almost all the power.¹³²

This is wishful thinking. Many women did get actively involved but in each village they always remained the minority. And of those women who were involved, there was a further minority which actually participated on public platforms or picket lines. Limiting oneself to those women will produce a slanted view of how the strike changed working-class women. But even those women, in their more lucid moments, and certainly a decade after the strike was lost, will be far more reticent in their assessment of the long-term consequences for working-class women's self-imagery. What these women tend to do now, when interviewed, is to project themselves back to 1984 and then re-clothe themselves, sometimes wistfully, in their mid-strike feminist consciousness. It was, for many, an exciting period when, for a short time, it looked as though they would never be the same again. And for a tiny minority that has turned out to be the case. But for the rest, once the public spotlight had gone and the middle-class support groups disintegrated, the reality of their unchanged socio-economic position re-imposed itself. Indeed, for many, if their position had changed, it was for the worse as pits closed, redundancy money ran out and jobs, with wages equal to those in the mining industry, were few and far between.

In her concluding remarks Jean Stead attempts a more realistic outlook admitting that the end of the strike meant, for the women:

... the end of dreams and hopes and a return to a life that they had, for the most part, found depressing and inadequate.¹³³

Unfortunately, such intellectual honesty in the face of hard evidence, is short-lived as Stead cannot resist a final rallying cry:

¹³² Stead, 22.

¹³³ Stead, 167.

With the 1984-85 coal strike a working-class based women's movement has been clearly defined. Women's proper contribution to the way the world is run will spring only from the solidarity of working-class women throughout the world.¹³⁴

An important part of the corpus on the role of women during the strike has been the published accounts of the women's own thoughts and ideas. To a limited extent these have informed the feminist ideologies of writers like Stead. Comments like this woman's in the Thurcroft Women's Action Group (WAG) have been used and considered typical for all women:

A lot of us wanted to get involved because we were bored. I mean, when you're doing the same things day in and day out, sometimes it can get on your nerves. It got on my nerves. It was chance to do something different. We've been all over, we were getting out.¹³⁵

Or these comments from two other Thurcroft women, speaking about the Barnsley rally:

... It was the first demonstration I'd been on. It wasn't what I expected at all. It was all women together. Everybody was applauding us. It was really uplifting ... to go on a rally and see everybody in the same boat and how happy they were with each other was really a great feeling. It was nice to belong to something...

... The speeches were really moving. What stuck in my mind was one woman saying "We all stand together. We stand with our men, not just behind them, but with them in the front line."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Stead, 168.

¹³⁵ Thurcroft, 159.

¹³⁶ Thurcroft, 164.

Arguing that the changes that occurred in the women's public community role during the strike were not as permanent as writers like Stead have suggested, is not to denigrate the very real radicalism of the changes at the time. Indeed, middle-class writers mythologising about what they believe should have been rather than what was, is really damaging to the *cause*. Many working-class community and union leaders, male and female, feel very let down by what they regard as their fair-weather, middle-class 'friends'. The reality of the situation in 1984 was that most men were initially very sceptical about the women's action, and only begrudgingly accepted them onto the picket line. But by the end, in 1985, these same men were full of genuine admiration. The women of Thurcroft were under no illusion that this admiration would translate into a new power structure in the community. Indeed, many of them, would probably not have been too sure about what, if any, public changes they desired. However, what was important were the internal changes in personal relations, especially between husband and wife. Here a new equality could often be found which it really would be difficult to dissolve. Re-bottling the liberated genie of personal and emotional feelings is nigh on impossible. This comment by a Scottish miner's wife sums up the new domestic relationship of many couples, including many in Aylesham:

The strike has brought my relationship with my husband closer. He used to be a very quiet man but not any more. Before, he'd go to his work, come home, sit and watch the telly, or go down the pub for a couple of pints of beer. He's changed. He's more open now and we talk about different things.¹³⁷

Domestic chores may once again have reverted to being primarily the women's domain, but a new and mutual psychological respect was born in many mining households during 1984-85 which is still tangible today. Perhaps, when all is said and done, getting on in one's personal relationships may be the most important aspect of our lives. And if the 1984-85 miners' strike can be said to have improved women's, and men's, lives on that level, then that is no mean achievement.

¹³⁷ *Women Living the Strike*, (Midlothian: Lothian Women's Support Group, 1986), 54.

The Strike's End: Why did it Fail?

The end of the miners' strike in March 1985 was as abrupt, as untidy and as divided as its beginning twelve months earlier. The trickle of miners returning to work from September 1984 turned into a steady stream, though not the flood predicted by the NCB, just before Christmas as men took advantage of the bonuses/bribes on offer. Once Christmas had been endured by those who remained on strike there was the further depressing realisation that the government was going to survive the winter without imposing power cuts or reducing industrial output, such crucial factors in the strikes of the 1970s. Statistics for both the return-to-work figures and coal stocks were a bone of contention between the NUM and the NCB, both sides trying to win the propaganda war through the various media. And while striking miners continued to express their distrust of NCB numbers, they found themselves confronted with the harsh reality of being increasingly forced to picket their own pits.

In the end, the strike collapsed area by area as miners voted with their feet, the principal justification for declaring the strike 'official' in the first place, and went back to work. Significantly, the debate about how the strike should end changed direction. By February 1985, Scargill was no longer speaking of victory but of a sensible negotiated return to work including an amnesty for all sacked miners. The NCB and the government, now willing to be seen to be publicly involved, demanded a form of unconditional surrender. This was what Thatcher proposed at a meeting of the Young Conservatives, perhaps deliberately appealing to the Young 'Turks' among them:

If the NUM accept that economic factors must be taken into account in deciding the future of pits, if they accept the right of the Board to take the final decision after all the procedures have been completed - then a settlement is ready and waiting.¹³⁸

Of course, if the miners accepted these terms then the right of management to manage and thus to close pits which *it* deemed uneconomic, was affirmed. This, in the last analysis, was

¹³⁸ Callinicos and Simons, 208.

what the strike was all about, and if the NUM acceded, then it was accepting the failure of the strike and the end of corporatism. Scargill realised the essence of what the NCB/government were 'offering' and preferred to continue the action. But his was an increasingly lone voice. Kim Howells in South Wales was speaking about a march back to work without a settlement. This idea had its advantages as it meant that the NUM would not, officially, have accepted the NCB's terms or its definition of economic pits. But, it would also have meant abandoning the sacked miners and dissipating the still national nature of the action leaving individual pits to fight alone in the vain hope that they could achieve at local level something which could not have been won by the national union. Nevertheless, the idea gained popularity and on 1 March 1985, Durham, Lancashire and South Wales Areas all voted for an organised but non-negotiated return to work. And, two days later, on 3 March, a Special Delegates Conference voted by 98 to 91 to return to work on Tuesday 5 March. Despite the Scottish and Kent Areas' refusal to accept this decision and their determination to stay out until amnesty had been granted to their sacked colleagues, the miners' strike was effectively over. It ended as it had begun, in a state of confusion, with Kent miners picketing militant Yorkshire pits, demanding loyalty and solidarity. The following is an extract from a letter written by a Frickley miner in South Elmshall, Yorkshire, about the march back to work at his pit:

About 2000 people marched through the village to the colliery ... it was very emotional. Women and children stood clapping us with tears running down their faces. When we got to the pit gates there were two Kent pickets there and everyone was stunned and shocked because we had no idea there was going to be a picket on the gate so I called all my lads into the pit car park and told them that we were not prepared to cross a picket line ... so we went ... and spoke to the Kent lads and asked them to withdraw. I told them the Coal Board nor the government had managed to split our village up so I am sure the lads don't want to either ... they shook my hand, they withdrew and we went into work...¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Samuel et al., 148.

This miner was evidently one of the local union leaders, and it is interesting to note his inadvertent use of the royal *we* when he says they were not prepared to cross a picket line. What he meant was obviously that *he* was not prepared to cross such a line, and the fact that the rest of the miners followed his exhortation, (order), clearly shows the continuing solidarity of miners at lodge level and their obedience to their elected officials, even after one year on a strike which had so publicly failed. And it would be wrong to suggest that such solidaristic tendencies only existed in those areas which went on strike. Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire were equally solid in their determination to resist the strike, following their own grass roots leaders rather than the national leaders, whom they believed to be responsible for the strike. This was part of the tragic irony of 1984-85, that the action throughout the British coalfield was a rank-and-file action, whether or not it was pro- or anti-strike. Media concentration on Scargill or any other national leader misses the point of the true nature of this strike. The miners themselves understood, which was why so much emphasis and effort was put upon persuading the Midlands miners to come out on strike. To them issues of a ballot or Scargillism were an irrelevancy as the only issue that mattered was that of union solidarity and the principle of not crossing a picket line. The Midlands miners were equally determined (stubborn) that they would not be dictated to by anyone. Miners everywhere have a traditional hatred of outside authority.

In Yorkshire, the presence of a handful of Kent pickets provoked some serious soul-searching. This area's solidarity and famous respect for union tradition is expressed quite succinctly by Dave Douglass, a pit delegate at Hatfield Main:

The Kent *area* was on strike, it was officially on strike, the pickets were genuine, the Kent picket line meant *we do not cross*.¹⁴⁰

However, in all cases picket lines were amicably withdrawn in order that men who had remained out together for one year, could march back together. And on 10 March 1985, both Scotland and Kent voted for an organised return with no negotiated settlement and no amnesty

¹⁴⁰ Samuel et al., 226.

for the sacked or imprisoned miners. The 1984-85 miners' strike was now, officially, at an end; but the question which was posed throughout the British coalfield and in the media, as well as in a host of academic and not-so-academic articles and books was: why did it fail?

Geoffrey Goodman enigmatically writes:

There is no mystery about why the miners lost their strike.¹⁴¹

Enigmatic because he does not then state the reason but rather goes on to summarise the various and widely differing reasons why the miners lost: a determined and well-prepared government; a politicised police force; the absence of a ballot and the Nottinghamshire question; *Scargillism*; and a divided TUC and Labour leadership.¹⁴² Of course, which of these is foremost depends very much on one's political or industrial position. The miners themselves, those who struck throughout, tend to vacillate between blaming the Government, the TUC and Kinnock, and their own colleagues in the Midlands who continued working. Scargill is seen to have done the best he could in difficult, if not impossible, circumstances. Talk of July deals, when the NCB offered a review of the pit closure programme, which Scargill rejected and many, outside the industry, thought he should have accepted on the *run, run, run away, live to fight another day*, principle, were anathema to the striking miners. They were convinced of NCB/Government intent to destroy the NUM by a war of attrition through pit closures. Thus there was never any *deal* proposed, as far as they were concerned, which offered any real hope of keeping pits open and consequently union lodges and communities alive. The strike was then a *fight to the death*, and, even retrospectively, discussions about whether Scargill should have held a ballot are academic to these miners as they remain unconvinced that the Midlands miners would have abided by a majority vote if it had been in favour of strike action. In this they are probably right. Leicestershire miners were as convinced as Kent miners that their coalfield was due for closure. They also had no doubts that Scargill was telling the truth but, as we shall see, had no faith in his attempts to save the industry. Indeed, many of them believed

¹⁴¹ Goodman, 195.

¹⁴² Goodman, 195-201.

that Scargill's ultimate aim was not primarily to save the coal industry as much as it was to topple the Conservative government. Their long tradition of general subservience to coal owners and then to the NCB management, had imbued them with the idea that they were truly democratic and that politics had no place in the union. Kent miners, with their contradictory traditions, would have welcomed the fall of the government as a bonus to saving their pits and all that went with them. For these men and, increasingly, their women, politics was at the heart of the dispute and was indivisible from their union. Any talk of keeping politics out was considered as being more than a little naïve.

The literature on the 1984-85 miners' strike, its origins and its aftermath, continues to grow apace, exciting interest at all levels. There is also a growing corpus of dramatic representations of life in pit villages, with community theatre groups producing their own plays (Aylesham has now produced two), and companies producing full-length feature films, one of which, *Brassed Off*, has won international acclaim. Taking an interest in miners and their lost communities has now a respectable legitimacy as memories of the dispute fade and saving what is left of the British coal industry has become some kind of sentimental bourgeois cause, like saving the whale or giant panda bear. But, for the men and women left in ex-mining villages the memories, and the associated feelings of anger and bitterness, as well as those of exhilaration and liberation, are only a brief interview or short conversation away.

Part II - The Miners' Strike 1984-85.

You won't get me I'm part of the Union - till the day I die, till the day I die.

The Strawbs, *Part of the Union*, AMS Record Company, 1973.

Introduction.

The methodology for this section is quite straightforward. It does not attempt to re-tell the story of the miners' strike and all its associated issues from a national viewpoint. That, as we have seen, has been done and overdone in a mass of books, articles, novels and even plays. Rather, it is the intention of this section to examine the miners' strike from the specific viewpoint of the two chosen localities: Aylesham and Coalville. National events and issues will be discussed, but only insofar as they impinge upon local events. The sources for this section are largely primary: interviews, local and national newspapers as well as the political and industrial press, parliamentary proceedings, television and radio reports and documentaries and private video recordings. Out of necessity the sections on Aylesham will be longer than those on Coalville for the simple reason that Aylesham miners and their families were so intensely involved in the strike from its beginning to the end, and even beyond. Whereas life in Coalville progressed relatively normally for most people after initial attempts by first Kent and then South Wales miners to picket out the Leicestershire Coalfield had failed. However, that is not to say that Coalville miners and *their* families did not also hold strong opinions about the strike and the pit closure programme. They did. And we shall see how those ideas and opinions, including their interpretations/analyses of Leicestershire's moderacy, were formulated and expressed. This will come in the third and final section when we look at the grass roots explanations for the failure of the strike.

The Strike Begins.

The announcement by the NCB on 1 March 1984 of the closure of Cortonwood Colliery in South Yorkshire has been well documented as the 'spark' which ignited the miners' strike. MacGregor himself goes some way towards recognising this when he writes:

The whole South Yorkshire coalfield was in a ferment ... looking for just such a 'grievance' to finally ignite. The fact that it did so, with a decision to strike from 9 March ... was, we felt at the time, almost the inevitable sequence of events.¹⁴³

Accepting the inevitability of the strike is not the same as *provoking it, a charge which* MacGregor flatly denies throughout his autobiographical account of the events leading up to 1984 and beyond. However, as we saw in the review section, there were plenty of miners and observers who did believe in the deliberate provocation theory. A *New Statesman* editorial in May 1984, accused not only the NCB but also the government of being directly involved:

The government provoked the crisis in the direct sense that it set short-term financial targets for the NCB that could only be met by the irrational closure - against specific recent promises and against the wishes of local Coal Board officials - of Cortonwood in South Yorkshire... It was a deliberate act and part of a deliberate strategy.¹⁴⁴

Rank-and-file miners did not need newspaper editorials to convince them of the government's involvement. The *Thurford* study, among others, shows quite clearly that some miners 'knew' right from the outset that the strike was political. Closing pits had as its real aim not the saving of the nation's finances, but the breaking of the miners' union power. Keith Owen was one of the many Kent miners who were convinced of the government's real, 'hidden' motives:

¹⁴³ MacGregor, 167.

¹⁴⁴ *New Statesman*, 25.5.84.

We knew it was political anyway, nothing to do with us producing coal... She [Thatcher] wanted to close the mines to break the National Union of Mineworkers, and that was it.¹⁴⁵

Joan Phelan, a retired Snowdown miner's wife, who was closely involved with the AWSG, also believed in the political nature of the strike:

I think I've become more politically aware. The strike has been political, although ... as a woman I didn't realise it was political, in the beginning. To me it was a strike. We knew it was going to be a long one. But as the strike has gone on and on, we've become more aware of the political aspect of it than we ever did before.¹⁴⁶

Mrs. Phelan shows not only her conviction in the political nature of the strike, but also its politicising effect on women like her who did not traditionally play an active, public role in industrial matters. And they were certainly not used to their political opinions being sought by journalists and academics.

At the beginning and, indeed, throughout most of the next twelve months, the strike in Kent was virtually solid. Consequently, only a token picket was required at the three Kent pits thus freeing the rest to go picketing at docks and power stations, to go fund-raising and to address public meetings, and to picket the working miners in the Leicestershire Area. It was this activity which occupied the Kent miners during the first few weeks of the strike, and which led to one of the strike's most notorious episodes - the Dartford Tunnel incident.

On Sunday 18 March, Kent miners set off to drive to the Midlands in order to picket the working pits in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. On arriving at the Dartford Tunnel, normally the fastest route north linking the M2 with the M1 via the M25, the miners noticed white transit vans and policemen at all the toll booths. What happened next, although not unprecedented, led to accusations that Britain was becoming a police state.¹⁴⁷ Cars were

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Keith Owen, 29.8.95.

¹⁴⁶ *Public Wives*, Anthropology Department, Audio Visual Unit, Univesity College, London, 1984.

¹⁴⁷ In 1968 anti-Vietnam war demonstrators on their way to London were systematically stopped and

flagged down before entering the toll booths and those men suspected of being miners were told to turn around and go back home. Although the local and national media reported that the miners were only *advised* not to go any further, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. Kevin Mellin's experience is typical, not only of what happened to many miners, but also of their judicial ignorance:

All the miners agreed to turn back for fear of being arrested. We weren't sure where we stood, so we went back ... no-one knew what was going on.¹⁴⁸

It also seems that some policemen were not convinced of the legality of their actions, or even their morality. Craig Loomer, a Tilmanstone miner who, with his father Arthur, had been transferred from Snowdown, had a lengthy and ultimately helpful exchange with a Chief Constable:

I got stopped at Dartford... We didn't, of course, know what we was up against at the time. There were four of us in the car and there was a roadblock. And this was where we first realised how serious they were taking it... We admitted that we were miners. They obviously had an inkling... The Chief Constable said he thought that he was doing an injustice. He even give us directions to go around another way... He says, "My orders are to stop you. I think it's completely out of order." And he give us instructions how to get through London ... through the Blackwall Tunnel.¹⁴⁹

Through the Blackwall Tunnel and central London is the way most of the miners went. The Dartford Tunnel operation thus turned out to be a massive delaying tactic. Some of the miners who were stopped tried to trick the police with stories which were patently untrue and which

searched by police, but were allowed to continue their journeys. Susan Miller and Martin Walker, *A State of Siege. Policing the coalfields in the first six weeks of the miners' strike*, (Yorkshire Area NUM and Greenwich NALGO, June 1984).

¹⁴⁸ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

¹⁴⁹ Craig Loomer, personal interview, 16.8.93.

added a sense of outrageous humour to what was a very sinister first-time experience for these men. Paul Jones, a Snowdown miner, was also stopped:

They pulled us over into this lay-by and said, "Where're you going?" ... "We're going to the coast." There were five of us sitting with donkey jackets on and we said, "We're going to the coast."¹⁵⁰

The comic absurdity of the situation was not lost on these miners who used humour to counter their frustrated anger. The policeman played it straight, however,

"I believe you're going to Nottinghamshire ... you're not going through the Dartford Tunnel." We said, "Well, we're allowed to go through." "No, you're not. Turn around and get gone."¹⁵¹

On Tuesday 20 March, following Sunday's events, two Betteshanger miners, Brian Foy and John Simmons, went to the High Court in London in an attempt to take out an injunction against Frank Jordan, the Chief Constable of Kent, over the policing of the Dartford Tunnel.¹⁵² The injunction was refused and the KNUM dropped the action because of the costs involved and the likelihood of failure. Jack Collins, in a phrase that NUM leaders were to use throughout the strike, commented:

This action smells of a police state.¹⁵³

And Malcolm Pitt, the KNUM President and the author of *World on our Backs*, added that the police action was:

¹⁵⁰ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

¹⁵¹ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

¹⁵² *D.E.*, 23.3.84.

¹⁵³ *E.K.M.*, 21.3.84.

A serious threat to civil liberties in this country.¹⁵⁴

While the justice of their case, the right to picket, seemed obvious to the Kent miners, they were not prepared to test it by going through the Tunnel. The 'right' to picket and the 'right' to strike had long been part of the trade unionist's psyche, the basis of which was the 1906 Trade Disputes Act. Brought in by a Liberal administration, it had overturned the controversial Taff Vale judgement and afforded unions protection from companies who wished to pursue civil suits against them claiming financial compensation for loss of business through industrial action. This Act informed trade union behaviour throughout the rest of the century cultivating the belief in various 'rights'. However, the validity of such rights was questioned in 1978 by Lord Denning who set the tone for the changing pattern of union/management relationships into the 1980s when he argued that the 'right' to strike had no basis in law:

... not at any rate when it is used so as to inflict great harm on innocent bystanders or to bring the country to a halt.¹⁵⁵

1978-79 saw the infamous 'Winter of Discontent' which seemed to 'prove' to the public that the unions had over-reached themselves; and it was certainly used by the new Conservative administration as the justification for its putting onto the statute books laws which encapsulated the sentiments of Lord Denning. The first was the 1980 Employment Act. This restricted 'lawful' picketing to the union's own workplace, or employer's office or previous place of work in a dispute over a dismissal. Among practices which, through tradition had been accepted by both unions and management as lawful, were now outlawed, were: supporting other workers in a dispute with their employer ('secondary picketing'); picketing another workplace owned by the same employer with whom the unions were in dispute; picketing suppliers or customers.¹⁵⁶ Recourse to criminal law had always existed for employers and

¹⁵⁴ *D.E.*, 23.3.84.

¹⁵⁵ Phil Scraton. "The State v. The People: An Introduction", *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Winter 1985), 251-266.

¹⁵⁶ *Beat the Act: TUC Workbook on the Employment Act*, (London: TUC, March 1981), 8-9.

included such offences as: using threatening or abusive language against any person attempting to cross a picket line; obstruction of the highway or workplace premises; behaviour likely to lead to a breach of the peace. However, in practice the police rarely pressed such charges during an industrial dispute. This was part of the corporatist way of handling industrial relations which had developed since the 1926 General Strike, and, of course, as part of government strategy to avoid inflaming potentially 'explosive' situations. The advent of the Thatcher government saw not only the end of the corporatist style of management, but also the temporary ending of civil policing - policing by consent.

In 1982 a second Employment Bill was passed into law under the aegis of the much more reactionary Norman Tebbit.¹⁵⁷ The 1982 Act ended the immunity unions had had from financial damages incurred as a result of strike action. At the same time, the Government produced the "Code of Practice on Picketing" which recommended:

Pickets and their organisers should ensure that in general the number of pickets does not exceed six at an entrance.¹⁵⁸

The strengthening of civil rather than criminal law was something which the police did not welcome, especially as it was clear that they would be called upon to enforce it in the likely event of an industrial dispute, thus placing the police squarely and publicly on the side of a Conservative Government against trade unions.¹⁵⁹ Enforcing such laws would mean the police exercising the discretionary use of powers of arrest in situations that may be inflammatory. Clearly there was the potential for further public discontent, aimed at the police. Added to this was the National Reporting Centre (NRC) created in 1972, following the miners' strike of that year and more specifically the events at Saltley Gate. The NRC is controlled by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), and was established to provide police forces in an area with temporary reinforcements from other areas when dealing with major public events or

¹⁵⁷ The Employment Secretary during the passage of the first bill had been the 'wet' Jim Prior. His 'reward' for an adulterated loyalty to Mrs. Thatcher had been the Northern Ireland Office.

¹⁵⁸ John McIlroy, "Police and Pickets: The Law Against the Miners", Beynon, ed., 101-22.

¹⁵⁹ McIlroy, 103.

disturbances. It is not a permanent organisation and is only 'activated' when leaders of ACPO deem it necessary.¹⁶⁰

With stricter legislation controlling the conduct of industrial disputes in place, and a large mobile police force capable of being organised at a national level, the scene was set for a confrontation with the miners. However, the employment legislation was never used during the miners' strike, the Government preferring to adopt a low-key role, at least in the early months, and allow a massive deployment of police forces to control and restrict the movement of the pickets. The NRC had been activated on 13 March, just four days after the 'official' beginning of the strike.¹⁶¹ The decision not to use the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts against the miners and their mass secondary picketing tactics seemed odd, if not downright perverse, since it was believed that the Acts had been established for just such an occasion as a national miners' strike. Not least among the confused was the NCB itself, having successfully applied for an injunction forbidding the NUM Yorkshire Area from participating in the picketing of the Nottinghamshire Coalfield. When the Yorkshire miners ignored the injunction, the way was open for the NCB to pursue a contempt of court action which could have resulted in the seizure of the Yorkshire Area's assets. But the NCB dropped the case and the Employment Acts were ignored by both the NCB and the Government for the rest of the dispute.¹⁶² Preference was then given to heavy policing of the dispute with policemen having recourse to criminal law. Explanations for this about-turn seem to be fairly straightforward. The use of the Employment Acts against the NUM may have had the effect of uniting the whole movement in support of the miners who, after their successes of the 1970s, would have been regarded as the spearhead in an assault on the anti-union legislation. There was also a situation within the NUM which the Government could at best have only dreamed of: coalfields divided and fighting among themselves. Enforcing the Employment Acts would almost certainly have resulted in a new solidarity within the NUM which could easily have defeated the Government.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Kettle, "The National Reporting Centre and the 1984 Miners' Strike", in Bob Fine and Robert Millar (eds.), *Policing the Miners' Strike*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 23-33.

¹⁶¹ John McIlroy, "The Law Struck Dumb? - Labour Law and the Miners' Strike", Fine and Millar (eds.), 79-102.

¹⁶² McIlroy, "Labour Law", 83-84.

The Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers, speaking on BBC Radio Four, commented on why the Acts were not used:

When we passed that legislation it was not in contemplation that a union would be split.¹⁶³

Ignoring the Employment Acts and asking the police to enforce criminal law also had the advantage of turning the dispute into a law and order issue, with the police protecting miners who wanted to exercise their 'right' to go to work. Thus the striking/picketing miners could be alienated from the public which had given them so much vital support in the 1970s.

With the miners determined to picket, and on ever increasing scales in the first few weeks of the dispute, the NRC swung into action and the first roadblocks were set up on 18 March. These centred on the Nottinghamshire Coalfield, and, of course, the Dartford Tunnel. The President of ACPO and the man in charge of the NRC was Charles McLachlen, Chief Constable of the Nottinghamshire Constabulary. He made it quite clear where he stood on the issue of freedom of movement:

Supporting the freedom of people who want to prevent people from going to work is not supporting freedom, but supporting anarchy, violence, riot and damage and everything else.¹⁶⁴

With comments like this coming from 'the top', it was evident in which direction the police force would go in monitoring and controlling picketing and other strike activities. That the police had the right to prevent suspected criminal acts, such as breach of the peace, was never in any doubt. It was not their right but their duty. The problem was in the liberal interpretation of police power to decide what constituted a genuine threat to civil order. Could miners at the Dartford Tunnel, over one hundred miles from the Midlands coalfields, be refused the right to

¹⁶³ McIlroy, "Labour Law", 85.

¹⁶⁴ Scraton, 259.

leave their own county on suspicion that they may be going to commit a crime in the future? Evidently they could. The 'offences' miners could be charged with if they attempted to pass through a roadblock were covered by the 1936 Public Order Act, which deals with breach of the peace; and the 1964 Police Act, which concerns the offence of obstructing a police officer in the course of his duty.¹⁶⁵ As we have seen, none of the Kent miners put this to the test and, apparently, neither did many other miners. Official police figures state that during the first twenty-seven weeks of the dispute, 164,508 "presumed pickets" were stopped from entering the county of Nottinghamshire.¹⁶⁶ The efficiency of the roadblocks was, however, more in delaying and frustrating pickets' travel arrangements, as the miners did eventually get through to their destinations, using alternative routes or different travelling times. The Dartford Tunnel roadblock ended almost as suddenly as it had begun - evidence of the police's discomfort, if not about the legality of such an operation, about its usefulness and its portent for future public relations. *The Guardian* was one of the only national newspapers which criticised the roadblock policy for its undemocratic nature and the dangerous precedent it set:

Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, is apparently outraged by Opposition criticism of the police role in the pit dispute. Such critics ... are trying to shake public confidence in the police and rule of law. If public confidence has been shaken, however, it is more likely to have occurred as a result of the behaviour of the police themselves than the comments of their critics. For with every day that passes in this dispute, evidence is accumulating of police activity that may or may not be legal but in any event should be considered quite outrageous in a democratic society... Stopping free and legal movement on the grounds that there may be offences in the future, at some unspecified time and place ... is as bizarre as, say, imposing a general curfew on urban areas on the grounds that crimes are committed at night.¹⁶⁷

⁵⁵ Robert East, Helen Power, Philip A. Thomas, "The Death of Mass Picketing", *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Winter 1985), 305-19.

⁵⁶ East et al., 308.

⁵⁷ *The Guardian Weekly*, 8.4.84.

The *New Statesman*, less moderate than the famously reasonable *Guardian*, was more outspoken in its criticism of the police action. Accusing the police of behaving illegally, which, as we have seen, was at least debatable, the *New Statesman* also gave vent to the popular left-wing notion that the activities of the NRC constituted a national police force, deliberately created to further the political goals of Thatcherism:

This is the measure of the advance made by Thatcherism on this front since 1979. To face trade unions in general and the miners in particular, a *de facto* national police force has been created, without any debate and outside any formal framework of political accountability. Illegal action by the police in preventing miners moving about the country freely has been applauded by government ministers and thought proper by public opinion.¹⁶⁸

Public opinion, it must be said, a difficult entity to assess at the best of times, was generally tacit rather than supportive. All sides of the dispute claimed the support of 'public opinion'. What was not in doubt was the rapid decline in respect for police authority among striking miners. This is more understandable when one considers the close, if not sometimes 'friendly', ties which had often existed between miners and their local police. In Aylesham, policemen sang in the Snowdown Male Voice Choir, played rugby and football against the miners' teams and had fathers and brothers as well as friends working at the colliery. It therefore came as a shock to many miners when the policemen, who usually came from the same socio-political background, were capable of forgetting or putting to one side such considerations as friendship and/or class solidarity. Adeney and Lloyd speak of an incident when a Yorkshire miner was arrested by his own brother, and refer to this, without any sense of irony as a "comic moment".¹⁶⁹ A similar incident occurred on a Kent picket line which was certainly not regarded as funny. Kevin Mellin found himself on a picket line opposite his brother, David, a policeman. According to Kevin his brother was given the option of leaving:

¹⁶⁸ *New Statesman*, 4.5.84.

¹⁶⁹ Adeney and Lloyd, 105.

His Sergeant said, "If you want to leave the picket line you can leave it." And he [David] goes, "No, it's my job."... There was a lot of hassle.¹⁷⁰

The "hassle" was not just on the picket line but extended into family relations. David Mellin no longer lives in Aylesham and relations between the two brothers are still strained. Kevin also had a problem with his father:

My Dad was a deputy. People weren't getting on too great with the deputies neither. My brother a copper. I was up in London all the time.¹⁷¹

The short, clipped sentences employed by Mellin exemplify the dry, often sardonic, sense of humour found among miners. His way of dealing with the confrontational family situation was to avoid it by spending as much time as possible fund-raising in London.

Paul Jones and Craig Loomer also witnessed the incident with David Mellin. Their account emphasises the shock at the total lack of class solidarity between police and miners. Paul Jones is speaking first:

David Mellin ... used to be a friend of mine, never spoken to him since... When he was at Tilmanstone his cousin, Craig [Loomer]... was saying, "What you doing here?"... Then his boss come to him and says, "I understand it's your family, you can go out and get a job round the back." And he says, "No, I'm a policeman." Craig was saying to him, "Bastard. Your grandad's died ... your brother and that are on strike and you stand there like that, with them."¹⁷²

Thus Jones, like many other miners, had his "eyes opened" to the reality of police loyalties and their behaviour. He extended his new opinions to include wider social and political issues and the treatment of other marginal groups and minorities in his conclusion on the police of today:

¹⁷⁰ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

¹⁷¹ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

¹⁷² Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

Got no time for them at all... Hippie convoys used to say they got harassed, but you can see that they did. Blacks an' that... Got no time for 'em.¹⁷³

The KNUM was quick to recognise the potential of the psychological and political links with such diverse minority groups and organised meetings with them. Philip Sutcliffe was astonished to find himself speaking at a Sikh meeting in London:

I even spoke at a Sikh meeting in London. And the way they drew the thing together was "Why a miner and a Sikh? What have they got in common?" And the thing we had in common was that we had, at times, both been harassed and intimidated by the police.¹⁷⁴

Kent meets Leicester.

After having been sent on a detour the Kent miners did eventually reach their destination which, initially, was Barnsley. They were allocated the Leicestershire Coalfield as their area of picketing, it being the closest coalfield to Kent and the major constituent of the South Midlands Division, of which Kent was now a part. When they arrived in Coalville, the Aylesham miners were despondent at the number of miners working. A handful of pickets was usually allowed to stand by the entrance to a colliery and flag down cars in order to speak to the men going to work. In most cases, after a brief exchange, the Leicestershire miners would go to work, giving the absence of a national ballot, financial pressure and the promise of the Vale of Belvoir as alternative employment as their reasons for not striking. The Kent miners, so full of confidence and faith in the comradeship and natural solidaristic tendencies of all miners, were soon disabused of such sentimental notions. The feeling of disappointment and sadness is evident in Kevin Mellin's words:

¹⁷³ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

¹⁷⁴ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

The first time we went up there we thought we were going to get them out on strike... Some of them were turning back... And some were stopping saying, "We know how you feel, but we've got to go to work, and we haven't had the vote, the national ballot."¹⁷⁵

Jackie Messiter, a Snowdown miner, picketing outside Whitwick Colliery, was confronted with the classic Lockwood 'privatised worker' syndrome: miners who argued that they could not afford to strike and that their loyalties were first and foremost to their families.¹⁷⁶ As a husband and the father of five children, he found such attitudes incomprehensible, as the following extract, an exchange with a Whitwick miner, shows:

I've got a wife and five kids and I'm supporting the union and I think everyone else should; and she understands and she backs me. In fact she came up on Saturday up to Leicestershire on the march with the women.¹⁷⁷

Philip Sutcliffe is more forthright in his condemnation of the Leicestershire working miners, alling into question their working-class self-imagery, their industrial identity:

I always thought a miner was a miner, but they're not miners when they went through picket lines. Some of them couldn't go through picket lines, they went over fences and hedges and crawled back to work.¹⁷⁸

Sutcliffe tries to show his disgust at such behaviour, giving animalistic images to these men, but he inadvertently admits the fundamental working-class solidarity which did exist. It was not fear which stopped these men from crossing picket lines - there were certainly enough police to protect them - but shame. Ivor Whyman, a Whitwick miner, admits as much when he speaks of

¹⁷⁵ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

¹⁷⁶ Jackie Messiter, personal interview, July 1989.

¹⁷⁷ *Die Kumpel von Kent*, private video made by the German support group, in the author's possession.

¹⁷⁸ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

the unpleasant feeling of walking past pickets. He tried an alternative entrance, confirming Sutcliffe's accusation, which did result in fear overcoming shame:

I thought I'd be clever and I went in the back way. Because I didn't think there'd be anybody there. And there was. And I was on my own. There was about half a dozen of them yelling at you, calling you "scab" and "blackleg". I never tried that again... I felt that we probably should've been on strike.¹⁷⁹

Keith Mellin, feeling totally isolated after five weeks on strike from Ellistown Colliery and believing he was only one of three Leicestershire miners out, decided to go back to work. He speaks quickly and confusingly at one and the same time, trying to justify his action and then, feeling that it was unjustifiable, shows a sense of shame:

I did cross a picket line once and I felt quite bad about it... I came out for about five weeks and it died. I thought there was only three of us out and it seemed a hopeless case. I didn't want to go back to work. It seemed nothing was going to change the mind of anybody working and I went back for four weeks... I was feeling guilty so I came out and that was it for the rest of the strike. Right to the end... Its' a lot easier to strike when everybody's got the same feelings... I'm not saying that I'm stronger than anyone else.¹⁸⁰

Mellin's observations about industrial action being easier when supported by like-minded colleagues is, of course, not new. But its lack of originality does not detract from its simple truth. He drew his support from his geographical origins: Kent, and the fact that all his Aylesham peers, with whom he had kept in regular contact, were on strike. That he was a Kent miner on strike in Leicestershire seemed to prove some mystical point about Kent miners being genetically militant. The reality was much simpler: after only three years in the Leicestershire

¹⁷⁹ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

¹⁸⁰ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

Coalfield his familial and professional loyalties were still to Kent. With a father, brother relatives and friends on strike at Snowdown and Tilmanstone Collieries, and sometimes picketing Ellistown Colliery where Mellin worked, it would have been psychologically and emotionally harder for him to work than to strike. However, that is not to diminish the financial effort it cost him, living in Coalville without the daily contact of a support group. His visits to Aylesham were a boost to his morale, especially as a *striking Leicestershire* miner originally from *Kent*. Kent miners were as eager to believe their own mythology as anybody else, perhaps more so as it served to define the somewhat tautological explanation for their action. They were militant because they were solidaristic. They were solidaristic because they were militant. Mellin's morale-boosting trips to Aylesham were short-lived, he had a wife and child in Coalville. Ultimately they served to heighten his sense of isolation and alienation from his more recent workmates:

I remember feeling, during the strike, that when I went to an area where there was a lot of people on strike, a bit jealous. You'd come back here and you'd think, "Why can't it be like that *here*?" That got to you a bit.¹⁸¹

This sense of apartness, once he had returned to Coalville, caused him to give up one of his great loves in life - playing rugby:

It's like winning the pools and then sitting with somebody who can't afford to pay the rent... It was awkward... I couldn't talk about work because I hadn't been.¹⁸²

The inability to 'talk shop', one of Blauner's criteria for occupational community, placed Mellin outside the community of workers in his specific geographical location. And it was that sense of local 'community', miners uniting and going to work, which kept the Coalville mining population solid. This accounted for several Leicestershire miners returning to work after just a

¹⁸¹ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

¹⁸² Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

few months of being on strike. Terry Jones, a Snowdown miner picketing in Leicestershire, tells a strange story that seems to capture some of the tragi-farce aspects of 1984-85:

This particular family, where we were stopping, in Burton, it was a mining village that had a strong Scotch community... The lad whose house we were stopping at, he'd been on strike for two weeks and he was about one of only three blokes at his pit that was on strike ... in the end he went back to work. We was picketing him going into work in the morning and we was stopping at his house... He wanted to be on strike, but you can't go out on strike and stay on strike because he had no support.¹⁸³

The justification for working, given by the Leicestershire miners to Kent pickets was, as we have seen, centred upon financial considerations and the 'undemocratic' nature of the strike due to the absence of a national ballot. It was this latter point which held the greatest sway and was used as a legitimate criticism of Scargill. The issue of 'Scargillism' cannot be avoided,¹⁸⁴ and was yet another question over which Kent and Leicestershire miners were obviously divided.

Kent miners were generally united in their support, indeed admiration, for Scargill, and their detestation of the press for its vilification of *their* leader. Kevin Fraser is typical of the response from Kent miners to any questioning of Scargill's handling of the strike:

Who could have done it any better? I can't believe there was another leader there who could have done it any better... That man from before the strike, from when he was elected, the right-wingers, the people in power, knew that he was a dangerous person, and from Day One his character was assassinated.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Terry Jones, personal interview, 29.12.93.

¹⁸⁴ One analyst does, however, manage to write an article on the miners' strike without mentioning Scargill at all. Michael Ignatieff, "England: After the Miners' Defeat", *Dissent* (Summer 1985): 277-81. But, like the Book of Esther, in the Old Testament, which does not mention God once, the conspicuous absence of Scargill seems to make him all the more present.

¹⁸⁵ Kevin Fraser, personal interview, 18.8.93.

There is, here, an implicit acceptance of the press' accusations of Scargill having ulterior political motives. Being a "dangerous person" meant danger to the State, which many Kent miners appreciated. Often the appreciation of Scargill is justified with reference to the vast numbers of pit closures since 1985, proving that he was right and not the liar the press said he was. Paul Jones:

I thought he was great. I still do. He was right wasn't he? He was even more right than he thought.¹⁸⁶

Craig Loomer reinforces the point. He agreed,

... wholeheartedly... I agreed with everything what Scargill said... Still do.¹⁸⁷

Trisha Sutcliffe, one of the activists in the AWSG, is ebullient in her praise of the NUM leader as an exemplary trade unionist:

All I can say is, that if all the trade unions in this country had leaders like Arthur Scargill, we wouldn't be in the position we are now. I just think he's a really good man.¹⁸⁸

The desire to support Scargill, and to be seen to be still supporting him, is tied up with the desire to be proved right. Attacks on Scargill's integrity were taken personally by Kent miners who, while revelling in the term 'militants', took strong objection to being called 'liars'. The fact of the coal industry being virtually closed down since 1985, while not giving any satisfaction to these men, has at least justified them in the action they took and placed them on the side of 'Right'. However, while wishing to place themselves firmly on Scargill's political side, many

¹⁸⁶ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

¹⁸⁷ Craig Loomer, personal interview, 16.8.93.

¹⁸⁸ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

Kent miners are also keen to show that they were not sheep following a charismatic leader. They have criticisms of him as well. Craig Loomer criticises his style:

He could have come across a bit more subtly.¹⁸⁹

Other miners are more specific and criticise his tactics. Terry Jones, while accepting that Scargill was fundamentally right, nonetheless criticises his (non)negotiating style and his tactics. His comment concludes with a classic piece of understatement:

I agreed with what he said because it was coming true all the time. Everything he said was coming true... You knew all the while that he was in charge that nobody would speak to him... he wasn't prepared to give an inch, and you can't bargain or negotiate like that... he was definitely right, but the way he went about it was wrong. Bringing people out on strike in the middle of summer isn't really a good idea.¹⁹⁰

Keith Owen shows how, whether it was true or not, Scargill, in the minds of many of the rank-and-file, despite his protestations to the contrary, had effectively become the NUM:

Looking back in hindsight now... I think the NUM, Arthur Scargill, made one mistake: we linked the wages with pit closures. We lost two ballots on that. Two national ballots. And if we'd have voted for strike action over pit closures, on its own, we'd have won it hands down.¹⁹¹

Such confidence in national solidarity over the issue of pit closures was almost certainly misplaced. But it was a belief that even Leicestershire miners expressed. For many of them the character of Scargill was paramount in determining their opposition to him and, therefore, the strike. John Tomlinson is somehow typical of the industrial and political nature of the

¹⁸⁹ Craig Loomer, personal interview, 16.8.93.

¹⁹⁰ Terry Jones, personal interview, 29.12.93.

¹⁹¹ Keith Owen, personal interview, 29.8.95.

Leicestershire Coalfield, especially in 1984. His desire to convince the listener of Leicestershire miners' working-class solidarity combined with their pecuniary and individualistic tendencies, gets him into a bit of a muddle. Extensive quoting is merited here:

There was a Leicestershire vote and the majority in Leicestershire didn't want to strike. Because the pits in the Leicestershire Area ... had only got about four or five years left anyway... So what was really the point of striking? The one thing which did go against the grain all the while - there was never a national vote. You was like being bullied to go on strike... If there'd been a national ballot Leicestershire would've been out... Everybody knew he [Scargill] were right. But it was the way he went about it. It's like somebody telling you you can't have a cup of tea in the morning... You were always supposed to be together. He was supposed to be your leader... To do that kind of thing is to have a national vote which he didn't go for. And I think that's the reason the whole lot didn't come out... I think he were right. And I think he's been proved he were right with what the Government has done. But at the end of the day, why didn't he have a national ballot? Was he frightened he might lose it?... Nine out of ten Leicestershire miners would've voted to come out on strike. But they weren't being bullied into it. They wanted a national ballot... And people went to work round here... I'll openly tell you, *I worked every day through it.*¹⁹²

This is the classic independent miner. Refusing authority, wherever it comes from, but wishing to be included in the traditional solidaristic work and union relations of coalmining. His argument that ninety per cent of Leicestershire miners would have voted for strike action in a national ballot is incongruous with his earlier comment that these miners did not believe in the point of striking to save pits which everybody accepted had been condemned. And, striking to save other areas' pits was out of the question. Also, the evidence of anti-strike feeling was clear, as Tomlinson points out, in the local Area ballot. This was conducted on Monday 19

¹⁹² John Tomlinson, personal interview, 10.8.95.

March, and produced a massive 89.3 per cent against strike action over pit closures.¹⁹³ The contradictions in Tomlinson's comments are, then, obvious and enormous. What is clear is that he was directing the traditional miners' obstinacy towards the perceived authoritarianism of the NUM rather than that of the NCB/government. Similarly, Jack Jones continued to call for a national ballot, especially after the Leicestershire Area ballot, the presumption being that a national vote would result in the men going back to work.¹⁹⁴ The role of Jones is a controversial one, and one to which we shall return, briefly, a little later.

Wally Quelch, a deputy and local Labour councillor, had similar ideas, although more consistent, about Scargill, the strike and Leicestershire miners:

They believed it was people like Mr Scargill and company declaring what they should do... And this Area didn't like being pushed.¹⁹⁵

Democracy is an important word for the Leicestershire miners, perhaps more important than union solidarity. Miners like Quelch are proud of the democratic traditions within the NUM and were very angry at what they perceived as a break with tradition over the political nature of the strike. Unlike the Kent miners, he did not believe in using industrial action for *political* purposes:

I don't believe in that sort of thing. I've been a socialist all my damn life. But I think the unions have manipulated the men for political issues, and I think that is completely wrong... The way to get rid of somebody is through the ballot box... It's no good saying the miners are against Thatcher let's have her out. All the other industries might love her.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ C.T., 23.3.84.

¹⁹⁴ Griffin, *Volume III*, 198.

¹⁹⁵ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

¹⁹⁶ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

Quelch also gives other reasons for the Leicestershire miners' failure to support the strike which, because of their financial nature, may be closer to the truth. They explain why the men may not have felt the same sense of economic insecurity about the future and why, unlike miners with more desperate employment prospects once their pits had closed, they could afford the luxury of democracy:

We had alternative industries like quarrying, pipeyards, engineering, hosiery, brickmaking. So we did have a diverse industry.¹⁹⁷

Some of the criticisms of Scargill were much more virulent showing a certain tendency to believe tabloid representations. Ivor Whyman must have had the controversial *The Sun* photograph of Scargill appearing to give a Nazi salute in mind when he said:

Scargill was right in what he was saying. But he went about it ... sort of Hitler style.¹⁹⁸

Whyman had very fixed ideas on how the split in the NUM and the subsequent setting up of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), could have been avoided:

The one thing I didn't like about it, it was a set-up with the Tories to split the NUM. What should've been happening was not split the NUM but get rid of Scargill. That would've made me happy.¹⁹⁹

Frank Gregory, a retired Bagworth miner by 1984, still had very clear ideas about the strike and Scargill:

Arthur Scargill, the worse thing we could ever have done, to have had him... We weren't going on strike because we agreed with Scargill. We wanted more money and

¹⁹⁷ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

¹⁹⁸ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

¹⁹⁹ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

different things. But all the time we were saying, "Oh, I wish I could get him out. Let's have somebody else in."²⁰⁰

The irony of these comments from Leicestershire miners and their faithful adherence to democratic principles is that they would have welcomed an NEC putsch to displace Scargill who had been elected NUM President with a massive popular vote of over seventy per cent. A House of Commons politician would be ecstatic with such a majority.

Peter Smith, a member of the NUM Executive when interviewed, was understandably a little more cautious in his comments on Scargill. But, his opinion of him and of Leicestershire miners is totally consistent with the previous comments once one realises that even the positive comment on Scargill is tinged with regret:

You can only admire the man for what he's doing. He's never budged one way or the other. Not even a fraction ... in Leicestershire ... we give a bit, you give a bit. Scargill's attitude was, "No, if you deserve something, that should be yours outright. You don't compensate by giving something else."²⁰¹

Once again we can see the obvious pride in the Leicestershire tradition of compromise, something we have seen throughout the history of the coalfield with first the LMA and *Gowdridgeism* and then the LNUM under the control of Frank Smith. Jack Jones followed in that tradition winning himself roughly equal amounts of respect and contempt, friends and enemies. He was first elected onto the Desford Colliery Branch committee in 1951 only three years after becoming a miner. His memory of the early days is a little bit suspect:

The demands for coal were not great, the need for coal following the war seemed to be declining ... we were producing all the coal the nation apparently required ... and the miners were greatly exploited.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Frank Gregory, personal interview, 23.7.93.

²⁰¹ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

²⁰² Carswell and Roberts. (eds.), 125.

That the miners were financially exploited is not in doubt, but this was precisely because the market demand for coal, post-war, was so voracious and the NUM did not take advantage of it, being more concerned to make nationalisation work and thus suppressing any industrial action in pursuit of higher wages.

Jones also speaks of the enormous disparity in wages at Desford, in the early 1950s, between surface men and underground rippers. His figures are somewhat difficult to accept:

I moved a resolution on behalf of surface workers ... who at that time were getting somewhere about eight pounds a week, and there had been men at Desford getting large wages for enlarging roadways - back ripping - some of these men had been getting seventy, eighty pounds a week... I argued that it was unfair for two men probably living next door to each other to go to the same place of work ... one got eighty pounds and one got eight pounds.²⁰³

It certainly would have been unfair if such a disparity had existed and it would have been highly *unlikely for two such miners to have been neighbours*. The NPLA agreement of March 1966 actually gave Leicestershire faceworkers £3.96 per shift, thereby establishing them on less than £20 for a five-shift week,²⁰⁴ and this some ten years after Jones' Desford miners were allegedly earning £80 a week. The temptation to exaggerate the past is always with us, but there are limits!

At the beginning of the 1984-85 strike, Jones was one of the first NEC members to call for a national ballot. After his own Area had voted against strike action he was determined to keep Leicestershire pits working, believing that was in line with the rules of the Area constitution. On one occasion, very early on in the dispute, one of the Leicestershire striking miners, Mick Richmond, managed to persuade a large number of Bagworth miners to join him:

²⁰³ Carswell and Roberts. (eds.), 125-26.

²⁰⁴ Griffin, *Volume III*, 133.

Jack Jones actually discouraged the strike in '84 round here. I'd got one hundred men out at Bagworth ... and he talked them back down the pit... I got a hundred in the canteen at Bagworth and Trevor Irons, who was the Union delegate, he went running down to Coalville to fetch Jack Jones... And ... he talked them back down the pit.²⁰⁵

One of the most notorious events of the 1984-85 strike was a meeting of right-wing members of the NEC held on Tuesday 27 March. It was held at the Brant Inn, Groby, just seven miles south of Coalville and was largely organised by Jones along with Roy Ottey and Ted McKay, General Secretary of the North Wales Area.²⁰⁶ The arrangements were made in secret, or what Ottey calls "... a cloak and dagger operation, akin to something in a detective novel."²⁰⁷ The reason for secrecy was revealed in the fear expressed by Sid Vincent, one of the NEC members invited to the meeting. Upon seeing the press and television cameras in the forecourt of the Brant Inn, Vincent exclaimed:

I shall get bloody hung in my area.²⁰⁸

Jones arranged for police protection for the meeting and even informed Ned Smith, NCB Director General of Industrial Relations, that the meeting was taking place. Left-wing members of the NEC were kept in the dark.²⁰⁹ The sole purpose of the meeting was to get a majority on the NEC to call for a national ballot. Thirteen of the twenty-four NEC members were contacted and pledged their support, most of them turning up for the meeting. As a result a press statement was released, read out by Ottey, part of which declared:

We are unanimously of the opinion that the national officials should recognise the validity of the democratic decisions taken in various areas and, whilst appreciating the right of areas to take strike action under Rule 41, they should also recognise the

²⁰⁵ Carswell and Roberts (eds.), 134.

²⁰⁶ *C.T.*, 30.3.84.

²⁰⁷ Ottey, 79.

²⁰⁸ Adeney and Lloyd, 88.

²⁰⁹ Ottey, 81.

decision taken by other areas not to strike. We hope and trust that they will instruct accordingly.²¹⁰

The press statement also called upon working areas to continue working while respecting the overtime ban still in force. This meant miners crossing picket lines, which Jones understood and for those who did not he reiterated the fact, very clearly, in *The Guardian*, the following day:

There is now a clear mandate for a national ballot on the strike issue, and we shall be urging our members and all those in other areas, who took a local vote not to strike, to cross picket lines and go to work.²¹¹

The scene was now set, very early on in the strike, for the theme which was to dominate it above all others, and which was ultimately to cause its failure and the break-up of the NUM: Area against Area, miner against miner. Nowhere was this division more clearly exemplified than in the schism in the South Midlands Division between Leicestershire and Kent. On the evening of the Brant Inn affair, Ottey appeared on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme. He only agreed to this because the BBC informed him that Jack Collins was appearing for the left-wing.²¹² Lawrence Knight accused Jack Jones of collaboration with the Government and the NCB.²¹³ While the first accusation may or may not have been true, Jones could hardly deny the second. The hope of the right-wing to secure a national ballot at the next meeting of the NUM Executive on Thursday 12 April in Sheffield, was once again frustrated. Jones spoke long and forcefully at the NEC meeting, accusing pickets of violence and undemocratic intimidation:

²¹⁰ Ottey, 84.

²¹¹ *The Guardian*, 28.3.84.

²¹² Ottey, 84.

²¹³ *C.T.*, 30.3.84.

It is a tragic situation of miner against miner and a position in some areas that the men would go to work if they were not prevented... If there had been a national vote, it would have prevented that and I say to those who go to the media and say we should not have a vote, there is only one rule book and it is sacrosanct... It is a tragic day that we are in. I speak to many in other areas and they see it as a political strike. We have lost sight of the cause.²¹⁴

It was quite incredible that Jones should, at this stage in the strike and with its obvious political ramifications, revert to the old Leicestershire tradition of maintaining a non-political union. However, one can only admire his gall in speaking in that manner to the likes of Scargill and McGahey. At the end of his speech he moved a motion calling for a national ballot over pit closures. There then followed a long and heated debate during which tempers became very frayed and only Scargill seemed to remain calm.²¹⁵ At the end of the 'discussion', after each Area representative had made his point, Scargill ruled Jones' motion out of order on the grounds that the NEC had previously, on 8 March, rejected a call for a national ballot and that such a ruling could only be overturned by Conference. The right-wing was dismayed, the left jubilant. In the light of the events from the Brant Inn to the NEC meeting at Sheffield, one can only marvel at the sentimentality and basic incorrectness of Raphael Samuel's description of loyalty and trust among the NEC:

The miners' leaders also showed a remarkable loyalty to each other: faced with an unprecedented campaign of vilification by the government and the national press, not a single man ran for cover, or attempted to distance himself, in however small a degree, from the symbolic object of national execration, Arthur Scargill.²¹⁶

One can only be comforted by such errors of judgement by the likes of such analysts as 'Raph' Samuel.

²¹⁴ Ottey, 95-96.

²¹⁵ Ottey, 96-113.

²¹⁶ Samuel et al. (eds.), 26.

While the Leicestershire miners and their leaders clamoured for a national ballot the Kent miners were equally convinced that there was no need for one. For them the old trade union adage of *one out all out* should be the guiding principle. This is what Kevin Mellin meant when replying to a question on whether or not he thought there should have been a ballot, he replied:

No, I don't... I think they should have all supported it spontaneously when it started.²¹⁷

Paul Jones admits that in retrospect it may have been wise to have had a ballot, but does so reluctantly, distancing himself from such a distasteful idea by the use of the third person plural. He then reverts to the obviously more inclusive first person plural when he expresses how he felt at the time:

Yes, you can say now, they should've had one... Blow the scabby bastards, we'll do without 'em... If they don't want it, blow 'em, we'll do without them. But we couldn't do without 'em.²¹⁸

Lawrence Knight, while agreeing that there should not have been a national ballot, comes very close to admitting that the real reason for that decision was fear of the majority voting to work and the strike collapsing. Such fear was based on very real and recent evidence which the right-wing also accepted and used in their plea for a ballot. Knight shows his awareness of the details and is not taken in by the heady solidarity of February 1981:

Well, people say we should've done... [But] look at the history of it. You're alright quoting 1981, but in the years after that there was setbacks, and ballot setbacks and defeats about this specific issue.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

²¹⁸ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

²¹⁹ Lawrence Knight, personal interview, 29.9.89.

The issue of the ballot continues to dominate discussions of the 1984-85 miners' strike. In retrospect, because the strike failed, it is easy, as Paul Jones says, to argue that Scargill should have allowed a ballot. The situation for the NUM and the coal industry could hardly have turned out worse even if there had been a massive anti-strike vote and a return to work early in 1984. But hindsight is the luxury commodity afforded only to historians, professional or lay. At the time, men and women believed they were fighting for jobs and communities on the conscious level; and the right to determine their own industrial and political destinies on a more subconscious level. With such stakes to play/fight for, wranglings over such democratic niceties as ballots, were mere pretexts that detracted from the fundamental principle of trade unionism: you do not cross a picket line. The problem is that the history of trade unionism, the mining unions included, is littered with examples of that principle being broken. Perversely, 1972 and 1974 had done a great disservice to the striking miners of 1984-85 in persuading them of the sanctity of that principle. It also helped some of the Kent miners, from Snowdown Colliery in particular, to forget some of their own, not so distant, moderate past. What the Leicestershire miners did in 1984-85 was simply revert to type, why the Aylesham miners did not, is perhaps the more interesting question.

After just less than a month picketing the Leicestershire Coalfield, the Kent miners withdrew and were replaced by the South Wales miners. As the relief troops arrived one of them commented to Philip Sutcliffe:

Well, the Kent boys couldn't get them out in a month. We'll have them out in a week.²²⁰

However, the solidarity of the Leicestershire working miners proved to be too much even for the famed tough militancy of the Welsh miners. After the Easter break the four remaining collieries in the Coalville area: Whitwick, South Leicester, Ellistown and Bagworth, were all working normally.²²¹ The South Wales miners left Leicestershire and a last desperate attempt

²²⁰ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

²²¹ C.T., 27.4.84.

to stop the Coalville pits from working was made by the North Derbyshire miners at the end of April/beginning of May 1984. On 30 April they marched through Coalville and their anger spilled over into violence in what the local paper described as a "riot" in Coalville.²²² Griffin calls it a "rampage", and quotes an Ellistown miner who makes a comparison between the different picketing methods witnessed in the Coalville area:

Until this week the picket at my colliery was conducted in a proper manner. The pickets were from the Kent and Welsh coalfields - these people we could sympathise with. But now we are confronted with loud-mouthed, ill-mannered miners from the north of the country.²²³

Whatever the truth of these events, and there is also evidence of assaults by the police upon the Derbyshire miners, their cases being heard at Market Bosworth magistrates court on Tuesday 8 May,²²⁴ the heavy picketing of the Coalville pits was at an end. Neither the alleged 'softly, softly' approach of the Kent and South Wales miners, nor the 'hard men' tactics of the North Derbyshire miners had succeeded in bringing the Leicestershire men out. At the end of the first week of May 1984, there was only a "token presence" of pickets at the pit gates of the four Coalville collieries.²²⁵ They continued to work normally for the rest of the strike. However, the Coalville miners did have their own 'enemy within'.

The Politically Spotless 'Dirty Thirty'.

Life was anything but normal, however, for the handful of Coalville miners who remained on strike. While the Kent, Welsh or Derbyshire pickets were present there was tangible evidence of the dispute being nationwide. This gave an enormous psychological boost

²²² C.T., 4.5.84.

²²³ Griffin, *Volume III*, 200.

²²⁴ C.T., 11.5.84. All cases brought against the police were dismissed.

²²⁵ C.T., 11.5.84.

to the Coalville strikers and the confidence to carry on striking in the sure knowledge that they were not alone. However, when the mass of the pickets left, the Coalville men were left to picket their own pits. Two men emerged as the natural leaders of the Leicestershire strikers: Mick Richmond and 'Benny' Malcolm Pinnegar, both from Bagworth Colliery. They came out on strike when the Kent miners picketed their colliery. Richmond explained to his wife, who was worried about the financial effects of her husband striking:

Well, I can't cross a picket line. That's it, I couldn't do it.²²⁶

Originally there were thirty striking miners from Bagworth and their official title was 'The Leicestershire Striking Miners' (LSM). However, the title by which they became famous was the 'Dirty Thirty', after a Leicestershire working miner gave them this abusive epithet during an interview with Radio Leicester.²²⁷ The 'Thirty' soon became forty as others joined them from Ellistown, South Leicester and Whitwick, but the nickname 'Dirty Thirty' remained. Relationships between these men were astonishingly loose. Astonishing because one would expect with such a small number of strikers, isolated from the rest of the local workforce, and, after May 1984, virtually ignored by other British miners, they would have turned in upon each other for mutual support. But this was not the case. Keith Mellin and Andy Webb were both striking miners from Ellistown, and they did not even know each other.²²⁸ However, the organisers of the LSM were very close and operated from a room donated by the Labour controlled Leicester City Council. Men like Richmond, Pinnegar and a few others, such as Bobby Girvan, went on a constant round of talks and fund-raising events, being treated like heroes wherever they went. They tried to keep contact with all the striking Leicestershire miners, but it was not easy. Geographically the strikers were split over a large area, there was no single village community as in Kent. Dave Douglas, one of the 'Thirty', explains:

²²⁶ Carswell and Roberts, (eds.), 134.

²²⁷ Carswell and Roberts, (eds.), 134.

²²⁸ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93. Andy Webb, personal interview, 25.7.93.

I can't just ring Richo and ask him out for a pint when we have a bit of spare money, because we live so far [fifteen miles] away.²²⁹

There was no guarantee that these men would come across each other when they went out. Coalville had several working men's clubs scattered over the area, and even if the striking miners could afford to go out, the atmosphere for them in the clubs, surrounded by working miners, was very tense. One of them commented:

We cannot use any of the pubs, even if the landlords are sympathetic, because the workers won't have us there. We're banned from every pub in Coalville. Our social life revolves around each other these days.²³⁰

Consequently, miners like Mellin and Webb who were on the fringes of the LSM, felt even more isolated. Only their personal convictions, rather than group solidarity, stopped them from going back to work. Andy Webb believes his union convictions were inherited:

My father's politics were he wouldn't cross a picket line. And if there was just one [picket] there, he'd turn round... I had nine months and three weeks [on strike]... Everytime I went to work, if there was a picket line I'd come home... Through the 'Dirty Thirty' I'd get a box of food every now and then and I'd got very good in-laws. If it hadn't been for my father and mother and in-laws...²³¹

Webb trails off at this point but the obvious implication is that he would probably have gone back to work, a fact which he clearly does not want to accept. Indeed, he did go back to work immediately after the Christmas break when it became obvious that there would be no power cuts that winter and the strike began to crumble nationally.

²²⁹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 235.

²³⁰ Griffin, *Volume III*, 235-36.

²³¹ Andy Webb, personal interview, 25.7.93.

Keith Mellin, as we have seen, stayed out until the end, but he never became closely involved in the organisation of the LSM. This was partly due to the fact that he was an electrician and therefore a member of the Power Group within the NUM. Such a distinction did not exist in Kent, indeed, many of the Kent miners had never even heard of it. Kevin Fraser was totally ignorant of them when he picketed Bagworth Colliery and asked the miners why they were not coming out:

"Power worker, mate." When we got up there none of us had ever heard of this sort of union or group called Power Workers. We all got up there and said, "We're from Kent and we're asking you not to go to work"... And they were saying, "Oh, we're Power Workers, mate"... We said, "Well, what's that then? Who are these? Power Workers?" We'd never heard of it down in Kent... They all started saying they were Power Workers.²³²

In Leicestershire, however, birthplace of Roy Ottey the General Secretary and founder of the Power Group, such a distinction was proudly guarded. Ottey was, of course, very much against the strike, or at least the way it was being handled, and consequently the Power Group in Leicestershire was, except for Mellin and five others, working normally. However, a very significant Leicestershire Power Group striker was Bob MacSporran the Leicestershire President.²³³ Although he had campaigned with Ottey for a national ballot he finally decided to support the strike from June onwards.²³⁴ His action was very important, psychologically, for the handful of Power Group strikers. Mellin had a lot of contact with and respect for MacSporran.²³⁵

Another member of the 'Dirty Thirty' was Gordon Birkin, but like Webb and Mellin, was very much on the fringes. A loner down the pit and in the 'community', he had been transferred from Snibston Colliery when it closed in December 1983, to Cadley Hill in South

²³² Kevin Fraser, personal interview, 18.8.93.

²³³ Ottey, 107.

²³⁴ *C.T.*, 22.6.84.

²³⁵ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

Derbyshire. His sense of personal and geographical isolation led to him coming into conflict with both management and the union resulting in a strange type of individual militancy. Birkin hated working in South Derbyshire and joined the strike in May 1984, for, on his own admission, rather egotistical reasons:

Because I wanted a transfer out of the area. Bit selfish, like.²³⁶

The lack of homogeneity in the LSM was somewhat typical of the political and industrial character of Coalville as a whole. As a concept, 'isolated mass', no matter how weak, loose or watered-down, could not possibly be applied to the miners of Coalville. While forming a financially significant group within the town they were hardly a 'race apart'. Indeed, their sense of apartness was rather from each other, living as they did, scattered over a wide area. It was not the miners who formed a cohesive industrial group in Coalville, but the railwaymen. While the Leicester NUM urged its members to cross picket lines and go to work, members of the NUR at the Mantle Lane Depot, Coalville, voted overwhelmingly, on Tuesday 3 April, to support its National Executive decision not to move coke or coal. And on Wednesday 4 April, they came out on a one-day strike and joined the Kent pickets in Leicestershire.²³⁷ The action and solidarity of the Mantle Lane train drivers in supporting a strike which was not their own in an area where the miners themselves were not supporting it is quite astonishing. Mick Richmond understood the terrible irony of the situation:

The lads at Mantle Lane, on British Rail, they were superb. They were without doubt brilliant, you know. They stopped the coal traffic and everything, just refused to work. That was weird because you'd got lads working, miners working and they'd got brothers on the railway that were supporting the thirty of us. It was ever so weird.²³⁸

²³⁶ Gordon Birkin, personal interview, 14.8.95.

²³⁷ *C.T.*, 6.4.84.

²³⁸ Carswell and Roberts, (eds.), 135.

The Coalville train drivers campaigned with the LSM throughout the dispute and it was only their total solidarity which stopped individual members from being dismissed, although there were some cases of victimisation.²³⁹ On one occasion, however, in June, all the Mantle Lane drivers were sent home after refusing to move coal stocks.²⁴⁰ Negotiations between British Rail and the NUR, Coalville Branch, continued into the summer but reached deadlock when the drivers refused to budge over the issue of transporting coal and coke stocks.²⁴¹ Their unilateral action, virtually no other train drivers in Britain adopting such a militant stance, was no minor inconvenience either - the Mantle Lane Depot was on the main route to the Didcot Power Station near Oxford. Private, non-unionised, haulage contractors were brought in (in-line with the Ridley proposals) to move the coal. Somewhat hypocritically, the LNUM Area officials condemned this action as being anti-union.²⁴² The Coalville NUR leader was Roy Butlin and he was in constant touch with Mick Richmond, offering important financial as well as *moral support*. Only when the 'Dirty Thirty' voted to go back to work, when the strike was officially called off, did the Mantle Lane train drivers call off their ban on the movement of coal and coke.²⁴³ There are many cameo stories in the history of the 1984-85 miners' strike and this one certainly deserves more attention.

Another crucial source of support for the LSM came from the women who supported the strike. Like the women in mining communities throughout the country, they formed a Women's Support Group (WSG). The wives of Richmond and Pinnegar were closely involved, but it was the wife of Philip Smith, one of the original 'Dirty Thirty', who emerged as the natural leader of the WSG. Like many other women in support groups, Kay Smith soon found herself organising meetings and speaking at rallies, doing things she would never have imagined doing before the strike began. She also quickly developed a heightened sense of union principles and of the past:

²³⁹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 246-47.

²⁴⁰ *C.T.*, 22.6.84.

²⁴¹ *C.T.*, 20.7.84.

²⁴² *C.T.*, 29.6.84.

²⁴³ *C.T.*, 8.3.85.

Miners have always had to fight for what they want, the ones who are still working are just not trade unionists as far as I'm concerned.²⁴⁴

The primary objective of the WSG in Coalville was to keep the small number of strikers and their families in contact in order to lessen the sense of isolation and to help each other cope with the hostility from working miners and their families. Richmond's wife, Linda, did not enjoy shopping in Coalville with her small daughter, Emma:

When I'm in the shops with Emma, the wives make snide remarks about money.

Former friends ignore me ... and the wives have been very abusive, calling us "scabs".²⁴⁵

This was the mirror image of the situation in the Kent Coalfield and villages like Aylesham. There the solidarity of the men on strike spilled over into the community permeating all aspects of human relations including, of course, relationships between women. The Coalville women, like their husbands, found themselves isolated and vilified, and it was the lack of 'community', both geographical and psychological, that made life so difficult. Such things as communal kitchens, handing out food parcels, packed strike meetings and womens' support groups organising the next picket, simply did not exist. Even an application from the LSM to the local Council to set up a food stall in Coalville Market was rejected. Councillor Wally Quelch, "a socialist all [his] damn life", spoke out against the application, arguing that such a stall may cause trouble and offend the majority of miners who were working.²⁴⁶

Support for the LSM did not, then, come from Coalville, apart from Mantle Lane NUR, but from beyond the coalfield from other miners, notably the South Wales Coalfield, and the various support groups outside of mining. These included the Leicester and Loughborough Trades Councils, local Labour Parties and college and university students within the region. The uniqueness of the 'Thirty' thus gave them heroic working-class status and the financial and

²⁴⁴ C.T., 13.7.84.

²⁴⁵ C.T., 24.8.84.

²⁴⁶ C.T., 12.10.84.

food support they received as a result enabled them to distribute funds and food to other isolated striking miners in areas such as South Derbyshire.²⁴⁷ This *heroism* also attracted poets and playwrights, a play based on the experiences of the 'Dirty Thirty' being written and called *With The Sun On Our Backs*, written by Tony Stevens and produced by the Utility Theatre Company.

As Christmas and New Year passed most of the 'Thirty' remained on strike, although one or two, like Andy Webb, did go back as it became increasingly obvious that the strike was lost. In February 1985, the *Coalville Times* published a letter from Mick Richmond, which was clearly a last desperate plea to Leicestershire miners to come out and save the strike.²⁴⁸ It was to no avail and the 'Dirty Thirty' began to express apprehensions about going back to work once the strike was over.²⁴⁹ Gordon Birkin and his wife, Barbara, were particularly worried as he would be going back to Cadley Hill. Their fears were realised immediately after the strike by the reaction of the local management, and Birkin decided to take redundancy.²⁵⁰ Barbara Birkin commented:

Yes, it was a sort of forced redundancy because he was on strike and when he went back they more or less told him that he would have no safety cover. They made his life difficult. If he hadn't have took his redundancy he would have got the sack because they didn't like the striking miners.²⁵¹

This story was not repeated in the Coalville pits when the 'Thirty' went back to work on Tuesday 5 March 1985. However, while the battle to save pits was now lost, the battle to save the Leicestershire NUM was only just beginning, although, as we shall see in Part III of this chapter, it was merely a refrain.

²⁴⁷ Griffin, *Volume III*, 244.

²⁴⁸ *C.T.*, 15.2.85.

²⁴⁹ *C.T.*, 1.3.85.

²⁵⁰ Gordon Birkin, personal interview, 14.8.95.

²⁵¹ Carswell and Roberts. (eds.), 139.

The Enemy Within the Garden of England.

After withdrawing from Leicestershire at the beginning of April 1984, the Kent miners concentrated their efforts on the Kent docks and power stations, and on fund-raising and speaking at meetings, mainly in London. Contacts with the Greenwich Labour Party, which had been established in the 1970s, were reopened in 1984. Small offices were given over to the miners from where they organised their activities. Throughout the whole of the strike the three Kent pits were largely independent of each other as far as picket organisation and fund-raising went. This sometimes led to local antagonisms especially as the Aylesham strike committee and the women's support group were far and away the most efficient at collecting food and funds. On one occasion a Betteshanger miner's wife wrote to her local paper complaining that she had never seen anything of the alleged lorry loads of supplies arriving, particularly those from the Continent. She asked, with evident bitterness:

Where is the food going? To Aylesham?²⁵²

However, in general, relationships between the three pits were good, if somewhat distant at times. Dick Richardson, the oldest working Snowdown miner (he had joined the pit in 1937) acted as the liaison officer with Betteshanger and Tilmanstone Collieries. He kept in daily contact with the KNUM headquarters at Magness House in Deal.²⁵³ Towards the end of the strike, relationships became necessarily closer as the striking Kent miners were forced to unite and do something they had not done since 1926 - picket their own pits.

The Greenwich offices were manned by Philip Sutcliffe, Moggie Bryan and Arthur Loomer, working on a rota basis so that they could all spend some time at home in Aylesham. They organised picketing of power stations, food and money collections and arranged accommodation for those miners staying in London. Most week-ends everybody would return to Aylesham to be with families and friends and to report back on the events of the week.

²⁵² *E.K.M.*, 10.10.84.

²⁵³ Richard Richardson, personal interview, August, 1989.

After leaving Leicestershire the Kent miners' experience of picketing was largely confined to Kent and the South-East, although they were briefly involved at Orgreave in what turned out to be a tragi-farce of almost comic proportions. Orgreave power station, near Sheffield, had been designated by the NUM as the principal target for mass picketing. It *had* to be closed, and as the attempt to stop the coke lorries entering the plant began, it quickly became clear that a battle was commencing of which to the victor the spoils. And the 'spoils' in this case, for the NUM, would be not only the closing of a power station, but also the massive psychological boost of reminding the miners of what they could achieve when they were united. It rapidly became clear to historically aware observers and participants that Orgreave was intended to be Saltley Gate Mark II. The Snowdown Branch leaders at Greenwich knew for weeks before it happened that a mass picket at Orgreave was being planned and they were waiting for the call. Philip Sutcliffe recounts what happened:

I was told that the message I'd get, all I'd get on the phone is, "It's the 'Big O'."...

What'd happen then is that I'd have to draw every picket from the power stations and all else in London that we was doing, every car and every man available would make his way to Orgreave.²⁵⁴

Sutcliffe was aware of the importance of Orgreave and tried to impress this upon his colleagues. What happened when 'the call' came seems to suggest he failed:

So in this Labour Party Office we had this big map. Now for two weeks beforehand on this map ... [there] was an arrow leading ... to Orgreave... And I looked at that for two weeks and I kept thinking, "Well, at least we know where Orgreave is." And we watched all the battles on the telly and I thought, "Well, they're bound to send for us", and they did. I had a message, "It's the 'Big O'." So I said, "Right, we're in business." So I phoned through and I told ... Peter ... "Peter, its' the 'Big O'." He said, "I can't." I

²⁵⁴ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

said, "What do you mean you can't? It's the 'Big O', the one we're waiting for." He said, "I can't, we've still got a casserole in the oven."²⁵⁵

Eventually Sutcliffe managed to persuade his men of the significance of the events which were unfolding and that it was crucial that they should be there to ensure the success of the operation. But what happened next makes the Kent miners look more like the Keystone cops than the shock troops of the labour movement. The following account makes almost pathetic reading:

We gave them all instructions on where this Orgreave was and we all left separate to find our own way. I'll never forget it. Right where this pinpoint [was] we ended up by a pub. And as we drew in there was another car come in with us and a few more... There was no steelworks, no nothing there. I mean we didn't know where Orgreave was, I didn't know it was near Sheffield. I phoned the Area and I spoke to Terry Birkett at Magness House. I said, "Terry, I've had instructions it's the 'Big O'." "Don't mention that on the phone, you can't mention it." I said, "I know, but where is it?" He said, "I can't tell you."... So I phoned back to John Golden at Greenwich. And he cried, "Philip, I've had every car phoning me up, they don't know where they are. They're lost!"²⁵⁶

Terry Jones, one of the Kent miners involved in this escapade, remembers the difficult journey to Orgreave more than actually participating in the picketing of the power station:

We went to Orgreave once ... everyone did. And? We got lost.²⁵⁷

Prevalent is the obvious paranoia that many miners felt at the time about living in what they believed to be a police state, with widespread rumours of phone tapping. But in the midst of this *Kafkaesque* world, where a simple telephone conversation was considered a threat to

²⁵⁵ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

²⁵⁶ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

²⁵⁷ Terry Jones, personal interview, 29.12.93.

security and integrity, there was room for humour of the darkest kind, befitting the troubled confusion of the occasion. Sutcliffe explains how everyone came to be lost in the same place, the desperation shows in his second conversation with Magness House:

So I thought, "Well, I don't know what happened with that thing on the map, but everybody went exactly where they're supposed to have done according to the map." I didn't know at the time, but we found out later that one of the lads messin' about at Greenwich, threw a dart. And where that dart landed he just circled and put Orgreave. Now I thought that Moggie had planned it ... the week he was up there. And he thought that I'd done it... But fair play to all them blokes, they went all them miles, and they all went exactly where that dart had landed... In the end I had to tell Terry Birkett... "Look, I've got twenty cars running round here like mad things ... we've got a contact at Greenwich. I need to tell him ... where Orgreave is."... He said, "We're not to say it on the phone." I said, "Look, everybody knows, the politicians, everybody knows where bloody Orgreave is, bar us. So let us know!"²⁵⁸

Eventually the Kent miners found their way to Orgreave where they discovered the 'battle' was already as good as lost. The police were so well organised that the raggie taggle 'army' of the NUM were clearly no match for them. Kevin Mellin was in awe of the police operation at Orgreave:

Thousands and thousands of Black Marias .. I couldn't believe it Never seen nowt like it.²⁵⁹

Sutcliffe confirms the impression using military metaphors and, as always, insisting upon the political significance of the episode. His words belie the media images at the time of fearless, tough miners determined to do battle with the forces of law and order

²⁵⁸ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29 12 88

²⁵⁹ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24 8 93

We went there and it was frightening. This was after the big battles. The amount of pickets and police there ... it was like Napoleon's armies all drawn up with the sides. Now everywhere you went was just a mass of blue, millions and millions of coppers on horseback, lorries and dogs and everything. Then you had groups of pickets ... it was the most frightening thing during the whole of the strike that I've ever seen ... it was intimidating just the mass numbers of coppers. Because what they didn't want, and that's why they sent as many coppers ... they didn't want another Saltley Gate... Because that's what we wanted. We wanted to shut that ... coking plant... And at any cost they didn't want that to happen. And that's why Orgreave was so important... It was a psychological battle.²⁶⁰

Due to the sheer weight of police numbers, the Kent miners were unable to play a significant role in the 'Battle of Orgreave'. Their 'mission' had been to go to the southern section of the coking plant alongside the South Wales miners, acting as a decoy to draw as many police as possible away from the northern entrance which the mass of pickets were planning to storm. The plan failed miserably, the 'decoy' being so heavily policed and "hemmed in that they were cut off from the main picket."²⁶¹ Meanwhile, the numbers of police at the northern entrance were quite sufficient to ward off any threatened advance by the remaining miners.

This was no Saltley Gate. There was no sudden arrival of sympathetic local trade unionists appearing over the brow of a hill, banners waving in the wind. Indeed, there was not even a genuinely united NUM as there had been in 1972. The 'Battle of Orgreave' was a fiasco. The actual importance of the Orgreave coking plant to the power supply was minimal, but had become a focal point for the NUM at the behest of Scargill. Clearly the Government also understood the psychological significance of Orgreave and was determined that it would not be another Saltley Gate. Expenditure on the massive police presence was, in Chancellor Lawson's famous phrase, "a worthwhile investment for the good of the nation."²⁶² Arthur Loomer's

²⁶⁰ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

²⁶¹ Jackie Messiter, personal interview, July 1989.

²⁶² Hansard, Volume 65, col. 306, 31 July 1984.

assessment of the extent to which he believed the Government would go in ensuring its success against the NUM was less reserved than Lawson's, but illustrates just how convinced the miners were of Thatcher's personal involvement and determination:

I think mass picketing was a folly ... in the '80s the government of the day had bloody thought this through and they knew exactly what they were gonna do and they had the resources to counter it.²⁶³

Dick Richardson is even more succinct:

She would've sold the bloody Crown Jewels to beat the miners.²⁶⁴

Despite the disaster of Orgreave, morale among the Kent miners remained high throughout the summer of 1984. This was due to the perceived rightness of their case and the belief that justice would be done. Also, public support seemed so widespread, even in the streets, where food and money collections encountered very little opposition or hostility, except in the immediate towns of Dover and Canterbury (see below). However, support where it mattered - at the gates of power stations - was virtually non-existent, although some lorry drivers were sympathetic. Their justification for not observing the picket lines was invariably the same, as Paul Jones reports:

"I'm all for you like, but you can't get your own house in order, so what the 'eck do I want to stop for?... You can't get your own men out on strike without asking us to come out."... and that's a fair point.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.3.

²⁶⁴ Richard Richardson, personal interview, August 1989.

²⁶⁵ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

The Kent pickets were almost speechless with embarrassment at their famed solidarity being found wanting. Philip Sutcliffe reiterates the point. He was confronted by lorry drivers making the same point about the NUM being split:

"Look, you get all the miners out on strike and then we'll join you. But until you're all out there's no way ... can we ask our members to come out on strike..." And we just couldn't answer it.²⁶⁶

It was this failure of miners' solidarity which marked the 1984-85 miners' strike and determined that it should be classified along with 1926, rather than 1972 or 1974. But, the failure of the Midlands coalfields to support the strike did not, initially, depress the Kent miners too much. The support of various groups from all over the country and abroad convinced them they would win anyway. In May 1984, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, (AUEW) donated £4,159 to the Kent miners, and Bill Summers, President of the AUEW Fleet Street Branch, promised weekly donations of £800-£1000.²⁶⁷ In June, Daniel Denoncourt, leader of the Pas-de-Calais miners donated 30,000 francs to the KNUM.²⁶⁸ On Saturday 30 June, a convoy of food, clothing and household goods arrived in Kent from Fleet Street printers and journalists;²⁶⁹ and two weeks later £4000 was donated by the Essex Association of Trades Councils.²⁷⁰ Local churches were also supportive, St. George's Church in Deal gave £250 and the local Anglican deanery's committee also donated £250.²⁷¹ Lambeth City Council, led by the militant Ted Knight, twinned with Aylesham and Elvington for the duration of the strike and gave regular amounts of food and money.²⁷²

The children of the Kent miners were well looked after, many of them having holidays that even if their fathers had been working, they would not ordinarily have had. At the beginning of August two hundred children went on a three week holiday to France, paid for by

²⁶⁶ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

²⁶⁷ *E.K.M.*, 23.5.84.

²⁶⁸ *E.K.M.*, 6.6.84.

²⁶⁹ *E.K.M.*, 4.7.84.

²⁷⁰ *E.K.M.*, 18.7.84.

²⁷¹ *E.K.M.*, 18.7.84.

²⁷² *D.E.*, 4.5.84 and 8.6.84.

French unionists;²⁷³ and a dozen children left for Bulgaria, paid for by the Bulgarian Trade Union Association and Friends of Bulgaria in London.²⁷⁴

With such widespread support the Kent miners cannot, perhaps, be blamed for believing not only in the rightness of their action but also the invincibility of a united nationwide, even European-wide, working-class movement. This kind of solidarity with outside groups survived throughout the strike and beyond, Christmas and birthday cards still being exchanged in many cases.

The success of the Kent miners in winning outside support can be partly attributed to the readiness of the Area and Branch unions for the strike. Since the overtime ban came into force in November 1983, virtually all the Kent miners believed that it was the precursor to a national strike, which many were eagerly anticipating. Consequently, when it did come the KNUM was quick off the mark to re-establish old contacts in London and abroad, realising, as it did, that the strike would probably be long and hard. None of the Kent miners were in any doubt about the determination of Thatcher to defeat the NUM. Once they had suffered the psychologically important 'own goal' of miners in the Midlands crossing picket lines, then the Kent miners understood the increased importance of obtaining outside support. And, cut off from other coalfields, the small number of miners in the heart of Conservative England came to symbolise a David and Goliath-type battle for the many middle-class socialist groups and sympathisers that existed in Kent and London. The success of the Kent miners in collecting was noticed by other areas and sometimes resented. Jack Collins retorted:

We were criticised by a number of other areas and women's groups who said we had thousands of pounds and kept it to ourselves. But we did send money to other areas. We sent £50,000. We also looked after other miners. We had their children for holidays. We put them up with our people and gave them a couple of pounds each ... we were the only area printing thousands of leaflets for the London meetings ... we had set up the organisation in London. We were responsible for the picketing there But

²⁷³ D.E., 3.8.84.

²⁷⁴ E.K.M., 8.8.84.

other people came into London and thought it was all for collecting money. We said there was really no need to send people to collect money; we should have been trusted.²⁷⁵

If there was some opposition to the Kent miners from their comrades there was also very little support in their own geographical vicinity. Like the Coalville striking miners who received very little support in Coalville, the Kent miners suffered open hostility in the local towns of Canterbury and Dover.

At the beginning of October, an application was made to the Dover District Council for a door-to-door collecting licence. Councillor Derek Garrity, from Aylesham, spoke in favour of the application and took this opportunity to praise the behaviour of the Snowdown pickets and to criticise the heavy policing of Aylesham.²⁷⁶ The Dover Mayor, Mike Farrell, made a speech objecting to his own union, the NUS, imposing a levy of 0.25p in the pound for the miners.²⁷⁷ The council meeting was noisy and angry with members of the public joining in. It ended without a decision on the application.

Two weeks later the licence application was discussed again with Councillor Garrity arguing that there was a legal obligation to grant the licence. Councillor Barry Williams stated that there was no such obligation, there being a distinct threat of intimidation. Once again a decision on the licence was delayed.²⁷⁸

The issue was finally settled on Wednesday 12 December, conflicting advice having been given to the Council in the meantime. A barrister working for the Council had shown that there was indeed a legal obligation to grant the licence,²⁷⁹ but Superintendent Frank Harris of Dover police had also written to the Council advising, on grounds of public order safety, against the licence.²⁸⁰ In the vote four councillors abstained, and the chairman, Philip Buss,

²⁷⁵ Adeney and Lloyd. 229.

²⁷⁶ *D.E.*, 5.10.84.

²⁷⁷ *D.E.*, 5.10.84.

²⁷⁸ *E.K.M.*, 17.10.84.

²⁷⁹ *D.E.*, 14.12.84.

²⁸⁰ *E.K.M.*, 19.12.84.

took the unusual decision to use his vote, casting it for the licence application. Despite this, the vote went 22-19 against the application.²⁸¹

Frank Harris' intervention in the debate served to inform what many miners had long since suspected - that the police were acting in concert with the Government, local as well as national. The Kent miners had come a long way since being stopped at the Dartford Tunnel. Many of them had been arrested on picket lines, only to be discharged through lack of evidence. Others were arrested and either bound over to keep the peace and/or refused permission to picket within a set distance of their own collieries. Arthur Loomer had just such an experience:

You can't go picketing within a certain area. Like if you was arrested at the gates of Snowdown or at Tilmanstone, they'd say, one of the conditions they'd apply to letting you go, that you wouldn't go picketing within two miles of that place.²⁸²

As the strike wore on through the summer and then into autumn, the number of Kent miners arrested within Kent increased. This was a direct result of the fact that the miners were increasingly forced to fight a rearguard action as some of their own colleagues started to go back to work. Pickets then had to be withdrawn from London and the South-East coast docks and power stations and deployed, in ever increasing numbers, back to their own pit gates, where the token pickets, established at the beginning of the strike, were no longer adequate. And, as some Kent men started to break ranks and go to work, they brought with them a police presence into the Kent mining villages which had not been experienced in most people's living memories. The last time had been in January 1942 when hundreds of policemen arrived, without warning, in Mill Hill, Deal, to arrest the striking Betteshanger miners. And the time before that had been in 1926, but it had been on a relatively small scale in Kent because Aylesham and other pit villages did not exist yet, and Snowdown and Betteshanger Collieries

²⁸¹ *E.K.M.*, 19.12.84 and *D.E.*, 14.12.84. For an analysis of the legal position regarding collecting money in a public place see: Cathie Lloyd, "Street Collections and the Coal Dispute", *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Winter 1985), 285-291.

²⁸² Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

were not in production. So 1984 was a very different experience of 'community policing' and one which forced the involvement of many, previously inactive, miners, and, of course, the women.

Stopping out with the Aylesham Women's Support Group.

The experience of Aylesham women during the strikes of 1972 and 1974, while not preparing them for 1984-85, set an important precedent for their involvement in industrial disputes which women in other areas did not have. It also meant that there was none of the initial opposition from the men, which existed in traditionally 'macho' mining communities, to the women extending their activities beyond the soup kitchens and onto the picket lines. The AWSG was formed in the first week of the strike, a meeting being organised at the Welfare Club. The social dynamics of the village meant that no official announcement of the meeting was considered necessary. Trisha Sutcliffe explains:

It was quite easy for us. Much more easy for us in Aylesham than it was for a lot of people in other areas because we are so compact... We see people every day.²⁸³

This almost casual approach to what all the women realised was a very serious situation, was a direct result, not of any naiveté on their part, but of their traditional private role in the village. It is completely in keeping with Loretta Loach's analysis of how women's groups were organised:

... the work they undertook and often the way in which they organised came from their specific situation as women.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

²⁸⁴ Loretta Loach, "We'll Be Here Right to the End ... and After: Women in the Miners' Strike", Beynon (ed.), 169-79.

This "specific situation" meant that the women viewed the principles at stake in the strike from a different angle from the men. The miners were fighting to protect jobs and the Union. They believed the closure plan was a deliberate attack on the power of the NUM, it was political revenge for the 1970s. While the women would agree with that, if asked to do so, their innate concerns were for community and stability. They were not even fighting for some wider feminist issues, although for a few, feminism did become mixed up with community issues. Kay Sutcliffe, wife of Philip, explains the specifics of the AWSG:

Even though we're a women's group, we're fighting to support our communities, we're not fighting for women. The women, as far as I can see in our communities, they don't want to fight for anything as women in particular. They want to fight to make sure they've got somewhere to live and there's a future for them, as far as their husbands are concerned, with money coming in.²⁸⁵

The different emphasis of the women is understandable. Since its construction, Aylesham had been a very foreboding place for the women. Far away from their communities of origin in a socially hostile environment, with their men battling against an altogether different environment, physically hostile, the women had been forced to turn in upon each other for moral support and the courage to continue. Steady wages from husbands working a six-day week meant they had the financial resources to survive. But it was the mutual support of female friends and neighbours which enabled them to survive psychologically. 'Community' for the women rarely included the men, although they recognised that without the pit the 'community' as they experienced it could not exist. In that sense there is a sad irony here: that the miners, upon whose shoulders the community rested and thrived, could never really be a part of it, 'it' being an almost exclusively female construct, except for the brief acceptance of male children. So, when the community that miners provided, but which women created, was under threat from outside forces, it is not surprising that they, the women, should fight for its

²⁸⁵ Kay Sutcliffe in *Public Wives*.

survival. After all, their survival depended upon it. Maureen Douglass, a Yorkshire miner's wife clearly meant this when she said:

The closure of the pits affects us just as much as it does the men who work in them, being miners' wives. And we're here to show our support and solidarity and to prove that women have a very valuable role to play in the struggle.²⁸⁶

Also, the interference of outsiders in the socio-economic dynamics of Aylesham was equally resented as it seemed that the only time politicians were seriously interested in the village was for negative reasons. For years, throughout the post-war decades, the Aylesham people had demanded that outsiders take an interest in the village and provide much-needed amenities. That interest had been slow in coming and, by 1984, when a stable community had been established, in spite of outsiders, the threat of closure to the *raison d'être* of the community - the pit - had to be resisted at all costs. Conversely, the women of Coalville did not have the same sense of fear or loss, should their collieries be closed. The consequences of pit closures were not the same at all, the 'community' of miners and their wives being largely dispersed over a wide area. Trisha Sutcliffe recognised that when she spoke of the compactness of Aylesham in comparison with more socially diluted areas. But that comprehension of the different social situations which existed did not translate into understanding of the Coalville miners and their wives' refusal to support the strike. The AWSG believed, like the men, in the myth of miners' solidarity. It was for that reason that the AWSG organised a coach party to go to Coalville on Saturday 24 March, to demonstrate and march through the streets. Kath Loomer, less reticent than she had been in the 1970s, explains the purpose of the trip to Coalville:

We're going up to Leicester to show the Leicester women and the Nottingham women that we are with our husbands down here, backing them up.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ *Women on the Line*, World in Action, Granada U.K., Monday 16 April, 1984.

²⁸⁷ *Die Kumpel von Kent*.

Margaret Davis, the AWSG treasurer, speaks in more forceful terms. She is conscious of working-class history and, without mentioning 'community', clearly realises the link between that and mining:

We've worked hard for what we've got. My Dad, my Grandad, they all worked hard. They fought to get a decent union for the miners. They fought to get jobs for everybody, and they fought for a decent way of living. And [neither] Maggie Thatcher nor MacGregor's taking that away from us, because we won't let her do it. They want to wipe everything that anybody's ever worked for away. And no way we're not sitting back and letting that happen.²⁸⁸

Margaret Davis shows how very early on many of the women were aware of the political nature of the strike. That Thatcher and the Government were involved was never in any doubt for them, especially the younger ones. Kath Loomer was irritated that the first woman premier in Britain was not representative of women:

She's not the only woman in this country... Because I'm a woman too. So why can't they listen to our kind of women, instead of her, for a change?²⁸⁹

For some of the older women in Aylesham, however, having lived predominantly private lives, the strike set them on a learning curve. Joan Phelan, as we have seen, experienced a 'political conversion' during the strike. And Hazel Norton, another retired miner's wife, had a similar awakening, although she still relies upon her husband for information, if not actually how or what to think:

Well, my political views before this strike was that I was just ... Labour. I just voted Labour. I'd go down and put my cross on, and that was it. But since this strike I've

²⁸⁸ *Women on the Line*.

²⁸⁹ *Women on the Line*.

been trying to learn and understand all what is involved in the Labour Party... I ask him [her husband] questions now that I'd never bothered with before.²⁹⁰

It was the transformation from passive to active participation in the strike which many women in the AWSG experienced. Marching in strange towns, carrying banners alongside miners and politicians (Kay Sutcliffe shared a banner with Tony Benn M.P., although he would probably say he shared it with her), and, of course, speaking at public meetings were all *extraordinary* experiences for these women. Kay Sutcliffe became one of the principal speakers for the AWSG, going all over Britain and even abroad to Belgium and Germany. Sue Bence, another miner's wife, and by her own admission a very timid person, also experienced a personal transformation during the strike. Along with Kay, she developed into one of the natural leaders:

I took on the whole of the unit in which I worked. I put the case for the miners. It gave me a basis, I think, for the public speaking which was to come, because I knew that there was a role to play. And my part was to put across the case for the miners in the best way I could. This has been the most traumatic change inasmuch that before this strike I was the 'mouse'. I had my opinions but I would never put them forward in any way.²⁹¹

This was the shared experience of miners' wives up and down the country in 1984-85. This self-discovery which led to the 'never the same again' school of thought. Sue Bence reiterates the point in language that, although rather clichéd, expresses clearly what the strike had come to signify for her, and it was evidently about more than saving pits:

I've become aware of myself. I'm much more independent... I'm a person in my own right... Ever since I was born I've been [somebody's] wife/sister/daughter ... but since

²⁹⁰ *Public Wives*.

²⁹¹ *Public Wives*.

the advent of the strike, I'm Sue Bence, a person in my own right... I'll never be the same wife or the same woman as I was twelve months ago.²⁹²

Because the women leaders were aware of the need to be open and not regarded as a clique, many of them being union men's wives and therefore open to accusations of elitism and profiting from their husband's positions, meetings at the Welfare Club were held daily and open to all the village women. Hazel Norton appreciated this inclusive approach of the AWSG:

I think the women's committee meeting is very important because it helps us to get together, it helps us to find out what is going on and we discuss things. We air our beliefs and our differences ... any grievances... And we all know what is going on, which is very good, I think.²⁹³

Once established, the AWSG, like the NUM, was a target of middle-class left-wing groups throughout the whole of the South-East. The AWSG appealed also to the many women's groups which would not ordinarily have associated themselves with pitmen and their closed communities. What these feminist groups failed to understand was that closed though these communities may well have been, male dominated they were not, the hidden social dynamics of such villages usually being controlled by the women. Soon after the strike began, offers of help and financial assistance came flooding in. Trisha Sutcliffe explains:

We had so much help from London. Women in London who were from Kings Cross Women's Centre ... Socialist Action and Socialist Worker. They came down constantly... We wouldn't have been able to do it without them 'cos they set us up for all the meetings we went to... We didn't have to work that hard to go out looking for help, the help came to us.²⁹⁴

²⁹² *Public Wives*.

²⁹³ *Public Wives*.

²⁹⁴ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

The financial position of the AWSG was also extremely healthy. In the first six months of the strike it received £5154.43 in donations, and through various fund-raising activities the total income of the AWSG, for that period, was £5718.61.²⁹⁵ Most of their expenditure was on food (£1866.58), children's clothing (£896.32), travel expenses (£336.50), and donations to the KNUM and other areas (£1098). But even after all that the balance remaining was £991.93.²⁹⁶ The success of the AWSG was yet another cause of some resentment from the other areas, which Trisha Sutcliffe acknowledges:

I think so many people thought that Kent just had it all, being so near to the Continent. Although when food convoys came over a lot of them just went straight up north. We were so near to London, as well. And, of course, we still had contacts in London from the '72 and '74 strikes. We got our feet into London before the other areas got organised... At the beginning we had the monopoly of London ... there was so much money coming down... We had financial help from all over the place. If we'd had as much physical help, inasmuch as people coming out in support, as we had financially and morally... We wouldn't have been out for a year - that's for sure.²⁹⁷

Apart from organising meetings and marches and sending speakers to various rallies, the AWSG was also largely responsible for arranging events within the village. The biggest and most successful was the 'Mines Not Missiles' Festival held over the August Bank Holiday on the Welfare sports ground. A variety of left-wing groups went to set-up stall and there were bands and celebrities to entertain the crowds. The highlight of the week-end was a play performed by part-time actors and members of Aylesham village, about the 1942 Betteshanger strike.²⁹⁸ Parallels with the current dispute were made throughout the play. It played to packed houses in the Welfare Club Hall, and at the close of the Aylesham Festival the troupe moved directly north to appear at the slightly more prestigious Festival in Edinburgh. The Aylesham

²⁹⁵ AWSG financial accounts, March-August 1984.

²⁹⁶ AWSG financial accounts, March-August 1984.

²⁹⁷ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

²⁹⁸ *In The National Interest*, Mere Commodity (Arts), 1984.

Festival was sponsored by the Canterbury Miners' Support Group and the Canterbury Trades Council.²⁹⁹ It also attracted sympathetic coverage from local television in the Southern News programme.³⁰⁰ Besides the obvious financial and morale boosting aspects of the week-end, the 'Mines Not Missiles' Festival brought very large numbers of Aylesham people together in one place for the first time since the war period. Talk of the re-birth or re-discovery of 'community' was on everyone's lips, although nobody was really quite capable of giving a precise definition of the word. What did exist was a community of spirit, a gathering together of moral righteousness on a field in a mining village during a, for once, sunny August Bank Holiday. The field became the 'place', and gave, if not a concrete, a soft green reality to the mystical construct of 'community'. Community existed because everyone said it did, and there was safety in numbers. The 'Mines Not Missiles' Festival was such a success that the event was repeated for several years after the strike. However, the last two festivals, in 1987 and 1988, took place just before and after Snowdown Colliery closed, and were clearly desperate attempts, by what remained of the AWSG and the support groups, to recapture some of the spirit of 1984 - a hankering after that ever elusive concept, 'community'.

After the summer passed and autumn and then winter set in, the AWSG, like the KNUM, believed, briefly, that with the weather on their side, the strike could be won. Christmas was a major psychological hurdle, which was overcome. But, if the dark months of January and February sapped anybody's will to win, it was the miners' and their wives', rather than the NCB's and the Government's. One of the hardest aspects of the strike at this time was that miners, used to having sheds in their gardens overflowing with coal, had nothing to burn. This was, in some ways, the greatest ignominy for miners that they, of all people, should have no coal. Janice Bartollo, a young Aylesham miners' wife with small children, found this period the hardest. With her husband determined not to go back, and she determined not to ask him to, she describes the post-Christmas period as cold and lonely, beset by domestic problems. Only the solidarity of the AWSG helped her through that time.³⁰¹ Arthur Loomer speaks in a similar vein, but adds a rejoinder, determined not to detract from the experience of 1984-85:

²⁹⁹ *D.E.*, 31.8.84.

³⁰⁰ Private video recording in the author's possession.

³⁰¹ Janice Bartollo, personal interview, July 1989.

We had no money. No bloody coal to put in the fire... I really thoroughly enjoyed it.³⁰²

Janice Bartollo, despite the hardships, was typical of the many women who agreed with such sentiments:

It was the best year of our lives... [We had] more education in one year than in twelve years at school.³⁰³

It was this aspect of education which gave meaning to the dispute for many miners and particularly their wives. "Became aware", "eyes opened", are phrases often used to describe the personal transformations which took place. Whether or not this translated into new and meaningful domestic relationships is highly debatable in most cases, and in some cases not at all, as the women have returned to their private domains. But all the women interviewed and spoken to had opinions, as well as memories, and were not afraid to express them. They may have been standing at the kitchen sink while doing so, but they had no doubts about why their opinions were being sought. In that sense the miners' strike did wreak permanent changes, these women were indeed, 'never the same again'.

In the last months of the strike the AWSG was fighting a rearguard action with the KNUM in an attempt to stop their own members from breaking the strike. It was hard. Trisha Sutcliffe remembers a meeting just two weeks before the strike ended:

These two men were up there crying ... one of them, particularly, said his wife said she was going to leave him if he didn't go back to work... And that was quite sad. She wasn't involved with the women at all.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

³⁰³ Janice Bartollo, personal interview, July 1989.

³⁰⁴ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

Although holding the men, and the women, became increasingly difficult in January and February 1985, the back-to-work campaign in Kent had actually begun as early as April 1984.

The Back-to-Work Movement in Kent.

It is somewhat ironic that while Kent boasted some of the most active pro-strike women's groups in the country, it also had the most famous and active woman organiser of the back-to-work movement: Irene McGibbon.

During the night of 5-6 April 1984, fly-posters were put up in Deal, Dover, Thanet and Aylesham. The message on these posters read: "Miners return to work Monday April 9th pending a national ballot."³⁰⁵ Of course the posters were unofficial and their origins never discovered. There was also no return to work on 9 April. But, on Friday 13 April, Bob McGibbon, a faceworker at Betteshanger Colliery, announced on local television his intention to go to work the following Monday.³⁰⁶ This he did, turning up for the 6.00 a.m. shift with another Betteshanger miner, Alec Smart. NACODS, however, threatened to withdraw safety cover and the KNUM said it would take away the two men's union cards.³⁰⁷ In the early stages of the strike, with union and closed shop agreements still in place, this would effectively have meant McGibbon and Smart losing their jobs. In Kent NACODS was relatively militant, voting in April by 72-28 per cent in favour of joining the strike, compared with the national result of 54 per cent.³⁰⁸ McGibbon claimed that about forty per cent of Kent miners wanted to return to work but were too afraid to speak out, and Smart threatened to take their case to the European Court of Human Rights.³⁰⁹

With NACODS taking a firm stand against any splinter groups in Kent and NCB management not wishing to rock the industrial relations boat any further by giving strike-breakers some kind of surface work, the back-to-work campaign in Kent was halted, for the

³⁰⁵ *E.K.M.*, 11.4.84.

³⁰⁶ *E.K.M.*, 18.4.84.

³⁰⁷ *E.K.M.*, 18.4.84.

³⁰⁸ *D.E.*, 13.4.84.

³⁰⁹ *D.E.*, 20.4.84.

moment. However, the corporatist approach to management/union relations, rapidly being dismantled throughout the British coalfield, was shattered in Kent in June 1984. On Monday 18 June, the worst day in the 'Battle of Orgreave', a huge police escort accompanied McGibbon and Smart to Betteshanger Colliery where the management employed them for one-and-a-half hours on the colliery railway, but paid them for a full shift. They did not go underground.³¹⁰ About two hundred striking miners occupied the colliery in protest and seven of them, including the Branch President, John Moyle, staged an underground stay-down, reminiscent of the protest of 1960. In return, the NCB promised work of some nature to any miner wishing to go back to work.³¹¹

The occupation of Betteshanger Colliery ended on Wednesday 20 June when McGibbon and Smart signed agreements promising not to break the strike again. But, the following Tuesday, 26 June, some of the miners who had demonstrated at Betteshanger Colliery were dismissed. This included the seven men who had staged the stay-down. They were sacked for "gross misconduct including breaches of mining regulations."³¹² Among the accusations cited by the NCB was the fact that a BBC film crew had been invited underground thus risking an explosion with their equipment. About the same time, on Wednesday 27 June, nine Tilmanstone miners were sacked for their part in the occupation of the control room from 23-26 June, in an attempt to stop three men from going back to work at their colliery.³¹³

Cracks in Kent's famed solidarity were now evident, and from July onwards the KNUM was forced to mount larger pickets at the three Kent pits, thus abandoning the docks and power stations where, in reality, they had had little or no success. What seemed important to them now was maintaining the strike in Kent, and it was at this point that the AWSG first became actively involved on picket lines.

During the months of July and August, McGibbon and his wife, Irene, continued campaigning for an organised return to work. They linked up with Chris Butcher, dubbed the 'Silver Birch' by the press because of his prematurely greying hair, a blacksmith at Bevercotes

³¹⁰ *E.K.M.*, 20.6.84.

³¹¹ *E.K.M.*, 20.6.84.

³¹² *D.E.*, 29.6.84.

³¹³ *D.E.*, 29.6.84.

Colliery in Nottinghamshire.³¹⁴ Butcher had been instrumental in setting up the Notts. Working Miners' Committee and then, with Christopher Leake, industrial editor on the *Mail on Sunday*, he set out to tour the British coalfield in order to test opinion and, if possible, establish other back-to-work movements.³¹⁵ Irene McGibbon set up the Moderate Miners' Wives Back To Work Campaign (MMWBWC) in August and executed a policy of night-time fly-posting in the Kent pit villages.³¹⁶ She also claimed that 350-400 miners had registered with her and were planning to go back in September.³¹⁷ And on Monday 20 August, Albert Theobald became the first Aylesham miner to break the strike, turning up for work at Tilmanstone Colliery. NACODS immediately withdrew safety cover and he was unable to work.³¹⁸ But a myth had been broken. From now on Aylesham miners and their wives would be fighting in their own backyards, an unprecedented event in the history of the KNUM and the Snowdown Branch.

As planned by the McGibbons there was a return to work in September, but not in the numbers they had predicted. Twenty-four returned to work at Tilmanstone and four at Betteshanger. Snowdown Colliery remained solidly on strike. There were serious clashes with the police and thirty-four miners were arrested.³¹⁹ Policing of the villages of Aylesham and Elvington became very intense with inhabitants complaining of police harassment. Councillor Watty Howard of Elvington lodged six complaints with the Kent County Constabulary for "police harassment of individuals".³²⁰ On Monday 10 September, the people of Elvington complained that the village had been occupied by the police and a strict curfew imposed.³²¹ One of the Elvington residents describes what happened:

A very serious situation took place here ... last night, in Elvington. The police virtually had a curfew from eight o'clock last night and they were keeping people even out of their own front gardens. Telling them to go back in their houses. Nobody was allowed

³¹⁴ *E.K.M.*, 1.8.84.

³¹⁵ Adeney and Lloyd, 265.

³¹⁶ *E.K.M.*, 22.8.84.

³¹⁷ *D.E.*, 24.8.84.

³¹⁸ *E.K.M.*, 22.8.84.

³¹⁹ *E.K.M.*, 5.9.84.

³²⁰ *D.E.*, 7.9.84.

³²¹ *E.K.M.*, 12.9.84.

to walk the streets in Elvington last night. There was cars and police walking, motorbikes patrolling, and cars and vans with dogs... Anybody that was seen on the streets was told to go in.³²²

Two weeks later on Monday 24 September the Kent pickets had to turn their attention to Snowdown Colliery when the first miner to break the strike went to work.³²³ His name was Terry Hall, and he did not live in Aylesham but in Folkestone, and clearly did not enjoy the benefits of the community solidarity available to the majority of Snowdown miners. However, after just two hours and a conversation with union representatives, he agreed to rejoin the strike.³²⁴ The atmosphere in the villages was now very tense as activists in both the union and the women's support groups worried about the less involved being tempted to go back. The working miners formed their own association, Kent Working Miners, and produced their own propaganda leaflets. These argued that the Kent coalfield had a future, but only if the men went back to work. They also insisted upon the undemocratic nature of the strike and demanded: "The Union Must Be Returned To Its Membership."³²⁵ The McGibbons continued working frantically, behind the scenes, to increase the back-to-work momentum.

By October 1984, there were still only twenty-five men back at work at Betteshanger and even fewer, seven, at Tilmanstone. Needless to say, no coal was being produced. But Bob, and more particularly, Irene McGibbon, were by now nationally known figures for daring to organise such an active back-to-work campaign in one of the most solid and militant coalfields in Britain. They attracted media attention, both sympathetic and hostile, for their actions. *The Daily Telegraph* lauded McGibbon for being "the first miner to resign" from the union.³²⁶ However, the paper also revealed information about him which attracted the attention of the NUM and the left-wing press. He had been involved in leading a moderates' back-to-work campaign at British Leyland's Cowley plant in Oxford, during a strike in March-April 1974. Further investigation by *Newsline*, a radical Marxist journal, revealed that Irene McGibbon had

³²² *Our Pits, Our Lives*. Local Radio Workshop. 12 Praed Mews; London, W2 1QY, 1984.

³²³ *E.K.M.*, 26.9.84.

³²⁴ Richard Richardson, personal interview, July 1989.

³²⁵ Kent Working Miners, leaflet, 28.9.84.

³²⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 27.4.84.

led a Cowley wives' revolt against the strike.³²⁷ It also became clear, in the summer of 1984, that the McGibbons were members of the extreme right-wing organisation, the Freedom Association, when they set-up a stall selling its propaganda outside the Conservative Party Offices in Deal High Street on Friday 3 August.³²⁸ Irene McGibbon took the public stage more often than her husband, and even had access to Mrs. Thatcher. She complained to the Prime Minister that each time there was the prospect of talks resolving the strike, men who were on the point of going back, remained out on strike hoping for an honourable return.³²⁹ And the ultimate accolade came in October 1984, when she was welcomed onto the platform at the Conservative Party Conference, given a standing ovation and applauded by Thatcher herself.³³⁰ An unnamed Snowdown miner, aware of McGibbon's previous activities and angry that he should have been allowed to infiltrate the NUM, commented:

He is a professional strike-breaker. We know this from his activities at the Cowley car works ... where he managed to break a strike... Unfortunately, where the T. and G. fell down, and where the trade union as a whole falls down, is that this character was not reported as a strike-breaker.³³¹

The Back-to-Work campaign never really gathered pace in Kent, as it did in other areas, but there was a steady trickle of men going back to work, especially at Tilmanstone Colliery. The NCB offer of £1200 Christmas bonus to any miner who achieved four consecutive wage packets by Christmas, was very tempting, and by the middle of November the back-at-work figures for Kent were:

Tilmanstone	66
Betteshanger	32
Snowdown	10

Source: *Dover Express*, 23.11.84.

³²⁷ *Newsline*, 30.6.84.

³²⁸ *E.K.M.*, 8.4.84.

³²⁹ Adeney and Lloyd, 200.

³³⁰ *E.K.M.*, 17.10.84, and *D.E.*, 12.10.84.

³³¹ *Our Pits, Our Lives*.

On Tuesday 20 November, a rally at the Glanville Theatre, Ramsgate, was addressed by Scargill. He warned of the closure of the Kent coalfield, pleading with men not to cross picket lines, and for those who already had to rejoin the strike in order to avoid being "stained to the end of time as a scab."³³² But it was too late and such language only served to alienate further the men who had gone back to work. These were men who, generally speaking, had had a very weak involvement in both the union and the pit communities and they complained of feeling both physically and psychologically distant from all that was going on.³³³ Perhaps in an ironic sense they were the real *isolated mass*, their sense of alienation leading to a diluted form of working-class self imagery and industrial solidarity.

The numbers of men returning to work increased very slowly after Christmas, but in an area which was proud of its solidarity each man going back increased the painful realisation that the strike was almost certainly crumbling more rapidly in other areas. The back-at-work figures for January and February were:

	January	February
Tilmanstone	77	108
Betteshanger	37	59
Snowdown	18	23

Source: *Dover Express*, 16.1.85 and 20.2.85.

On Monday 25 February Irene McGibbon attempted to address a meeting of the Federation of Conservative Students at the University of Kent. But the protests from other students and miners' supporters were so great that she was unable to speak and she had to leave with police protection.³³⁴ There was no further news of the McGibbons and when the strike was over they left the area.

By the end of February 218 men were back at work in Kent representing less than twelve per cent of the total workforce.³³⁵ To all intents and purposes, then, the miners' strike

³³² *D.E.*, 23.11.84.

³³³ *E.K.M.*, 12.12.84.

³³⁴ *D.E.*, 1.3.85.

³³⁵ *D.E.*, 1.3.85.

in Kent was still very effective right to the end. Not one piece of coal was produced in the Area throughout the whole twelve months.

The End of the Strike in Kent.

As the strike progressed through January and February of 1985, with no hint of power cuts or softening of attitude by either the NCB or the Government, most Kent miners began coming to the painful conclusion that the strike was lost. Kevin Mellin appreciated the hopeless reality of the situation:

We wanted to stay out and fight for our own pits... We were well depressed. Couldn't believe it. But we all knew it was going to end, and we weren't getting anywhere. And at the end we were just sitting at power stations for nothing.³³⁶

Because most of them would not cross a picket line, the Kent miners had to wait until the strike was called off officially. But the local union leaders realised that it was becoming increasingly difficult to hold the men together:

One of ... the last meetings that we had up the Club ... people were starting to crack up... I could see all the good work, and the way we had worked together was gonna be undone if the strike went on any longer.³³⁷

However, this did not stop the KNUM from holding out a little longer, once the strike was officially called off by the national leadership, in order to get the sacked Kent miners reinstated

³³⁶ Kevin Mellin, personal interview, 24.8.93.

³³⁷ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

At the Special Delegates' Conference, held in London on Sunday 3 March, the KNUM proposed the following motion:

Conference demands the right to negotiate freely with the employer and agrees not to discuss any other motion or make any recommendation until an agreement is reached that reinstates those members who have been sacked during the course of the present dispute.³³⁸

This was rejected by 170-19, a decision which Jack Collins called a "betrayal" of colleagues.³³⁹ Collins called a meeting of the whole Kent Area membership at the Glanville Theatre, Ramsgate, for Monday 4 March, in order to decide what the Kent miners would do. Over a thousand miners gathered and there was a near unanimous decision to continue the strike in Kent until amnesty had been granted to the forty-one sacked Kent miners.³⁴⁰ Some Kent miners were irritated at the way the meeting was handled and the decision taken, on an Area basis, to stay out. Terry Jones was present:

... when we came out on strike we came out on a single-pit vote. Snowdown voted to come out on strike... Betteshanger decided they would come out on strike...

Tilmanstone ... decided to come out... So it was three-nil, if you like... But when we came back we had to have an Area vote knowing full well there was more men at Betteshanger than there were at Snowdown and Tilmanstone. So it didn't matter how the other two pits voted, you would've stayed out on strike. Mainly due to the fact that you had the miners that had been sacked at Betteshanger.³⁴¹

The decision was also taken to send Kent miners to picket the organised return to work in Yorkshire. This was an amazing decision which "stunned and shocked" some Yorkshire

³³⁸ Goodman, 190.

³³⁹ *E.K.M.*, 6.3.85.

³⁴⁰ *E.K.M.*, 6.3.85.

³⁴¹ Terry Jones, personal interview. 29.12.93.

miners.³⁴² Others were so depressed at the strike being called off that they welcomed the Kent pickets:

Pip was one of the last men to go in because he had been rostered on late afternoons... He kept saying that he hoped there'd be a picket on, so he couldn't go in. We'd heard that some of the Kent lads had refused to go back and were picketing around the place.³⁴³

However, it was an impossible situation and in all cases the picket lines were withdrawn so that men who had remained solid for a year could march back, solidly, to work.

On the days following the 5 March and the nationwide return to work, the numbers going back in Kent increased dramatically. The NCB had made it clear there would be no amnesty for sacked miners;³⁴⁴ and consequently many of the men just wanted to end the strike. Philip Sutcliffe was forced to accept the reality of the situation:

I pledged support for them sacked lads on behalf of the Snowdown men ... no men at Snowdown would ever go back to work until their men had been re-instated. This was summat I pledged on behalf of them, but the way the strike was finished ... it was a pledge that had to be undone. It was an impossible situation.³⁴⁵

The KNUM Executive took the decision to call off the strike in Kent and organise a return to work for Monday 11 March.³⁴⁶ The 1984-85 miners' strike was now officially at an end, but its consequences had hardly begun. In Kent, forty-one miners had been sacked. Eight were in prison; one of them, Terry French from Betteshanger, had a five year sentence, reduced to four on appeal.³⁴⁷ The cost of the strike for the Kent police was put at fourteen

³⁴² Samuel et al. (eds.), 148.

³⁴³ Lynn Beaton, *Shifting Horizons*, (London: Canary Press, 1985), 264.

³⁴⁴ *D.E.*, 8.3.85.

³⁴⁵ Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

³⁴⁶ *D.E.*, 15.3.85. and *E.K.M.*, 13.3.85.

³⁴⁷ Martin Walker, "Miners in Prison: Workers in Prison: Political Prisoners", *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Winter 1985), 333-43.

million pounds, and Kent shops and businesses estimated their losses at about twenty-three million pounds.³⁴⁸ Defeating the diminutive enemy within this small corner of the tranquil 'Garden of England' had really cost dear.

³⁴⁸ *E.K.M.*, 13.3.85.

Part III - The Aftermath of the Strike, and Beyond...

Not in the clamour of the crowded street,
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,
But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807-1882, *The Poets*.

Introduction.

This final section will look at what grass roots opinion believed caused the failure of the 1984-85 miners' strike. It will also trace, briefly, what has happened to the Kent and Leicestershire Coalfields since March 1985, looking at the pit closures, the employment alternatives and the official plans that have been envisaged for the two areas. The aim, as always, will be to examine how 'community' has changed or perceived to have changed with the disappearance of an industry charged with symbolism and heavy historical portent - real and imagined.

Marching to Defeat.

The return to work in March 1985, miners and their wives marching behind banners, leaders and brass bands, has been much written about and perhaps a little over-sentimentalised. Proud though some of them may have been about their extreme effort and their ability to hold-out against what they believed to have been the massed forces of police and State, most miners knew they were going back defeated. Paul Jones had no sense of pride in March 1985, he was under no illusion about what had happened and what the future held:

It was a big flop ... an anti-climax. You were going back to work, but you knew you wouldn't be there long... That's why we never went back then other two weeks. You had no reason to go straight back to work.³⁴⁹

Jones had voted, at the Glanville Theatre, to stay out. But the above comment makes it clear that it was not because he thought they could win anything. Rather his reasons for continuing the strike were negative - there was simply no reason to go back as that would be hastening the real end of the dispute: the closure of Snowdown Colliery. It must also be noted that he was a single man living with supportive working parents. Young single men, seen as a risky group in some areas, were the backbone of the strike in Kent, especially those who lived in Aylesham. Trisha Sutcliffe explains:

In a place like Aylesham, all the single men have got families... Being as we are in Aylesham they wouldn't have gone back... Everyone just stuck together anyway.³⁵⁰

At the very end, however, not everyone did stick together in Aylesham which was why the strike had to be called off before the solidarity dissolved into in-fighting. The men who went back to work after the 5 March were generally married men with families. Paul Jones picketed Snowdown Colliery during the period 5-11 March, and explains what happened:

Your scabs would go across first. Then you'd have your last two-weekers. But nobody said anything to them... It was the end, really... Your two-weekers, I don't class them as scabs.³⁵¹

The sense of quiet sadness at the end, as men who had been on strike all year went back before the strike had been called off locally, is very evident. Jones makes a distinction between men who went back before the 5 March - *scabs* - and men who went back after - *two-weekers*,

³⁴⁹ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

³⁵⁰ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

³⁵¹ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

although in fact it was really only one week. Even the men who were going back seemed to have made the distinction, the *scabs* going in first, apart from those who were going back at the last moment. Philip Sutcliffe is less forgiving about the *two-weekers*, he makes a difference between the types of *scab*, but concludes they are all the same in the end:

There is a distinction between a hard-line scab that went back, like Theobald and people like that, but there's some people that went back to work when ... nationally they did... We stuck out ... for them that was sacked. But that week, that was when there was about twenty or thirty scabbed at Aylesham, at Snowdown... I still won't talk to them because it was our decision to strike and you shouldn't go back until the majority says so.³⁵²

This was a very strict application of local democracy which displays as much federalism as the LNUM displayed when it refused to join the strike on the basis that the local majority had voted against. However, Philip Sutcliffe would have no time for such academic arguments, insisting upon the absolute rule: you do not cross a picket line.

Among the Aylesham miners who suffered the most when the strike ended were those who had to return to Tilmanstone or Betteshanger Collieries. For a whole year they had been active in Aylesham and organising with their old friends and workmates. But when it came to going back they were denied the chance of marching back with Aylesham miners to Snowdown Colliery. Arthur Loomer and his son, Craig, were two such cases:

I felt very, very sad. I knew that we'd lost because when we got to the pit gates, the bloody manager was there ... Dave Hanson... I felt very sad because we weren't with the Snowdown lads... I hardly knew anybody at Tilmanstone.³⁵³

³⁵² Philip Sutcliffe, personal interview, 29.12.88.

³⁵³ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

Craig, much younger than his father and with a future to think of and now rearrange, was perhaps even more depressed than Arthur who had already had a lifetime down the pit and would soon retire anyway:

I didn't have no heart for the job any more... After that it was never the same.³⁵⁴

Explanations for the failure of the strike were fairly straightforward, in Kent. It was first and foremost the lack of solidarity within the NUM. All the other factors such as the failure of the TUC and the Labour Party to offer wholehearted support, plus the obvious determination of the NCB, the Government and the police to defeat the striking miners, were secondary considerations. If miners in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire had not been turning coal then there would have been no need to picket their pits and march through their towns and villages. As a result, mining communities would have been trouble-free zones, as they were in 1972 and 1974. Also, the solidarity of the NUM may then have appealed to the wider working-class movement, and lorry drivers and power station workers may have felt more inclined to give the miners support. But, this is mere conjecture because in reality the NUM was split, if not at the coal seams, at the pit tops; and, as we have seen, this was regularly used by other workers as an argument when faced with pickets. Trisha Sutcliffe understood that the failure of the strike was fundamentally the result of the failure of industrial solidarity:

Towards the end of the year it was pretty obvious that they [the miners] couldn't do it on their own, and I think it was the other trade unionists should have recognised and supported.³⁵⁵

It was this anger and frustration at workers', especially miners', failure to support the NUM which caused men and women, who survived the whole year, to refuse to speak to men who crossed picket lines. That management, the Government and the police should be against

³⁵⁴ Craig Loomer, 16.8.93.

³⁵⁵ Trisha Sutcliffe, personal interview, 28.12.88.

the miners, was an accepted part of the class struggle. Even if the police were mostly working class in origin they, like the army, were paid to protect the *interests of the ruling class*, so the discourse ran. Although it was difficult when miners were faced with friends and relatives in the police force on the picket line, some kind of class solidarity or, at least, sympathy, being expected. However, nothing, in the eyes of an activist, can justify a miner crossing a picket line, particularly one manned by miners. That was collaboration. A Yorkshire miner from Frickley Colliery explains his views of miners who broke ranks:

When I started colliery in 1957, I was shown some of the people that scabbed in 1926... I was shown the children of some of the people that scabbed in 1926. And I thought that was a bit much, because they'd not experienced it. But I assure you, I'll show everybody who scabbed in 1984. I'll make a point of going showing people who scabbed in 1984. Because I think it's one of the worst things they could've done. They've just been traitors to the working-class.³⁵⁶

This social ostracization of strike-breakers is part of the tradition of miners' militancy, and it is not just a simple matter of revenge. Establishing it as a tradition means that potential strike-breakers know what awaits them and their families. It is also an exercise of the only real power left to the miners after they have been defeated. And, like all traditions, it is not genetic but conscious, passed on from generation to generation. There is no mystery about where this aspect of militancy comes from. Craig Loomer shows exactly the same kind of determination to continue the tradition even though he has left mining and works for British Telecom. He is speaking about a Tilmanstone strike-breaker:

One of them works on B.T.... and I've told everybody... I've told everyone that he was a scab at Tilmanstone. And he knows it. He don't look at me in your eye.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ *Our Pits, Our Lives*.

³⁵⁷ Craig Loomer, personal interview, 16.8.93.

If the Kent miners were sure about what caused the strike's failure, the Leicestershire miners were equally convinced that it was not they and their Nottinghamshire colleagues who were to blame, but one man or one dogma: 'Scargillism'. Griffin argues:

Working miners in Leicestershire and elsewhere simply crossed picket lines with police protection and did not believe that they were scabs because they were continuing to work in their own pit and had not been consulted through the ballot box.³⁵⁸

Jack Jones stated, in February 1986, somewhat optimistically, and not without a little self-righteousness:

History would record that our stand during the strike was the right stand and that had the ballot been held at the commencement of the strike, then history would have been written differently.³⁵⁹

This is a rather disingenuous interpretation of what was and what might have been. All the objective factors in the history and the economics of the Leicestershire Coalfield suggest that, had a national ballot produced a majority in favour of strike action over pit closures, Leicestershire, along with Nottinghamshire, would have reverted to federalism and gone back to work after a short time on strike. The high earnings under the productivity scheme and the area-wide acceptance of the rundown of the coalfield, plus the antagonism felt towards the political rather than the industrial militancy of leaders like Scargill and McGahey, had combined to produce a massive vote against strike action in March 1984. This strike, unlike those of the 1970s, did not appeal to the pecuniary nature of coalminers - and they do all have one - but to their altruistic and solidaristic traditions. And the extent to which they possess those is, of course, highly variable, geographically and historically. The evidence from Leicestershire is overwhelming in its support of the idea that the strike was political, instigated

³⁵⁸ Griffin, *Volume III*, 216.

³⁵⁹ Griffin, *Volume III*, 216.

and manipulated by Scargill for his own ends. For that reason it is difficult to believe that the Leicestershire miners would have behaved any differently, regardless of a national ballot. Ivor Whyman's comments are fairly representative of the views of most Coalville miners:

I've never liked Arthur Scargill. I know he was very popular amongst miners, a lot of miners. But I never liked the man. He were too over the top. I'm a Labour man myself, I've always voted Labour. And I like the idea of unions... [But] these unions... I've got no time for that... I'm sort of really old socialist, I like the old fashioned values of socialism. I can't stand the Tories. I'd never vote for them... I like Tony Blair, best man since Harold Wilson. And I thought he were very good.³⁶⁰

The Leicestershire miners have on their side Neil Kinnock, Labour Party leader during the strike. He too put the failure of the strike down to Scargill:

The greatest gift that Mrs. Thatcher has had was in having the right enemies. Galtieri was a *good* enemy to have. A fascist dictator... Arthur Scargill was a good enemy to have because he didn't have a ballot. Because he tried to excuse illegal actions. The script was written for the Conservatives...³⁶¹

Kinnock's comparison of Scargill with the Argentinean military dictator, Colonel Galtieri, was, of course, simple repetition of Thatcher's notorious description of the miners as the "enemy within." That phrase reverberated around the coalfields in 1984, and still manages to inspire intense resentment. Tony Benn noticed it in his conversations with miners:

When she called them the "enemy within" it was the biggest insult. She didn't serve in the armed forces and many of the miners I talked to had been in the armed forces and

³⁶⁰ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

³⁶¹ *The Thatcher Years*.

they were *bitter* that they were treated in that way. She saw them as the enemy.

Treated them as the enemy.³⁶²

Arthur Loomer was a soldier for six years before becoming a miner and he was one of those miners absolutely incensed by Thatcher's comment. Verbally, he managed to contain himself throughout the interview until it came to that point:

I fuckin' hated her when she said that... Thatcher describes striking miners as Britain's "enemy within" and I'd done six years in the fucking army supporting this country. Ooh, that really stuck in my craw that did.³⁶³

The fact that they worked throughout the strike earning them the disparaging nickname of 'woolly-backs', and being accused of being collaborators and "Tory miners",³⁶⁴ does not, of course, mean that Leicestershire miners vote Conservative. Some do, as they do in Kent. But the majority do not. John Tomlinson, another Coalville miner who worked throughout 1984-85, is horrified at the idea of being labelled a 'Tory':

I can't be no other than Labour, can I? I vote for Labour every time... There is Conservative miners ... but they won't let you know who they are... No matter who's in at Labour I'll vote for Labour.³⁶⁵

Wally Quelch, however, had a different experience. One can almost hear the shocked sadness in his voice upon encountering miners who readily admitted to voting Conservative:

When I first went to the pit it'd be hard to find a Tory voter down the mine. When I finished up, after all these imports from the Boot and Shoe and from Hosiery ... we had

³⁶² *The Thatcher Years*.

³⁶³ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

³⁶⁴ Raymond Challinor, Letter to the Editor, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 58, Part I, 1993.

³⁶⁵ John Tomlinson, personal interview, 10.8.95.

during the '70s when it was hard to recruit labour, then the balance changed and there were a heck of a lot of Tories down the mine when I left... [they would] argue with you down the pit about how good the Iron Lady was.³⁶⁶

Quelch's wife, Joan, goes even further in her account of Conservative miners, questioning their industrial self-imagery, always one of the worst insults:

I used to think they were not true miners. They were people who had probably lost their job. And the pit was paying good money... And they'd get a good job at the pit and then leave.³⁶⁷

Derek Holmes, an overman at Bagworth Colliery, also expresses shock at the increase in the number of Conservative miners:

Unfortunately, to my horror, there's a good many Conservatives in this village. Miners.³⁶⁸

What is clear here is that there are so many varieties of miner that all attempts at generalisation are doomed to miserable failure, although that does not usually stop us from trying. For Kent miners all Leicestershire miners were 'Tories', just as all Kent miners were considered as extremists or communists by the Leicestershire miners. Furthermore, even inside areas there were political distinctions and divisions between and sometimes within individual collieries. Therein lies the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of trying to formulate an all-embracing hypothesis, such as was attempted with the theory of *isolated mass*. We shall return to this theme shortly in the concluding chapter.

³⁶⁶ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

³⁶⁷ Joan Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

³⁶⁸ Derek Holmes, personal interview, 22.7.93.

Once the strike was over and the NUM decisively beaten, both the Kent and the Leicestershire miners knew that it was simply a matter of time before their pits were closed. In Kent the pressing issue was redundancy payments. This matter threatened to split the Area Union and the rank-and-file as the acceptance of such payments by some miners was regarded by those who refused them as selling jobs and smoothing the way for the NCB to close collieries. In Leicestershire, most miners looked forward to their redundancy payments, having long since accepted pit closures as a fact of life. For them the most pressing post-strike issue was whether or not to join the breakaway UDM, led by close colleagues and allies of Jack Jones, like Ken Toon. Once the Nottinghamshire Area had left the NUM, quickly followed by South Derbyshire, the pressure was on for Leicestershire miners to follow suit. It would have been the logical conclusion to their (in)action during 1984-85 and their renowned antipathy to the political leadership of the NUM. Somewhat surprisingly to many, including those who knew him personally,³⁶⁹ Jones adopted a very anti-UDM stance and campaigned for Leicestershire to remain within the NUM on the basis that Scargill had been neutered and no longer counted for anything. He argued that it was vital to stay within the NUM and fight for the moderates' corner,³⁷⁰ although some Coalville men, like Quelch, were more sceptical about his motives, putting it down to his having achieved the top position in the LNUM:

If he hadn't got that top job he'd have been gone, along with his president Terry Hughes... That was the death knell of the NUM.³⁷¹

Terry Hughes, the LNUM President, did campaign for Leicestershire to join the UDM.

Whatever his reasons, Jones argued quite adamantly for Leicestershire to remain within the NUM. He postulated the thesis that the LNUM *was* the community:

³⁶⁹ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93, and Steve Peace, personal interview, 23.7.93.

³⁷⁰ Griffin, *Volume III*, 274.

³⁷¹ Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

The Union was not all about arguing for wages and politics, it was looking after people, not necessarily paying members, but looking after its older people. If we destroyed this area, we would be destroying a community.³⁷²

It was decided that a ballot would be held in the Leicester Area in January 1986 to decide whether or not the Area should join the UDM. An incredible situation emerged whereby Terry Hughes, Area President of the NUM, was campaigning for the membership to join the UDM and was having regular meetings with UDM representatives. His position as a top NUM official was clearly untenable but he refused to resign. The result of the ballot came as a surprise to many in the UDM and the NUM, to those who expected Leicestershire to join the UDM. Along with another right-wing area, North Wales, Leicestershire voted to remain within the NUM:

North Wales voted by a record 90 per cent to remain within the National Union and Leicestershire represents the greatest blow of all to company unionism. 64 per cent of Leicester's miners voted for genuine trade unionism.³⁷³

Genuine union or not, the UDM suffered a severe setback in its inability to recruit Leicestershire to its ranks. History had once again repeated itself, but neither as tragedy nor as farce, but as an irrelevancy as far as the NUM was concerned in 1986. The NCB was now determined to 'convert' Leicestershire to the UDM by a process of gradual permeation. Terry Hughes left the NUM and began recruiting individual members to the UDM. He had some success, especially at Ellistown Colliery where, by August 1986, the UDM had a majority of 225 - 218 members.³⁷⁴ British Coal (BC), as the NCB had become after the 1987 Coal Industry Act, refused to negotiate with the NUM at Ellistown and offered a pay rise to UDM members only. In the same month R. Pidcock, South Midlands Area Deputy Industrial Relations Officer, informed Jack Jones that the Area Incentive Scheme was to be rationalised,

³⁷² Griffin, *Volume III*, 276.

³⁷³ "The Miners' Unfinished War", *Militant Miner*, London: Militant Publications, (no date), 12.

³⁷⁴ Griffin, *Volume III*, 280.

a common incentive/bonus rate to be calculated based on the average of Ellistown and Bagworth Collieries.³⁷⁵ Jones wrote to L. Harris, the Area Director, informing him that the men were "incensed" over the amalgamation of incentive payments. The NUM had not been informed, there had been no negotiations, and only the UDM was allowed to negotiate figures for Ellistown and Bagworth.³⁷⁶ Jones' anger at the privileged position of the UDM was increased by the fact that, due to UDM members taking redundancy at Ellistown, the NUM was once again the majority union.³⁷⁷ He initiated a ballot over the merging of the bonus payments and asked the membership to support industrial action if BC went ahead with their plans. The result was seventy per cent in favour of industrial action and consequently BC backed down and withdrew its amalgamation of incentive payment plans "following the ballot for industrial action by the membership."³⁷⁸ At this point, believing their fortunes were in the ascendancy, the LNUM began a recruitment campaign to bring back all UDM members within the fold of the NUM. This was aided by Bagworth miners who were "adamant that they would not work alongside UDM members" who had been transferred from Ellistown as part of the rundown procedure.³⁷⁹ For the LNUM there was an unfortunate side effect of the militant position adopted by the Bagworth men - BC decided to transfer only NUM members from Ellistown thereby giving the UDM a decisive majority at that colliery. BC refused to provide facilities for the LNUM at Ellistown and face training was only made available to UDM members. This meant only a hard core of committed NUM members, left at Ellistown, were prepared to forgo the financial advantages of joining the UDM, on a point of principle. Thus, rather than relinquish the Ellistown lodge, the LNUM decided to merge Ellistown and Bagworth lodges in October 1987.³⁸⁰ The UDM continued to operate as a separate union at Ellistown Colliery, becoming an object of hatred, perhaps even more than Scargill. John Tomlinson was one of those miners who refused to consider joining the UDM:

³⁷⁵ LNUM Minutes, 25.8.86.

³⁷⁶ LNUM Minutes, 26.9.86.

³⁷⁷ Griffin, *Volume III*, 281.

³⁷⁸ LNUM Minutes, 18.12.86.

³⁷⁹ LNUM Minutes, 22.12.86.

³⁸⁰ LNUM Minutes, 1.10.87.

I never joined the UDM. Never would do. Once you split a union that's the union finished.³⁸¹

The tragic irony, of course, was that this latter day solidarity with the NUM had come too late. Tomlinson's loyalty to the NUM was regional rather than national, but when the breakaway union was formed it emerged, like the miners' strike, from the grass roots, albeit aided and abetted by management. But the UDM was a regional union and Tomlinson's solidarity with the LNUM was misplaced because it could not easily survive isolated from the National Union. That in essence was the regional/national dichotomy which the MFGB and then the NUM was never able to resolve and which was to be the cause of its undoing. Peter Smith was equally anti-UDM, and uses sarcasm in his attack upon it:

They're not worth the air that they breathe... They don't represent their members in any way at all... The Secretary on their National executive was President of our union - Terry Hughes... He lives up Coalville and he's the only man I know that's lived for four-and-a-half years without food. Because nobody's ever seen him in Coalville shopping. That's how disgraced they are.³⁸²

Once the NUM/UDM problem had been compromised at Ellistown, with the NUM virtually capitulating, the struggle moved onto even more contentious and more lucrative grounds: Asfordby 'super-pit' in the Vale of Belvoir. This had been regarded as the saviour of the Leicestershire Coalfield throughout the 1980s. But in October 1987, BC decided to transfer Asfordby out of Leicestershire and into Nottinghamshire in what was seen as a punishment to Leicestershire miners for not joining the UDM.³⁸³ Jack Jones was very bitter about the Asfordby decision and was convinced of the 'real' motives behind it:

³⁸¹ John Tomlinson, personal interview, 10.8.95.

³⁸² Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

³⁸³ LNUM Minutes, 26.2.88.

These jobs were meant for Leicestershire miners, now they will go to Notts. UDM members... The UDM thought they could take over Leicester at the end of the strike. They could not do it and it was a major set-back for them. I don't think the Coal Board have ever forgiven us.³⁸⁴

As expected, Asfordby became a UDM stronghold with individual miners allowed to join the NUM but refused office facilities or negotiating rights. Indeed, it was quite evident that the Asfordby management were determined to have as few NUM members as possible. In August 1989, the General Secretary of the Power Group, J. Dowling, wrote to T. Colinshaw and J. Rhodes, Industrial Relations Officers of the Central and Nottinghamshire Areas. Dowling complained about the recruitment procedures at Asfordby, believing that experienced NUM members were being passed over in favour of less-experienced UDM members.³⁸⁵

In November 1989, Peter Smith, the newly elected LNUM Area Secretary, had cause to write to Rhodes about trade union contributions at Asfordby. BC had finally agreed to deduct NUM contributions at source, as it did with UDM members. This system of contracting in/out had, of course, long been a bone of contention between unions and management. However, BC was sending the Asfordby NUM contributions to the NUM in Nottinghamshire. Smith wanted them sent to the Leicestershire Area.³⁸⁶

At every turn, it seems, the NUM at Asfordby was being thwarted by management in favour of the UDM. By August 1995, when Asfordby was in full production, there were 148 NUM members out of a total workforce of 360. Smith was hopeful that offices would soon be provided.³⁸⁷ However, the issue disappeared when Asfordby Colliery was closed in August 1997. It was the last colliery ostensibly in the Leicestershire Area.

By 1989, only Bagworth and Ellistown Collieries had remained, and in a rare show of working-class solidarity the LNUM raised £820 for the ambulance men's dispute.³⁸⁸ This could well be interpreted as the song of a dying swan, the Leicester Area never having sung this tune

³⁸⁴ Griffin, *Volume III*, 287.

³⁸⁵ LNUM Minutes, 2.8.89.

³⁸⁶ LNUM Minutes, 6.11.89.

³⁸⁷ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

³⁸⁸ LNUM Minutes, 19.12.89.

before. In March 1990, Ellistown Colliery was closed. And on 25 February 1991, the final lodge meeting in the Leicester Area took place at Bagworth Colliery which had closed on 8 February. The meeting voted to dissolve the union and close the lodge.³⁸⁹ Coalmining in Leicestershire had come to an end.

Socially and economically, Coalville as an area of employment, has not suffered some of the dire consequences of pit closures that were predicted at the beginning of the 1980s. Indeed, the opposite would seem to be the case. By 1990, unemployment in the Coalville region was actually lower than it was in 1981, and lower than it had been just three years previously, in 1987, when it had reached a peak of twelve per cent. The following two tables, the first comparing the structure of unemployment in Coalville with that of Leicestershire and Great Britain; and the second comparing unemployment rates in Coalville and Leicestershire give a good picture of at least the effects on job prospects of pit closures in the region.

**Structure of Employment in 1981 -
Coalville, Leicestershire and Great Britain.**

	Coalville	Leicestershire	Great Britain
Employed	93.3	91.6	90.2
Unemployed, seeking work	6.0	7.6	8.8
Unemployed, sick	0.6	0.7	1.0

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys - 1981.

³⁸⁹ LNUM Minutes, 25.2.91.

Unemployment in Coalville and Leicestershire during the 1980s.

	Coalville unemployment rate	Leicestershire unemployment rate
October 1983	8.3	9.6
April 1984	9.3	9.6
Oct. 1984	10.4	10.0
January 1985	10.8	N/A
Apr. 1985	9.9	9.9
Oct. 1985	9.9	9.7
Apr. 1986	11.4	9.6
Oct. 1986	11.7	9.5
Jan. 1987	12.0	N/A
Apr. 1987	11.9	8.8
Oct. 1987	9.5	7.6
Apr. 1988	8.4	6.8
Oct. 1988	7.0	5.5
Apr. 1989	6.0	4.8
Oct. 1989	4.3	4.3
Apr. 1990	4.0	4.5

Source: Building and Social Housing Foundation, *Regeneration of a Mining Town: Coalville into the 1990s - A Future without Coal?* (Coalville, 1990).

Not surprisingly the peak unemployment years, 1985 and 1987, are the years of pit closures and rundown. Within individual wards Ellistown, which had between 40-50 per cent of its male population employed in the coal industry in 1981, suffered the highest rate of unemployment with 17.7 per cent in January 1987. But even this figure had been reduced to nine per cent by 1989.³⁹⁰

Overall, then, Coalville has survived the impact of pit closures much better than other areas, notably in the northern coalfields surrounding Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle. The explanation for this is the influx of industry into the area building on the already famed diversification of industry in Coalville. In 1981 only 8.3 per cent of the Coalville workforce

³⁹⁰ "Regeneration of a Mining Town: Coalville into the 1990s - A Future without Coal?", (Coalville: Building and Social Housing Foundation, 1990), 13.

was in the mining industry, with 18.7 per cent employed in manufacturing industries.³⁹¹ By 1987 the number employed in coalmining had dropped to five per cent, while the manufacturing industry now employed 23 per cent.³⁹² The industries were varied and ranged from meat production to textiles and fabrics, engineering and knitting needle manufacturers. There was also continued employment in quarrying and construction with the Bardon Hill Group employing up to five hundred people.³⁹³ Thus the job losses caused by pit closures have largely been absorbed by smaller service and manufacturing industries. Men did not have to uproot themselves and families in order to find employment. Jobs came to them, and this factor was always in the back of their minds during the 1980s. They knew their pits were closing, there was nothing they could or even wanted to do to stop that process. But the fear of unemployment was not present. Coalville miners were surrounded by companies and businesses which seemed to be thriving in the mid-'80s, and as many of the miners had come to coalmining late in life, during the 1970s when wages suddenly became more attractive, there was not the same sense of tradition or belonging which miners in other areas felt. The pit was a place of work like any other, except it was dirtier and more dangerous. If it closed and alternative employment was available, which it clearly was, then that was all to the good. Sentimentality and notions of attachment to the pit had very little place in Coalville. Although there was a very unsentimental attachment to the wages paid by the coal industry. For most miners the closure of the pit did mean a substantial drop in wages, the 1989 New Earnings Survey showing that the Leicestershire area paid £25-£30 per week less than the national earnings level.³⁹⁴ However, that is only the economic aspect of pit closures. The effect of pit closures on 'community' in Coalville cannot be gauged by official statistics.

Once the strike was over in Kent the old arguments about the economic viability of the coalfield, especially Snowdown Colliery, were resurrected. Although most Snowdown miners knew the battle to keep the pit open had been lost in 1984-85 and not in committee rooms

³⁹¹ OPCS Census, 1981.

³⁹² "Regeneration of a Mining Town."

³⁹³ "Regeneration of a Mining Town."

³⁹⁴ "Regeneration of a Mining Town", 31.

afterwards. Despite that, many of them were determined not to accept closure without some kind of resistance, although strike action was out of the question. For that reason contacts with support groups continued and the AWSG also met regularly in the face of falling numbers. Tony Benn believes that the extent of support for the miners, the new relationship between working and middle-class groups and the political education of working-class women were the most important legacies of the strike. He argues:

Anyone who has listened to the speeches made realises ... the giant leap that has occurred in political consciousness, understanding and awareness that the strike has produced amongst those who may never have been in any way political before... It is interesting, and deeply encouraging, that all this activity should have boosted the self-confidence of thousands ... of men and women ... who may never have realised before how capable they were of running organisations effectively, efficiently and without bureaucracy... Therein lies the real socialist dimension - a conviction of the possibilities of self-emancipation, based upon a historic class struggle entered into by a trade union and attracting wide popular support.³⁹⁵

There is an echo of Thompson's "working class present at its own birth" ethos here. Certainly the Kent activists believed, for a short time, that a momentum had been built up during 1984-85 which had to be continued in order to make some kind of sense of that twelve month sacrifice. Consequently, fund-raising activities continued throughout the months following March 1985, and another "Mines Not Missiles" Festival was planned for August 1985. The focus point for the groups was the release of miners from prison and amnesty for the sacked miners. Aylesham had two of its own men, Kevin and Donald Fraser (brothers), in prison, sentenced to three months for assaulting a police officer during a "snowball attack" on Aylesham police station on Saturday 19 January 1985.³⁹⁶ The amnesty campaign continued throughout 1985 and into 1986 both at area and national levels. The KNUM called for a mass

³⁹⁵ *London Labour Briefing*, No. 47, March 1985.

³⁹⁶ *E.K.M.*, 30.1.85; *D.E.*, 1.3.85; Kevin Fraser, personal interview, 18.8.93.

lobby of the TUC in Blackpool on Monday 2 September in support of an amnesty for the sacked and jailed miners.³⁹⁷ However, as time passed, the campaigns lost steam as a result of increased apathy at grass roots level and the obvious factor that the numbers of miners in prison decreased as they were released after serving their sentences. By the beginning of 1986 only a hard core of miners remained in prison for serious offences. These included Terry French from Betteshanger and Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock, two Welsh miners initially serving life sentences for the murder of taxi driver, David Wilkie. They had thrown a lump of concrete from a bridge onto the taxi below, on 30 November 1984, because it was carrying a working miner. Their sentence was reduced on appeal to eight years for manslaughter.³⁹⁸

In February 1986, the NUM Executive formed a National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign which brought together the various support groups including the WAPC, and the Campaign Group of MPs, with the NUM.³⁹⁹ On Thursday 27 February, Tony Benn presented a Private Members' Bill to the House of Commons, the Justice for Mineworkers Bill. This called for:

... a review of all cases of miners jailed as a result of the 1984-85 dispute in the mining industry; for the reinstatement of miners sacked for activities arising out of the dispute; for the reimbursement of monies confiscated as a result of fines, sequestration and receivership; and for purposes connected therewith.⁴⁰⁰

Most back bench bills never get beyond their first reading, so this particular bill, presented to a Conservative-dominated Commons in 1986, was purely and simply a device to raise public awareness over the question. Benn also appeared on BBC Television's popular "Question Time" programme on the same day as he presented his bill.

³⁹⁷ *The Miner*, June 1985.

³⁹⁸ Walker, "Miners in Prison".

³⁹⁹ NUM Area Circular No. ASO42/86, 19 February 1986.

⁴⁰⁰ Hansard, Official Parliamentary Debates, 6th Series, Vol. 92, col. 1082, 27 February 1986.

At the beginning of 1986, the KNUM had to turn its attention to the inevitable battle over pit closures in the coalfield, and the first collieries earmarked for closure were, surprisingly, Tilmanstone and Betteshanger Collieries. Tilmanstone had been placed in the Review Procedure in June 1985 and Betteshanger in August. Betteshanger quickly showed an improvement in production turning a loss, of two million pounds since the end of the strike, into a profit of one million pounds during the period August to October 1985.⁴⁰¹ Tilmanstone also showed an improvement and the NCB agreed, at a meeting on 3 February 1986, to keep the colliery in Review rather than proceed with closure.⁴⁰² This optimistic situation was tinged by the fact that further investment in the pit, required, according to the KNUM, to reach a new profitable seam, was refused.⁴⁰³ Jack Collins was convinced that the NCB did not want the Kent Area to make a profit, for vindictive political reasons:

There can be no reason for wanting to destroy mining in Kent unless it is to teach us the lesson for fighting for our jobs.⁴⁰⁴

Tilmanstone remained in the Review Procedure for over a year until, despite KNUM protests, the colliery was closed in September 1987. By that time Snowdown Colliery was also about to be closed.

Losses at Snowdown since the end of the strike continued to mount. In 1985-86 there was a loss of £5,376,000 and in 1986-87, £6,405,000.⁴⁰⁵ As a result, Mr. F. Middleton, the Kent General Manager, took the decision to halt a large part of the development work at Snowdown and reduce manpower by ninety men, offering them either a transfer to Betteshanger Colliery or voluntary redundancy. The unions present at the Colliery Review Meeting deplored this decision arguing that Betteshanger could not take extra men, and that British Coal's real intentions were clear: to close Snowdown Colliery and eventually the Kent Coalfield. Wes Chambers, the KNUM National Executive Delegate, spoke very determinedly

⁴⁰¹ *Coal News*, No. 294, February 1986.

⁴⁰² *Coal News*, No. 294, February 1986.

⁴⁰³ *Coal in Kent*, February 1986.

⁴⁰⁴ *Coal in Kent*, February 1986.

⁴⁰⁵ British Coal (Kent), Colliery Review Meeting, Minutes, 8 May 1987.

and said the unions would not allow Snowdown to close.⁴⁰⁶ Middleton denied that it was the Corporation's intention either to close Snowdown or the Kent Coalfield. He argued:

Kent had the advantage of coal with a high calorific value, high proceeds per ton, and at the moment, markets. However, it was vital that costs be kept as low as possible and he could see no reason why the coalfield could not compete and succeed in the prevailing economic climate.⁴⁰⁷

However, Middleton also made it clear that the survival of the colliery depended very much upon the co-operation of the unions in this partial closure plan. And that did not look forthcoming.

At the next Colliery Review Meeting, on 12 June 1987, Middleton demanded a positive response from the unions in order for him to go ahead with his proposals for the partial rundown of Snowdown Colliery. Lawrence Knight, Acting Area Secretary⁴⁰⁸ and Snowdown Branch Chairman, reported that the Snowdown Branch had met and decided to reject the Corporation's proposals. F. Redman, Area General Secretary of NACODS, I. Carnell, Regional Officer of COSA (Colliery Officials and Staff Association) and C. Towe, representative of APEX (Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff), reported that their unions had also decided not to agree with the proposals for Snowdown Colliery.⁴⁰⁹ Middleton replied in a very menacing tone, asking the unions to be aware of the ramifications of their decision:

I am sorry that the unions have not seen fit to co-operate with the implementation of my proposals... By refusing to co-operate any reduction in the costs of Snowdown and thus any improvement in the financial position of the coalfield is impossible...

Therefore, I must now formally state that I can see no justification for continuing our

⁴⁰⁶ Colliery Review, Minutes, 8.5.87.

⁴⁰⁷ Colliery Review, Minutes, 8.5.87.

⁴⁰⁸ Jack Collins was dying with cancer.

⁴⁰⁹ British Coal (Kent), Colliery Review Meeting, Minutes, 12 June 1987.

operations at Snowdown Colliery. I am, therefore, advising the Corporation that operations should cease as soon as possible at Snowdown Colliery. It is with great reluctance that this decision has been reached, but with there being no possibility of improving costs at the colliery there can be no other conclusion. There will, of course, be no compulsory redundancies.⁴¹⁰

There was consternation when the unions heard this and Knight asked for an adjournment to give them time to make their response. After a short time the meeting reconvened and an official reply was given:

The NUM and COSA presented written letters to the General Manager formally notifying him that their unions could not accept the Corporation's proposals for the reduction of manpower at Snowdown by transfer/redundancy, or to the closure of the Colliery and they wished the matter to be put into the Appeals Procedure.⁴¹¹

Redman did not make a response for NACODS until he had had time to consult with his membership. After he had done so he informed Middleton, at the next Colliery Review Meeting on 22 July 1987, that NACODS would also be appealing against the Corporation's closure plans for Snowdown Colliery.⁴¹² At this meeting Middleton announced that in order to reduce operating costs, Snowdown Colliery would be placed on single shift working immediately after the August holiday. This decision also angered the unions as they argued that it amounted to rundown by stealth. Wes Chambers spoke very angrily:

... he believed that Snowdown could be a record breaking pit and that people should be talking about a living vibrant thing rather than figures on paper.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Colliery Review, Minutes, 12.6.87.

⁴¹¹ Colliery Review, Minutes, 12.6.87.

⁴¹² British Coal (Kent), Colliery Review Meeting, Minutes, 22 July 1987.

⁴¹³ Colliery Review, Minutes, 22.7.87.

This way of speaking about the pit, giving it some kind of personality almost, was typical of how many miners regarded their workplace. It had its own character and miners would invest time in getting to know its idiosyncrasies. There existed a form of relationship with the pit which had been built up over a long period and consequently the decision taken by 'outsiders', men who knew nothing of the special relationship, was particularly resented. This is why miners could often be found crying on their last shift, why they speak in such painful, personal terms about *their* pit closing, and why interviewers feel as if they are somehow invading a very private area when they ask questions about such things. It is as if they are asking a man questions about his personal life, about the ending of a very intimate relationship.

Some members of the Review Meeting tried to appeal to the potential of the 'good times ahead' in order to keep Snowdown Colliery open and the pitman/pit relationship alive. Redman said that:

... he found it incomprehensible that the Corporation should be proposing to close the colliery just when it was reaching a stage when more positive results were being seen.⁴¹⁴

However, he too showed how the pit had taken on a personality of its own when he said that:

British Coal were 'murdering' a pit with a possible long term future.⁴¹⁵

The Appeal Meeting on Snowdown Colliery was held on Monday 21 September 1987, with national representatives of British Coal and all the unions involved as well as the Area representatives present. At the meeting Middleton gave a brief history of the development work which had taken place at Snowdown since January 1983, and the various geological difficulties which had been encountered.⁴¹⁶ Arthur Scargill presented the NUM case for keeping Snowdown open. He called BC's decision on closure "almost sinister", and argued that

⁴¹⁴ Colliery Review, Minutes, 22.7.87.

⁴¹⁵ Colliery Review, Minutes, 22.7.87.

⁴¹⁶ Note of the National Appeal Meeting on Snowdown Colliery, Minutes, 21 September 1987.

Snowdown had viable coal reserves for thirty to fifty years.⁴¹⁷ Redman, speaking for NACODS in Kent, criticised the closure of Tilmanstone Colliery and said that it, plus the planned closure of Snowdown Colliery:

... graphically illustrated the abdication of corporate responsibility as a result of what was now widely seen as closure psychosis for political gratification.⁴¹⁸

John Northard acting for BC, and a hard-liner over pit closures,⁴¹⁹ listened to the representations from all sides and,

... undertook to make a detailed report of all the arguments for consideration by the full Board, following which the Unions would be informed of the Board's decision.⁴²⁰

By this time, however, Snowdown Colliery was employing only 191 men and its economic importance to the village of Aylesham was now minimal. Its significance remained historical and symbolic and thus it came as no less a shock to the village when the announcement came that Snowdown Colliery was to close in October 1987. Aylesham was technically no longer a mining village. Its historical *raison d'être* was gone. Three years later, in July 1990, Betteshanger Colliery ceased operations. The brief, sometimes turbulent, life of the Kent Coalfield had come to an end. Now people really could once again be surprised at the idea of coalmines in the Garden of England.

With the closure of Snowdown Colliery came the concomitant questions about how to use the colliery land and in what direction, socially and economically, the village of Aylesham should go. One of the ideas for land usage which received serious, if brief, attention was to build an East Kent Mining Museum on the site of Snowdown Colliery.⁴²¹ And once again Kent

⁴¹⁷ Appeal Meeting, Minutes, 21.9.87.

⁴¹⁸ Appeal Meeting, Minutes, 21.9.87.

⁴¹⁹ Adeney and Lloyd, 74.

⁴²⁰ Appeal Meeting, Minutes, 21.9.87.

⁴²¹ Kent County Council, Economic Development and Tourism Sub-Committee, East Kent Mining

was linked to Leicester because the authors of the Feasibility Study studied very closely the Leicestershire Heritage and National Mining Museum which was to open its doors on the site of Snibston Colliery, Coalville. However, just as in life, Snowdown Colliery resurrected as a museum or theme park was not considered economically viable. The Study wrote:

The costs of running a mining experience with underground tours of the existing mine using shaft and winding gear of the former colliery would be prohibitive, even if very large numbers of visitors were to be drawn to the site...⁴²²

Perhaps there is a sense of justice about the decision not to use Snowdown Colliery as a tourist attraction. The idea of people visiting the pit top and even going on guided underground visits had raised the hackles of many miners. This irritation was directly linked to their personal relationship with the colliery and tourists would simply be prying. Also they could not bear the thought of patronising sympathy and questions about their profession, a profession which they had considered more a way of life. Kay Sutcliffe anticipated the museum idea during the 1984-85 strike and captured the sense of bitterness, felt by those in the industry, in poetic form:

It stands so proud, the wheels so still,
A ghostlike figure on the hill.
It seems so strange, there is no sound,
Now there are no men underground.

What will become of this pit yard?
Where men once trampled faces hard?
So tired and weary their shift done,
Never having seen the sun.

Museum, Feasibility Study Report, 8 July 1988.

⁴²² Feasibility Study, 10.

Will it become a sacred ground,
 Foreign tourists gazing round?
 Asking if men really worked here
 Way beneath this pit-head gear?

Empty trucks once filled with coal
 Lined up like men on the dole.
 Will they ever be used again
 Or left for scrap just like the men?

There'll always be a happy hour,
 For those with money, jobs and power.
 They'll never realise the hurt
 They've caused to men they treat like dirt.

Ironically, the closing of the colliery caused the old idea of expanding Aylesham to be resurrected. Kent County Council was looking for suitable areas of development in the South-East as the Channel Tunnel was now being built - another irony⁴²³ - and an influx of commuters was expected. Rockfort Homes, a building company which had bought land to the north of Aylesham, submitted a planning report to Dover District Council on the proposed expansion of the village. The authors of the report readily admit their indebtedness to Abercrombie:

The key to the planning strategy lies in the recognition of the formal structure of Aylesham proposed by Abercrombie in the late 1920s. The village was conceived as having a main axis... A fundamental concept of the programme is to reinstate this

⁴²³ It was, of course, the abandonment of the Channel Tunnel project at the end of the 19th century which had led to the positive finding of coal, for long just a hypothesis, in Kent. Now as the Kent Coalfield was ending its brief life the Channel Tunnel was finally becoming a reality, and took advantage of the skilled underground labour of the miners.

ordering device ... and extend the strong formation in the new growth of the town to the north. In addition to reinforcing a clearly defined urban order the Abercrombie approach provides the model for a response to topography, urban/rural edge conditions and a hierarchy of routes.⁴²⁴

So it looked as though the wheel was finally turning full circle and Aylesham was to realise its original size potential over sixty years after having been conceived and after the pit had been closed. There were to be additional residential areas and a variety of small businesses and new shopping areas as well as extra sports facilities and recreational areas. These proposals were very adventurous and would certainly have changed not only the physical appearance of Aylesham, but also its social fabric. No longer officially a mining community, it would have soon lost all traces of ever having been one, including the all-important social homogeneity which characterised the village throughout its sixty-odd years. However, these plans were rejected by the Dover District Council on the basis that they would have contravened the Planning and Compensation Bill which was currently passing through Parliament and became law in 1991.⁴²⁵ The District Council did, though, seem determined to proceed with some form of expansion of Aylesham and offered a watered-down (less expensive) form of the Rockfort Homes proposals for public consultation.⁴²⁶ This offered no significant changes to the existing village but proposed to use land north of the village as a development area for residential housing. In a highly patronising paragraph, showing that it understood nothing about either mining villages, the phrase "tightly-knit", 'community', nor what Aylesham people actually wanted, the *Planning Brief* stated:

As is typical of all tightly-knit mining communities, some social groups are under-represented in Aylesham. While the east Kent Coalfield was active, this did not matter as Aylesham displayed the social richness found in all such communities. With the

⁴²⁴ *North Aylesham Development Strategy*, A Proposal by Rockfort Homes to the Dover District Council, October 1989.

⁴²⁵ *Aylesham: A Planning Brief*, Consultative Draft, Dover District Council, February 1992, para. 1.04.

⁴²⁶ *Aylesham: A Planning Brief*.

closure of the Coalfield, however, a wider social mix of residents will help sustain and enrich community life in the future. This can best be achieved by having a variety of dwelling types, prices and tenures in the new development. This will range from affordable housing to individual plots for architect-designed executive housing.⁴²⁷

This statement is breathtaking in its audacity. Throughout the 1940s, '50s and '60s Aylesham was crying out for inward investment and consistently felt neglected and paranoid about the reasons for that neglect. During that period it was essentially a single-occupational community with little prospect of male employment beyond the colliery and very restricted opportunities for women. What the District Council meant by "social richness" is unclear, but it cannot possibly have meant variety or social diversification. It was more or less a patronising term to describe a single-class settlement, used to justify almost total inaction on the part of the Council over the past decades.

Feeling neglected, ostracised, the people of Aylesham had turned in upon themselves for support and gradually created a stable community with the pit as its symbolic heart. These miners and their families were present at the birth of their community, not merely as expectant fathers onlooking, but as midwives up to their arms in the process struggling to release the child 'community'. And the sense of parental pride in what they had achieved reached its zenith on the Welfare field on a sunny August Bank Holiday in 1984, when the people of Aylesham were involved in a fight to keep what they regarded as the lifeblood of the community open. Once that had gone the people waited for the slow death of 'community' in the village. And they would be present at this event too, although opinions differ over precisely what time the sad passing took place. Discussion of this; and a final analysis of community and militancy will be the subject of the next and concluding chapter.

⁴²⁷ *Aylesham, A Planning Brief*, para. 3.06.

Chapter Eight.

Community and Militancy: A Final Thought.

Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task has done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney sweepers come to dust.

William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, Act 4, Scene 2, lines 258-63.

Introduction.

This concluding chapter will attempt to bring together the loose strands of community and (non)militancy which have occurred in the histories of Aylesham and Coalville. The previous chapters have traced the histories of these two mining areas, looking specifically at their (non)involvement in industrial disputes during the twentieth century. Much of the thesis, which has been largely historical by nature, has concentrated upon the period post-1945, and particularly the episodes of extreme industrial action in 1972, 1974 and 1984-85. We have seen how Coalville miners became increasingly militant (pecuniary), following the introduction of the NPLA in 1966, culminating in their active involvement in the wage strikes of the 1970s. However, the success of those strikes and the implementation of a wages productivity scheme in 1977-78, led to the Coalville miners reverting to their previous reputation for moderation, resulting in their refusal to participate in the union action for jobs dispute in 1984-85.

Conversely, Aylesham miners, who were somewhat reticent about the Area communist leadership in the 1950s and '60s, became increasingly politicised following the introduction of the NPLA, and after 1972 and '74 vied with Betteshanger Colliery for the reputation as the most militant Kent pit.

In the following pages we will look once again at the theme 'community' and endeavour to analyse the relationship between this concept, abstruse for the sociologists but quite tangible for miners and their families, and levels of militancy and union solidarity. The discussion will be based upon the theoretical, as expressed in the written form, and the practical, as voiced by the actors who live in 'communities', real or imagined.

Pits, Pit Villages and the People in Them.

In 1993, the Conservative Government, led by John Major, embarked upon a new round of pit closures, this after its abortive attempt in October 1992. Michael Heseltine, the President of the Board of Trade in 1992, had been forced by an astonishing and totally unexpected display of public opinion into declaring a moratorium on twenty-one of the thirty-one pits announced for immediate closure. Suddenly miners were everyone's favourite worker and the historical tradition of their being archetypal proletarian was reaffirmed. However, they had been emasculated of any potential political or industrial muscle, and as with tamed beasts cowed in a cage, middle England could afford to be magnanimous. John Cole, writing in the *New Statesman and Society*, was typical of the bourgeois romanticisation of miners and their villages:

... they are geographically isolated, people living in districts that are made unattractive to fresh industrial developers by the environmental devastation inseparable from their trade ... the miner's skill, perhaps his temperament, make him not easily assimilable into gentler jobs.¹

This was an expression of longheld ideas about miners which consistently categorised them as a 'race apart'. It was a repetition of probably one of the first ascriptive accounts of miners and their communities, written by an anonymous author who had spent some time observing miners. His is certainly one of the first sociological surveys of pit villages, and although written

¹ *New Statesman and Society*, 5.2.93.

in a somewhat naive and patronising style sometimes, it served to inform many later, and ostensibly more academic accounts. The methodology employed was one of immersion in the social and familial lives of the mines, a methodology repeated by numerous ethno-sociologists, including the Chicago school and Dennis et al:

I used to spend many of my evenings in the pit villages, for the sake of pursuing my investigations into the conditions of the colliers. I would go from house to house, talking with one and asking questions of another, until the people became familiar with me... I became accustomed to all the indoor customs and manners... I managed to learn the dialect, and acquired much minute information not otherwise attainable.²

The Traveller Underground adopts the kind of romantic view of miners which has done them such great disservice over the years. He describes miners ascending the pit shaft using the old method of the rope which hauled them out of the ground. The boy miners are sitting on their father's knees and our nineteenth century sociologist observes:

... there's one poor little boy asleep! How striking an instance of confidence in his father's tenacity! That little fellow has fallen asleep while coming up nearly a thousand feet!³

Confidence probably had nothing to do with it. It was more likely a case of sheer exhaustion. The author then describes the miners' journey home in the evening sun, in a literary style which pre-empted that of Thomas Hardy's. And, having seen the evidence of the debilitating lassitude affecting the boy miners, he comes to the incredulous conclusion that the work does not have "any very pernicious effects" on them.⁴ However, it is his description of the pitmen and his

² *Our Coal and Our Coal Pits; the People in Them and the Scenes Around Them by a Traveller Underground*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), 195.

³ *Our Coal and Our Coal Pits*, 192.

⁴ *Our Coal and Our Coal Pits*, 195.

villages which is most pertinent to this study as he sets the tone which has determined attitudes, professional and lay, towards miners:

Pitmen have always lived in communities; they have associated only among themselves; they have thus acquired habits and ideas peculiar to themselves: even their amusements are hereditary and peculiar ... [they] may be regarded in the light of a distinct race of beings.⁵

This, of course, is the classic 'race apart' theory of miners which has been consistently employed to explain their supposed solidarity and high levels of militancy. There is also the hereditary aspect of miners' lives, which continues to be used, as we have seen, as an explanation for their propensity to take industrial action. However, no such analysis is proffered by the Underground Traveller. He suggests a more class-based explanation, believing that miners, wrongly, interpret their lives and working conditions in a dichotomous manner:

Most of the pitmen imagine themselves to be an oppressed race. They foolishly think that their interests and those of their employers are opposed. They believe that they have one effectual, and only one effectual weapon with which to meet their masters ... and that weapon is what they call a 'steek', and what we call a 'strike'.⁶

This early picture of miners, their work and their lives is important in spite of its inaccuracies, subjectivity and impressionistic nature. It not only shows that by the mid-nineteenth century miners were deemed worthy of special attention, but it seems to have been largely responsible for setting the standard by which pitmen and their villages would be analysed well into the twentieth century. The Traveller Underground's description of relationships between miners and their wives, the role of women and the industrial socialising of their children would not have been out of place in *Coal is Our Life*. And, of course, that account, combined with

⁵ *Our Coal and Our Coal Pits*, 197.

⁶ *Our Coal and Our Coal Pits*, 203.

fictional accounts like *Weekend in Dinlock* and the more recent mining novel, *Coming Back Brockens*⁷, have served to shape public and media images of miners and their communities right up to the 1984-85 miners' strike and beyond, viz. John Cole. It was largely this image of the poor proletarian which determined the public sympathy for miners in October 1992 and forced the Government into an official Review of the coal industry. This Review was published in March 1993,⁸ by which time public outrage had dissipated and the Government was able to continue its pit closure programme, although at a more cautious rate. The review insisted upon the economic soundness of the Government's October 1992 announcement, but recognised:

... that in the difficult wider economic context prevailing at the time the speed and scale of the closures announced by British Coal in October 1992 were too great to be acceptable to a wide body of public and Parliamentary opinion.⁹

However, it was clear in the review that the Government not only intended to close the pits, it was doing so in order that a more streamlined coal industry could be sold off under its privatisation plans.¹⁰ All pits were to be affected including those which had worked during 1984-85 and which had joined the UDM. Margaret Thatcher, out of office by 1993, could afford to ignore the 'hard' economics of the coal industry and express sorrow for the way *certain* miners were being treated:

I understand now that those marvellous working miners, the Democratic Union, feel a sense of betrayal. Things have happened, since I left, to the coal mines, that I would never have countenanced had I been there. Indeed, I turned down a similar proposition when it was made to me... The debt we have to those miners is a continuing one and should be honoured by the continuing government.¹¹

⁷ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens: A Year in a Mining Village*, (London: Vintage, 1995).

⁸ *The Prospects for Coal: Conclusions of the Government's Coal Review*, London: HMSO, Cmnd. 2235, March 1993.

⁹ *Prospects for Coal*, para. 2.7.

¹⁰ *Prospects for Coal*, paras. 2.36 and 2.41.

¹¹ *The Thatcher Years*.

So there we have the official point of view concerning the outcome of the 1984-85 miners' strike: the Government won thanks to the working miners. Thatcher finds herself on the same side as Scargill and the left in her analysis.

The nature of mining communities, geographical and socio-political, has been used as one of the determining factors in miners' militancy. However, a universal theory has so far eluded social historians, and when one is suggested that looks reasonably coherent it hardly has time to see the light of day before it is shot down in flames. *Isolated mass* being the classic and obvious example. Indeed, even the term 'militancy' is open to different interpretations, such as strike proneness, strike activity, or, an abstract, such as 'political awareness'. Roy Church et al. at least show that the term 'miners' militancy' is not a misnomer, the mining industry being, in every decade since 1893, far and away more strike prone than any other traditional working class occupation such as metals and engineering, textiles, building and transport.¹² Church et al.' subtitle, "Towards a history of British miners' militancy", is tentative to say the least, no definitive explanation being offered, rather a survey of useful ideas including, of course, *isolated mass*. And, while accepting the methodological weaknesses in the term, they describe it as a "helpful attempt to analyse strike activity" and as "attractive to historians typically more at home with the idiomatic and multi-causal explanations."¹³ Church et al. suggest that one of the problems associated with trying to produce a universal theory of miners' militancy is the lack of case studies on specific collieries, and the failure of such case studies as do exist to place the chosen collieries within a national or regional context and to give a wider comparative aspect. The existing case studies are also criticised for being limited in their time range. Goffee's study of the Kent Coalfield is singled out.¹⁴

This study, a comparison of the Leicestershire and Kent coalfields, looking specifically at Coalville and Aylesham over a much longer period, 1920s-90s, has attempted to go some way towards filling that gap in the historiography of British coalmining. However, it probably complicates rather than facilitates an understanding of the nature of British miners' militancy,

¹² Roy Church, Quentin Outram, David N. Smith, "Essay in Historiography: Towards a history of British miners' militancy", *Labour History Review*, Vol. 54, Part No.1, Spring 1989, 21-36.

¹³ Church et al., 24.

¹⁴ Church et al., 26.

with its contradiction of widely-held notions such as that of Kent miners' militancy. But, as all historians must at one time or another acknowledge, historical facts (should such things exist!) are sometimes inconvenient, especially when one sets out to prove a hypothesis. That was not the intention of this piece of research. Rather it was to examine notions about militant/moderate miners and their communities, to see if such ideas were valid and, if so, what were their origins. In the course of the research it soon became apparent that the generalities about Leicestershire and Kent, usually accepted as absolutes, were largely unsubstantiated. What became clear was that the miners in the chosen districts were capable of differing levels of militancy and moderacy, and that the reputation of the Kent Coalfield as militant was essentially earned on the backs of the Betteshanger miners post-1942.

Church et al.' quest for an explanation for miners' militancy did not stop at one article. In another article, published the same year, they use the 1984-85 miners' strike as a starting point suggesting that our inability to understand fully the nature of the strike is perhaps:

... a manifestation of a more general failure of understanding of miners' militancy and their strike proneness.¹⁵

Once again they show, using statistics, that British miners have been more strike prone than any other traditional manual industry. However, this time they point out the rather important factor of miners' militancy not being evenly spread on a national basis, nor even at a regional level. Rather it was small "clusters" of collieries, particularly in the South Yorkshire area which were heavily strike prone and increased the overall strike percentages in the industry as a whole.¹⁶ Unfortunately, no explanation for this phenomena is postulated.

The irregular pattern of strike proneness is a significant point for this study as generalisations about both Kent and Leicestershire are very difficult to make. Church et al. study the inter-war period, and this study has shown that Leicestershire miners were more strike prone than Kent miners during this period. They played a full part in the 1926 lock-out

¹⁵ Roy Church, Quentin Outram, David N. Smith, *The Militancy of British Miners: Interdisciplinary Problems and Perspectives*, (Universities of East Anglia and Leeds, April 1989).

¹⁶ Church et al. *Militancy of British Miners*, 11.

as well as having several localised disputes over such issues as shovel-filling. Kent miners, on the other hand, were keen to protect their jobs during that period and played a very limited part in national disputes. Snowdown Colliery was, of course, closed during the mid-1920s and Betteshanger Colliery was still in the process of being sunk. So comparisons are impossible. However, by the 1930s, both pits were operational and disputes at them extremely rare. This may well have been due to the insecurity felt by the Kent miners newly arrived from distant coalfields where they had lost their jobs due to either closure or being sacked. Kent offered a new chance, another opportunity, with six-day working, if they wanted it, and relatively good wages. The miners were keen to make good. There was also the 'butty system' in operation which meant that any disputes which did take place were usually *between* miners and therefore went unrecorded.

Church et al.' point that individual collieries were capable of extreme levels of militancy is exemplified by the 1942 Betteshanger dispute. With the full weight of the State against them in a time of exceptional national emergency the Betteshanger miners held out and won a total victory without any of the three other Kent collieries even voicing support, let alone giving it. This event was a turning point in the industrial history of the Kent Coalfield. There was no going back for the Betteshanger miners who had been mishandled by both management and government and forced into a corner from which they could only come out fighting. And, having won that battle a tradition/myth of militancy was established which fed off itself and enveloped the whole coalfield. Conversely, the other Kent collieries which could not participate in the astonishing success and victory celebrations of the Betteshanger miners, remained somewhat aloof. This was particularly true of the Snowdown miners who, as we have seen, followed a distinctly moderate pattern for much of the post-war period.

Leicestershire miners, used to regular work and stable wages, due to their high productivity, also preferred to distance themselves from their more militant colleagues in South Yorkshire. Throughout the 1930s and the post-war period the Leicestershire Area was consistently strike-free, the men adopting a very co-operative attitude with management pre-nationalisation, and then falling, naturally, into the corporatism of post-1947. Two individual miners elected to lead the LMA and then the LNUM were both exemplars of this approach:

Thomas Gowdridge and Frank Smith. The extent to which Leicestershire miners took their desire to be seen as co-operative rather than intransigent meant that they even gave tacit compliance to the rundown of their industry in the 1980s and, perversely, to the ending of the corporatist style of man/management relations. Corporatism, or more accurately 'tripartism' - employers, trade unions and government - is the subject of another historical survey by Roy Church.¹⁷

The involvement or interference of the State in the British coal industry dates from 1893 and the first organised dispute between the newly formed MFGB and the various coal owners' associations. We saw, in Chapter Two, how the Government could not afford to allow a serious and lengthy interruption in the supply of coal to industry and therefore felt it necessary to take steps. This heralded the beginning of tripartism although successive governments were always loathe to be seen to be involved in the affairs of private enterprise. Consequently, the official attitude was rather Janus-like with governments believing in the hands-on approach in times of crisis - war and strikes, but immediately adopting a *laissez-faire* style once the crisis had passed. Miners and their unions demanded the total involvement of the Government in the form of nationalisation, although why they should have had faith in the benevolent nature of capitalist governments shows more about their political naiveté than it does about their industrial astuteness. One of the few calls for a more regional and co-operative approach to management came in the radical syndicalist document *The Miners' Next Step* of 1912, and in the speeches of Harold Macmillan to the Commons during the debate on the Nationalisation Bill in 1946. But it was the idea of a centralised, state-owned coal industry which won the day and came into being on 1 January 1947. Miners up and down the country celebrated this day believing that the pits really did belong to them. They thus embarked upon a long period of collaboration with Government and Coal Board in the simple belief that damage done to the industry through stoppages was damage done to themselves. This was tripartism/corporatism at its peak and both the Kent and Leicestershire coalfields fully co-operated in its smooth running. As a result there were no national disputes in the coal industry

¹⁷ Roy Church, "Employers, Trade Unions and the State, 1889-1987: The Origins and Decline of Tripartism in the British Coal Industry", in Gerald D. Feldman and Klaus Terfelde (eds.), *Workers, Owners and Politics in Coal Mining*, (London: Berg Publishers, 1990), 12-73.

from 1947 to 1972, and unofficial disputes were restricted to regions and "clusters" of collieries. Leicestershire was strike-free during this period and Kent was almost strike-free, Betteshanger Colliery once again behaving the most militantly with its stay-down dispute over job losses in 1960. As in 1942, solidarity from the other Kent pits, expected by Betteshanger miners, was not forthcoming. What added to Kent's reputation for militancy during this period were the leftist sounding resolutions which came from the Communist-led KNUM. Union officials like Jack Dunn certainly gave the impression that Kent was a militant area, just as men like Frank Smith helped enhance Leicestershire's reputation for moderacy. In reality, however, Dunn knew he could not push his men into action, just as Smith had no desire to. What Dunn, and later Jack Collins, did do was lay the groundwork by 'raising' young militants in their own image through a slow process of industrial and political education, especially with the help of Ruskin College. Consequently, when the big national strikes of the 1970s came, the Kent miners of that period had begun to believe the myth and mystique surrounding their 'famed' militancy. Whereas in Leicestershire the moderate leadership of men like Smith was overtaken by the long restrained rank-and-file, not militant, but frustrated.

If the arrival of the two main protagonists onto the national scene in the 1970s-'80s, Thatcher and Scargill, signalled the end of corporatism in the coal industry, the seeds of its demise were planted long before, in the 1960s. Ironically, it was an NCB policy which helped to increase miners' militancy and reduce co-operative tripartism. This was the introduction of the NPLA in 1966 which, while it assisted a smoother running of the industry and succeeded in eliminating regional pay disputes, it increased the sense of national unity within the NUM and solidarity between miners. The NPLA also helped to frustrate miners in Kent and Leicestershire who had to endure effective wage freezes for five years while other areas 'caught up'. By 1971, miners in both areas were ready to take industrial action in support of a wage claim. This was not regarded as politically militant action by these miners but as justifiable industrial action in pursuit of a justifiable pay rise. The fact that a Conservative Government was in power enabled all miners to participate against their traditional, historical 'enemy', frustrated as they were by their inaction during the late 1960s when the coal industry was

decimated and the potential power of the NUM emasculated by the miners' enemy within: a Labour Government.

The pit closures of the 1960s affected both Kent and Leicestershire, showing these miners that job security, if ever such a thing could exist in coalmining, was a thing of the past. The adverse psychological effects and the artificial ceiling placed upon their wages by the NPLA combined to produce a newer, more militant, local leadership. This was evidenced at Snowdown Colliery in the late 1960s and at Coalville in the early 1970s with the arrival of men like John McMahon and Jack Jones. Church assesses the importance of this period thus:

Henceforward, national bargaining assumed paramount importance and, in parallel, unity among mineworkers in pursuit of a favourable national wages policy grew; for those who lost most by the compression of differentials could feel that they had less to gain from restraint.¹⁸

It was at this point that serious differences between the two areas began to emerge as Leicestershire leaders insisted upon their preparedness to take action in pursuit of better conditions and wages, while Kent, and increasingly Snowdown, leaders, began to express more overtly political aims. The militant Jack Collins, transferred from Chislet Colliery to Snowdown was soon elected as a Branch official and then onto the Area Union Executive. These were the fruits of the labours of early KNUM leaders such as Tudor Davies and Jack Dunn. In 1970 all three Kent pits voted to take part in the unofficial strike action against the NCB's pay offer. They joined up with South Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland, thereby earning themselves the reputation of being militant - guilty by association.

Tripartism reached its apogee in 1972. The miners' strike of that year forced the Government not only into public intervention but into a position where it had to finance the pay settlement as recommended by the Wilberforce Inquiry. The experience was repeated in 1974, only this time the Government recognised its responsibility and immediately entered into the very public talks with the NUM. Images of union leaders entering Number 10 Downing

¹⁸ Church, 55.

Street for talks seemed to have been generally accepted, although it must have made the blood of at least one female Cabinet minister run cold. With the collapse of the Government in 1974, over the issue 'Who governs Britain?', came the beginning of the end of tripartism. It also saw, as we now know, the zenith of NUM power, never to be repeated, many miners stepping back from the brink of political responsibility aided and abetted by a divisive productivity scheme.

That the NPLA gave an unprecedented unity to the NUM is hardly in any doubt, and it is perhaps no accident that, as part of his recommendations, Wilberforce suggested some kind of productivity bonus scheme. The subsequent debate over its form and method of introduction saw the NUM fragmenting into its constituent federal parts, with Midlands miners, who stood to gain the most, campaigning hard for such a scheme. Where wages are concerned all miners are militant, only their methods differ. With the introduction of the productivity scheme, not only was there a loss in the uniformity of miners' wages, which had forged their unity in 1972 and 1974, but an important precedent had been established, which was perhaps even more significant for the future (dis)unity of the NUM. A national ballot which had produced a majority against a productivity scheme was overturned at regional level by those Areas which had voted in favour. This lesson in *democracy* was not forgotten, and the miners on strike in 1984-85 had absolutely no confidence in Midlands miners to abide by a national ballot if it had produced a majority in favour of industrial action over pit closures. Keith Mellin, a striking Coalville miner, voices the opinion of many:

If you had a ballot and you got a seventy per cent majority ... or 80-20, you'd have had areas that would've had 50-50 or 60-40, or vote not to strike. And after three months those areas would've been calling to ... go back to work... They would've eventually drifted back to work, a lot of them areas - Leicestershire, Nottingham or whatever.¹⁹

The 1984-85 miners' strike signified the end of corporatism/tripartism. Throughout the first six months, Thatcher's government maintained an official, if somewhat ludicrous and increasingly incredulous stance that it was not involved. Where infractions of the law occurred

¹⁹ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

these would be dealt with by the police through the law courts. That the Government was *directly* involved was never doubted by the miners, both militant and moderate, strikers and non-strikers. Indeed, most miners believed this dispute was *with* the Government, and for that reason miners in Kent were convinced that the strike had to be won, not only to protect jobs and communities, but to bring down one of the most class conscious administrations since 1926. The feeling of loss when the strike was over was not just regret about twelve months sacrifice having been for nothing, nor even that massive pit closures were now an inevitability. It was these, but it was more: it was about the inevitable loss of a way of life, of an autonomy from the interference of an outside world just when it was not wanted, and there was a strong sense of an opportunity missed, an opportunity to strike a blow for the working-class. Arthur Loomer tries to sum up this sense of loss:

It was an experience... I don't think there was anything ever like that. I don't think there'll ever be anything like that again, not as long as I live.²⁰

Philip Sutcliffe is more precise about what he understood to have been lost in March 1985:

I don't think there'll be another chance like that one; I don't mean for pits, I mean to defeat the system.²¹

It was precisely this political aspect to the dispute which helped to dissuade the miners of Coalville from taking part. With the closure of their pits having been accepted, they were not prepared to get involved in a dispute which, among other things, was regarded as some kind of class war. That had never been part of their tradition, indeed, it was not a tradition within the NUM, until the advent of Scargillism. Kent miners, like those in Coalville, were fully aware of the wider political issues at stake, but unlike those in Coalville, were prepared to go along with them.

²⁰ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93. Arthur was certainly correct about the uniqueness of the strike in his lifetime, he died in March 1998.

²¹ Philip Sutcliffe, 29.12.89.

Following the miners' strike the Government declared its intention to withdraw from any involvement in the coal industry, with the ultimate act signalling the end of any form of tripartism - privatisation. This was achieved in 1993, less than fifty years after Vesting Day. If the mines had ever belonged to the miners in some psychological form, it was clear that they no longer did. The dream had been short-lived and easily broken.

The myth of the militant miner is attacked in an article dealing predominantly with the pit deputies union, NACODS, but which also covers such topics as regional and historical moderacy among miners in general.²² Peter Ackers criticises the 'romantic tradition' in coalmining history and the "neglect of the economic base of mining industrial relations."²³ He believes that this is a deliberate attempt by leftist historians to concentrate on regional and national disputes in order to propagate their own political agenda. He writes:

... there is a tendency to overplay the importance of industrial disputes by identifying mining labour history with strike history.²⁴

While it is true that the national disputes of 1926, 1972, 1974 and 1984-85 have received their due attention it is disingenuous of Ackers to pretend that these events are central to the majority of mining histories. As this thesis has attempted to show, it is the construction of 'community' which is the more interesting aspect in the history of pit villages, even if it is this 'community' which provides the base for solidaristic action when required. It is to this subject that we now turn for the final part of our conclusion.

Despite Alan Macfarlane's dismissal of the term 'community' as being fundamentally meaningless and Margaret Stacey speaking of the "myth" of community, the word continues to be used and overused, particularly by politicians who either hark back to an imagined past community - John Major - or who project upon the nation state of Britain a totally unrealistic 'community' future - Tony Blair. This use and abuse of the word does, however, force

²² Peter Ackers, *Labour Process and Labour History: Whatever happened to the Moderate Coal Miner? Some Reflections on the 'Pit Deputies' Trade Union before Nationalisation*, Loughborough University Management Research Series, Paper 1992:15, August 1992.

²³ Ackers, 3.

²⁴ Ackers, 9.



sociologists, historians and linguists into ever greater attempts at definition. Mining historians are naturally particularly concerned. They, above all, are aware (or jolly well should be) of the inherent dangers in employing the term, but they insist upon doing so in some desperate belief that a universal definition of the concept can be attained. And, once attained, the key to miners' industrial behaviour, militant/moderate, will also be, almost magically, revealed. However, the sad reality is that such a universal definition does not exist. Rather, 'community' exists very firmly in the minds of those people who employ the word. They know what they mean by it at the point of usage, but the concept is so elusive that its meaning dissipates into the public arena and becomes what the listener or reader wants it to become. 'Community' is all things to all men.

The miners of Aylesham and Coalville both believed they live(d) in communities and bemoan their passing. Steve Peace of Coalville knows he is treading on dangerous sociological ground in his definition of 'community', but he ventures forth, nevertheless:

I know it might sound a bit of a cliché, but when I was growing up I did live in a community where literally the back door was open... I remember being brought up by an extended family, relatives and neighbours.²⁵

Peace's definition *is* clichéd but nonetheless real for him and many others. The open door policy of mining communities symbolises a golden age when property was communal and neighbourliness extended to the whole village. David Gilbert describes the same principle of a lost golden age of community:

The archetypal mining community can stand for a lost moral order: for a time and a place when working-class people respected each other and each other's property, when back doors were always open, help always forthcoming for those in need, and full attendance at local chapels or union meetings always guaranteed.²⁶

²⁵ Steve Peace, personal interview, 23.7.93.

²⁶ David Gilbert, "Imagined communities and mining communities", *Labour History Review*, Vol. 60, Part 2, 1995, 47-55.

Apart from the full churches (Gilbert's research took him into the peculiarly religious area of the South Wales valleys), this was Aylesham's experience. Historical or not, such communities are very real in the recollections of people when asked to speak about the past. And the pit was central to that sense of 'community', as if the dangers below ground and the necessary solidarity it produced had to be reproduced at the pit top and into the domestic lives of people. Community meant a shared precariousness. Women, whose men relied upon each other for their lives below ground, mirrored that solidarity above ground in their kitchens and over their garden fences. If the pit was taken away then so was that sense of togetherness. The pit head winding gear stood symbolically over the village as a permanent reminder of why the village existed, and the wind sometimes whistling through its girders and heard all over the village reminded those people above ground of their men who were below it. Perhaps only the constant presence of the sea in fishing communities, can equal the pit head gear in mining communities, with its heavy symbolism of work and its inherent dangers. Perhaps levels of militancy in pit villages is directly related to the height of the winding gear and just how visibly present it is in the daily lives of people who either depend upon it for their livelihood or have some kind of familial connection with it. Perhaps it is no accident that in the modern 'super-pits' the winding gear is encased in metal prefabricated sheets, giving it the appearance of a workplace just like any other, with the concomitant weakening of industrial militancy. These are all just hypothetical and empirically unprovable propositions, except, maybe, by socio-psychoanalysts. But how else do we explain the sense of loss when the pit is closed and the tears shed by men and women when the winding gear is pulled down? It really is as if the virility of the community has been drained away. In Aylesham there was real anger that few people were warned of the day when the winding gear was pulled down. By chance some people were present, and one man took a series of photographs of the event which were used silently and powerfully as the backdrop to scenes in a recent play about the history of Aylesham.²⁷ Today the pithead wheel, painted brilliant black, takes pride of place in the village Market Square as a memorial to Aylesham's reason for being. A special unveiling ceremony took place at which Philip Sutcliffe made a short speech:

²⁷ Colway Theatre Trust, *Fightback*, directed by Jon Oram, 1998.

... cynics might say, "Well, why do we need a memento?" But I think it's very important that this village, and the people that come after us, know that the reason for Aylesham was for Snowdown Colliery... I think it's important that we mention the '84-'85 strike, and I think that this village, and the miners and their wives ... ought to be very proud of themselves. We had a twelve-month strike, and any strike you go into, it takes a lot to think about and a lot of doing. But this village [was] practically one hundred per cent solid right throughout that twelve-month strike... I think that anybody who was associated with the pit at that time should feel proud of themselves. And, like I said, we shouldn't always dwell on the past, but I do want this memento, and I hope people, especially the young ones, respect what it's there for 'cos it is in respect of not just us that's here, but of miners that have lost their lives working in the colliery. Also miners whose lives were cut short because of working at that colliery... And this is still a mining community. There's no pits here no more, but Aylesham is still a mining community.²⁸

The sense in which this speech is an elegy is evident. Clearly something has died and the laying down of the pithead wheel in the geographical heart of Aylesham had an air of finality. But like all good speeches delivered in the midst of defeat, this one attempts to salvage something and that 'something' is *community*, a specific type of community: *mining community*. The people of Aylesham had no doubt that the type of community which existed was forged at the bottom of the pit shaft. Community and pit work were synonymous and were part of personal history. An unnamed Snowdown miner makes no distinction between work, community and history:

When people say, "Well, why do you want to work in the dust and the heat?" Again we go back to the community. Our fathers were miners, our brothers were miners. So we're born and bred into the pit... The pit is so hard to explain to people who's never been down it.²⁹

²⁸ *Sunshine Corner*, video.

²⁹ *Our Pits, Our Lives*.

This miner catches the essence of the problem: describing the technology of mining and the life in a pit village has been done almost *ad infinitum*, but it is capturing the spirit of the work and the community which has fascinated and eluded more analytic observers. Why did villages fight for men's right to work in the dust and the heat, especially in Kent where alternative work was readily available? There are many answers: the right to determine one's own life, the right to protect an inheritance; the right to defend communities. But none of these answers really satisfy the academics who would not work down a coal mine to protect anything. Only miners and their families seem capable of really understanding, but incapable of explaining to 'outsiders'. The women also try to explain the significance of coalmining. Joan Phelan is speaking:

I've got coal in my blood. And I always will have. It's a heritage. It belongs to us. It's our way of life and we've got a right to live our lives.³⁰

Once again history, the right to self-determination and 'community' are prevalent in this woman's concept of the significance of the pit. Heritage in Aylesham is something to be protected now the coalmine has gone. Terry Jones has two daughters:

I would always want them to remember where they're from, you know, and I always tell 'em like.³¹

This sense, perhaps one could say, passion, about history and community was not so readily found in Coalville. These miners had their own, strongly held, ideas about what constituted 'community', but it did not necessarily include the pit. Wally Quelch had a much looser idea about community:

³⁰ *Our Pits, Our Lives*.

³¹ Terry Jones, personal interview, 29.12.93.

My idea of community: first it's the people and it's the different facilities that bring these people together whether it be the Church, the local post office, the shops, the clubs, sporting facilities... If any of them are threatened I think you need to fight for it. Because once you lose one it seems to have a knock-on effect, and you lose another. And then the whole heart is ripped out of that community ... an estate ... you've got to have something within that estate to make it become a community that brings people together.³²

The absence of a coalmine in this ex-miner's analysis of what makes 'community' is very surprising, especially when compared with the comments of Aylesham miners. When a pit was suggested as an important ingredient there was a hesitant accord, and then Mrs. Quelch immediately re-emphasised the necessity of a post office:

Most people meet in there, don't they... It's a community... It brings people together.³³

Clearly the post office had become a significant place for this elderly couple, and Wally Quelch felt particularly concerned that such a local amenity must be preserved, especially for pensioners who need it on a weekly basis. To what extent the post office plays an important role in *forming* 'community', however, is perhaps an area of research that other students might like to take up.

Derek Howe, another Coalville ex-miner and, like Quelch, a member of the District Council, had similar ideas about what constitutes a community and, like Quelch, these included no mention of a coal mine. It is also important to note that Howe was Chairman of the District Housing Committee at the time of the interview:

A community is good housing, a good standard of living, sports facilities and employment.³⁴

³² Wally Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

³³ Joan Quelch, personal interview, 21.7.93.

³⁴ Derek Howe, personal interview, 22.7.93.

Steve Peace is more circumspect about the relationship between housing and community. He speaks about the new housing estate built at Ellistown:

I just think it's just a bunch of houses where people just happen to live.³⁵

Peace's view is in line with that of Norman Dennis' who, as we saw in the first chapter, described these modern housing estates as "archetypes of the 'not-community'."

Keith Mellin had the rare experience of having lived and worked in both a Kent and a Leicestershire mining village. He was quite sure that he had left a strong mining community in Aylesham and moved to a mining town, Coalville, where a community did not exist, at least not as he defined it:

It wasn't a community. They all had different jobs and different attitudes. And there wasn't one or two or three clubs that you went to where most people had the same sort of attitudes... There were six pits. And within ten to fifteen miles there was South Derbyshire.³⁶

For Mellin it was the watered-down relationship with the pit, which serves to form and homogenise ideas and attitudes, which symbolised the lack of 'community' in Coalville. In 1981, when he left Aylesham, there 1,918 adult males in Aylesham of whom only about seven hundred, well under fifty per cent, worked in mining.³⁷ Yet Aylesham was still perceived to be primarily a mining community. This was largely due to its history and the spatial aspect of the village, it being self-contained and still hidden from view. The colliery stood as a constant reminder of what Aylesham represented, and the people who lived in the village, even if they were not miners, knew what lay at the heart of the community. Coalville people, despite the town's name, had very different perceptions of themselves. Coalville was a town with shops, banks, businesses and a variety of industries and occupations. Coal may have been at the

³⁵ Steve Peace, personal interview, 23.7.93.

³⁶ Keith Mellin, personal interview, 25.7.93.

³⁷ OPCS, 1981.

town's origin, but it had never been the sole source of occupation. Miners mixed with other workers and, as we have seen, in the 1960s-'70s, they changed occupations according to where the wages were highest. There was clearly no sense of miners being a 'race apart' as they were in Aylesham. They were not hidden from view. David Gilbert offers a practical definition of different mining settlements which could quite easily be applied to the Aylesham/Coalville dichotomy:

A useful distinction can be made between places which were *miners'* towns and places which were mining *towns*.³⁸

Using this distinction Aylesham was evidently a miners' town or village even when mining ceased to be the principal occupation. Coalville, on the other hand was always a mining town which as well as having miners in it, and despite being founded on coal, was a varied municipality. The mining villages within the area were contiguous, Bagworth, Ellistown, Hugglescote, all merging into one another before joining Coalville town. There were no distinct boundaries. It is not clear at which point Hugglescote becomes Coalville or Ellistown. And, interestingly, the pithead winding gear in this region was quite stunted, due to the pits being much shallower. They were, therefore, often hidden from view. They were not a constant physical and visual presence in the people's lives.

Because of the geographical, spatial distinctions between the two areas, Aylesham more easily fits into the *isolated mass* hypothesis, whereas for Coalville, such a definition would be highly inappropriate. This is not to rehabilitate the hypothesis as an explanation for levels of militancy/moderacy among miners, but clearly in this specific comparative case study neither can it be totally ignored. The miners of Coalville, themselves, tended to be aware of the diluted form of 'community', especially when compared to other areas. Ivor Whyman argues that Coalville had never been a typical mining community in his lifetime, and tentatively suggests that it may have been only before 1939. He also makes the link between propinquity,

³⁸ Gilbert, "Imagined communities", 51.

'typicality' and propensity to take militant industrial action, using the South Wales and Yorkshire coalfields as an example:

If you went to South Wales ... you got the impression that they were mining villages. And these villages more or less all worked at the pit. Whereas an area like Coalville, there were a vast amount of different industries round here... The same in Yorkshire - massive mining areas. But this has never really been - it's a sort of medium-sized mining area.³⁹

Having given this comparison of Coalville with more 'typical' mining areas, thus confirming the distinct lack of *isolated mass* in the Leicestershire Coalfield, Whyman goes on to explain why he became a miner, and in so doing places himself firmly in Lockwood's 'privatised worker' category:

Mining never even came into my head until they started paying better money ... the wages were better than what I was earning elsewhere.⁴⁰

Peter Smith, the last LNUM Secretary, and very adamant about the need for a single united union in coalmining is very coherent about the community/militancy link and the reasons for Leicestershire's historic moderacy:

Going up and down the country there's more community collieries in other coalfields... You go up Yorkshire and North Derbyshire and you've got rows and rows of houses and you may have an individual, or two or three, that don't actually work at the pit. In Leicester, you've got rows and rows of houses and you may have one work at the pit, or two... The communities weren't as knitted as they are up in the north ... and certainly in Scotland. And in South Wales, well, it goes without saying... The lifestyle of the

³⁹ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

⁴⁰ Ivor Whyman, personal interview, 14.8.95.

people in the [Leicestershire] area is different. When Bagworth was at its conclusion you [had] a radius of people working at the pit like from the furthest side east to the furthest side west. You may be talking fifty or sixty miles... There was no community... I don't think the Leicestershire Coalfield was a community.⁴¹

It is not clear whether Smith has read Kerr and Siegal on *isolated mass*, or Blauner on single occupational communities, but he shows an astute awareness, albeit, perhaps, subconscious, of such concepts. *Isolated mass* in its 'weak form', as interpreted by Church et al., does not mean simply geographical isolation.⁴² That would be an important aspect of the 'strong form', which, interestingly, Aylesham still fulfils. *Isolated mass*, post-Kerr and Siegal, means:

... a limited level of social interaction between the residents of the colliery settlement and the wider society.⁴³

In this sense Coalville does not qualify for *isolated mass* status as there was manifestly a great deal of social interaction between miners and non-miners. All the interviewees spoke of the varied occupational and industrial prospects within the region. Whereas Aylesham people continued, even in the 1980s, to regard themselves as separate, apart from the wider population of south-east Kent. Indeed, they considered not only the loss of the pit as the death knell to their community, but also the steady influx of newcomers to the village who had no historical ties to mining. Most of these lived in a new, small housing estate built on the wasteland area where the 'prefabs' once were. The estate, officially called 'Old Park Estate' is widely termed 'Brookside' because of its architectural similarity to the houses in the popular television 'soap' series. Paul Jones blames this estate for being partly responsible for the dilution of Aylesham's community:

⁴¹ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

⁴² Church et al., "The *isolated mass* revisited".

⁴³ Church et al., "The *isolated mass* revisited", 64.

There's a lot more strangers. Whereas you used to know everybody, you tend not to know 'em all now ... the Brooksidiers, there's a lot of strangers now.⁴⁴

What is happening here is the transition of Aylesham. The 'strong form' of *isolated mass* - miners in settlements, geographically apart, socially and occupationally segregated and limited almost certainly did apply to Aylesham in the first two decades of its existence. But by the 1950s, that had passed as limited occupational opportunities outside of mining began to open up. The 'weak form' of *isolated mass* thus became more applicable. By the 1970s, however, the single occupational status of Aylesham was obviously no more, although the historic and psychological attachment to the pit remained, thus enabling Aylesham to retain its 'mining community' status. With the closure of Snowdown Colliery in 1987 that title became patently absurd, but there are enough men surviving who still insist upon their occupational identity as being first and foremost, miners. However, as there are actually no miners in Aylesham anymore, the only aspect of *isolated mass* which remains is the physical isolation of the village. Consequently, the older, established families in Aylesham can still talk of 'newcomers' and 'immigrants'. Arthur Loomer is even more vociferous about the effect on community of these new arrivals:

[Aylesham] is not as close now as it used to be... It's difficult to say why. When I was a boy ... I knew where everybody lived in this village, in every street. But I don't know them now because you've had that many changes over the last five, ten years. You've got people coming in who are not what I call Aylesham people. They might come to live in Aylesham, but they're not Aylesham people.⁴⁵

Such a comment from a Coalville resident, or any of the constituent ex-mining villages, would be almost unthinkable. Coalville acts as a dormitory town for Leicester and Loughborough and a fluid population has been one of its characteristics for many years. As the interviewees stated:

⁴⁴ Paul Jones, personal interview, 13.8.93.

⁴⁵ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

there was no close-knit community in Coalville. And, concomitant with the lack of community was a lack of union solidarity, at least at the national level, and to a large extent at local level as well. Peter Smith explains how he imagines union power is exerted in more 'typical' mining communities:

When you go to meetings you're sitting next to somebody and somebody says, "Righto. Who's all in favour of this?" [The] majority of the people. And obviously that must happen in communities that are so tightly knit. It's because him next door, ol' Jack that's waving, "He'll go our way, anyway. We can rely on him. Come on Jack..." Now, he's not, perhaps one hundred per cent behind what he's doing. But he's brought into the situation, and he'll get used to the situation and he'll accept it. But, whereas, if you've got a row of houses and there's one here and one there, you're gonna find people that's gonna do what they want.⁴⁶

What Smith touches on here is the all-important feeling of belonging, of inclusiveness, which is so important to individuals, whether they belong to a family, society, club, group of friends or a union. In the case of Aylesham, being a member of the community meant belonging to all those things. Stepping out of line meant exclusion, ostracisation - the worst possible fate. Living in but not within an active, dynamic community. Arthur Loomer confirms Smith's interpretation of the power of the union in 'close' mining communities:

The Union when they said something that was it. There was no bloody arguments about it. That was it.⁴⁷

At no time was this more true in Aylesham than in 1984-85. The political militancy and aspirations of local union leaders in Aylesham may not have been precisely mirrored at rank-and-file level, but it was difficult to get anybody to voice a contrary opinion, even some years

⁴⁶ Peter Smith, personal interview, 10.8.95.

⁴⁷ Arthur Loomer, personal interview, 17.8.93.

after the strike was over. The dynamic inclusive effects of 'community' were still in operation. Who would want to risk exclusion from such a community, real or imagined, but otherwise historical, by simply expressing a contrary opinion? To do so would negate the efforts of the past struggles and would risk the individual being excluded from his own history. Meaninglessness, non-existence: the real enemies within.

Appendix A: A chronology of the 1984-85 miners' strike.

The strike nationally		The strike in Kent
February 1984	Polinaise colliery closure announced, overtime banned in Scotland, over 4000 miners strike.	
20 Feb. 1984	Manvers Main (S. Yorks.) snap-time dispute.	
1 March 1984	George Hayes (area director of S. Yorks. coalfield) announced closure of Cortonwood at S. Yorks. Area Colliery Review Meeting.	
5 March 1984	Yorks. Area Council votes to implement 1981 ballot decision and instructs branches to stop work from last shift on Friday 9 March.	
8 March 1984	NEC endorses Yorks. and Scottish strikes. Government announces increase in redundancy payments for miners aged 21 - 49.	
9 March 1984	Durham area executive agrees to support the strike. Nottinghamshire Executive calls for a pit-head ballot.	Kent Area Executive votes to support the strike.
11 March 1984		Pithead meetings at the three Kent pits. Strike vote solid at Snowdown and Belteshanger, disputed at Tilmanstone.
12 March 1984	Flying pickets deployed.	Day 1 of the strike in Kent.
13 March 1984		Kent miners in South Wales speaking at public meetings.
14 March 1984	NRC drafts 8000 police from over 20 forces into Notts.	
15 March 1984	David Jones killed while picketing at Ollerton, Notts. Notts. NUM leaders call strike pending outcome of area ballot.	
16 March 1984	73% of Notts. miners vote against strike. DHSS deducts all "notional resources" (e.g. food parcels) received by striker households from benefit entitlements.	
17 March 1984	Area ballots in Midlands, N. East and N. West all heavily against strike.	

18 March 1984		Kent miners intercepted by police at Dartford Tunnel.
20 March 1984		Kent miners lose court case against police over intercept policy.
21 March 1984		Kent pickets at Faversham successfully stop unloading of 800 tonnes of coal destined for Bowater's paper mill at Sittingbourne.
24 March 1984		Kent miners' wives demonstrate in Leicester.
26 March 1984		Coal unloaded from a Belgian ship at Rochester is impounded.
27 March 1984	Triple alliance agree to picket ports and steelworks, and to plan a series of sympathy stoppages	
30 March 1984	ASLEF executive instructs members not to cross picket lines and not to move coal.	
3 April 1984	Peter Walker (Energy Minister) presses for a national ballot.	
4 April 1984	Ravenscraig steel-workers agree to use coal carried by private hauliers.	30 Kent miners set off from Aylesham on a 12 day fund-raising and publicity march to the Midlands coalfields.
5 April 1984	Steel-workers vote to work normally.	
6 April 1984	Operation Policewatch launched in Sheffield. Plain-clothes police infiltrate miners lobbying Notts. delegates.	German trade unionists present £500 and a silver trophy to striking Kent miners.
7 April 1984		150 miners' wives leave from Aylesham Welfare Club bound for a national rally in Nottingham.
9 April 1984	NUS provides offices for NUM to co-ordinate support of other unions. Operation Policewatch accuses police of infiltrating 4000 pickets at Babington colliery and acting as 'agents provocateurs'. David Owen, Chief constable of N. Wales, admits using plain clothes officers at Point of Ayr colliery.	
10 April 1984	Two coke hauliers begin legal action against S. Wales Area's secondary picketing of Port Talbot steelworks. Emergency Commons debate on policing the miners' strike. Britain defends use of plain clothes officers.	
11 April 1984	NACODS vote 7,638 to 6,661 in favour of strike action over pit closures, less than two-thirds majority required.	Kent NACODS votes 72% in favour of strike action, but nationally it is 54%, less than 66% required.

12 April 1984	NEC proposes to reduce majority required for strike from 55% to a simple majority and to convene a Special Delegate Conference.	(12/13 April) Pirate poster campaign in Deal, Dover, Aylesham and Thanet advertising a back to work campaign.
13 April 1984	Kinnock calls for a national ballot.	Belshanger miner Bob McGibbon announces on local television his intention to return to work.
14 April 1984		Benefit night in aid of local miners' wives at King Lear pub, Aycliffe, Dover - raises £100.
16 April 1984		McGibbon and Alec Stuart turn up for 6.00 a.m. shift.
17 April 1984		South Thanet M.P., Jonathon Aitken (Conservative) expresses concern in the House of Commons over police actions.
		CEGB says that Richborough power station is operating normally.
		Ned Smith promises a future for Kent coalfield, including Snowdown, despite continuing losses.
19 April 1984	SDC reduces majority required in strike ballot, votes against a national ballot, and agrees to establish a National Coordinating Committee.	
20 April 1984	Scargill claims CEGB coal stocks will last nine weeks.	
25 April 1984	NCB launches back-to-work campaign advertisements.	
30 April 1984	Scargill declares strike can be won without support of Notts miners.	
1 May 1984	NCB grants Notts miners a day off with pay, and 7000 demonstrate in Mansfield against the strike.	450 Kent miners take part in May Day demonstrations in London.
2 May 1984		NCB publishes full page advertisements, "Here is the NCB's side of the story".
6 May 1984	Power-station coal stocks estimated at 20m. tonnes.	
11 May 1984	Thatcher declares the Government will not intervene in the coal dispute.	Malcolm Pitt charged with obstruction, released on bail and told not to picket.

12 May 1984	BWAPC launches first national women's rally in Barnsley: 10,000 delegates from all areas turn up.	
14 May 1984	Mansfield rally. Scargill claims CEEGB will be in desperate trouble in a few weeks. Print workers prevent 'Sun' publishing defamatory picture of Scargill.	
16 May 1984		AUEW donates £4,159 to Terry Birkett at Deal Welfare Club. Bill Simmons, President of AUEW Fleet Street Branch, promises weekly donations of £800 - £1,000.
18 May 1984		Leon Brittan arrives in Dover, agrees to meet a deputation of four miners.
19 May 1984	Scargill meets leaders of overseas unions in Paris. Australian, French and Polish unions agree to halt coal shipments to Britain.	Malcolm Pitt arrested at Richborough power station. - Convoy of food from TUC South East arrives in Deal.
23 May 1984	First meeting between NUM and MacGregor since the start of the strike ends within an hour.	
29 May 1984	Over 5000 pickets at Orgreave. SCC calls for picket of Polish Embassy over coal imports.	70 Aylesham teenagers join Young Socialists to protest outside Hobart House.
30 May 1984	Scargill charged with obstruction at Orgreave.	Kent miners refuse to picket Polish Embassy.
1 June 1984		30 miners' wives protest at DHSS offices, Dover, over government decision to assume all miners are receiving £15 per week strike pay.
2 June 1984		Mr. Daniel Derancourt, leader of Northern French miners donates 30,000 francs to Kent miners. Kent and French miners demonstrate together in Paris. Social evening at Aylesham Welfare Club, attended by Lambeth councillors and residents.
4 June 1984	Government agrees to accept NCB losses.	
5 June 1984	<i>Daily Mirror</i> reveals Government agreed to rail-workers' pay claims in order to divorce them from miners' dispute.	11 miners arrested at Ramsgate Harbour picket line, four more arrested in the afternoon at Ramsgate court.

7 June 1984	First major parliamentary debate on the strike, miners Lobby Parliament, over 100 arrested.	Kent miners take part in London rally and lobby of Parliament.
8 June 1984	NUM and NCB negotiators meet in Edinburgh.	2 Betleshanger miners charged at Medway Court with obstructing a train bound for Isle of Grain power station.
13 June 1984	NUM-NCB negotiations collapse. MacGregor sends "Your future in danger" letter to every miner.	
15 June 1984	Joe Green killed by a lorry while picketing Ferrybridge power station.	
18 June 1984	"Battle of Orgreave", 500 pickets, 90 arrested, over 100 injured including Scargill.	McGibbon and Smart given huge police escort as they return to work. 200 miners occupy the colliery and its offices, seven, including branch president John Moyle, stage an underground sit-in.
20 June 1984		Occupation of Betleshanger ends. McGibbon and Smart sign agreements not to break the strike.
23 June 1984		10 miners occupy Tilmannstone to prevent 9 men from returning to work. Kent miners' wives' rally in Dover.
26 June 1984		Tilmannstone occupation ends. 3 men sign agreements not to break the strike. 29 miners involved in Betleshanger occupation sacked.
27 June 1984	ISTC leaders agree to accept coal from any source. S.E. Regional TUC demonstration in support of miners including one day stoppage by rail workers and Fleet Street printers.	9 miners involved in Tilmannstone occupation sacked.
28 June 1984		Aylesham councillors vote to twin with Lambeth.
29 June 1984	Bill Sirs tells NUM that ISTC support will not extend to industrial action. Jean McGrindle, National Treasurer of WAPC, writes to 'Sunday Times' proposing an NUM Associate Membership for women.	
30 June 1984		Food and clothing convoy from Fleet Street arrives in Deal.

5 July 1984	NCB resumes negotiations with NUM.	
6 July 1984	Notts. delegates vote 228 to 21 to leave the NUM.	
7 July 1984	Women's National Office established in St. James' House.	
9 July 1984	National Docks Strike called over BS use of non-registered labour. Apparent progress in NUM-NCB negotiations.	
10 July 1984	Docks strike begins.	
11 July 1984	TGWU votes to extend action to ports outside dock labour scheme.	
12 July 1984	McGregor announces strike breakers will not lose their jobs if expelled from NUM thereby terminating closed shop agreement.	
12/13 July 1984	Special Conference of NUM.	
13 July 1984	Government withholds estimated £6.8 m. in tax refunds due to striking miners. Court appearance of 10 BWAPC arrested on picket line.	
14 July 1984		60 Kent miners travel to Durham for gala. Miners protest against National Front rally in Maidstone.
		£4000 worth of food from Essex Association of Trades Councils arrives in Deal.
15 July 1984	ACAS intervenes in docks strike.	
18 July 1984	NUM-NCB negotiations end with the NCB continuing to insist that pits must be closed unless they can be "beneficially developed".	
19 July 1984	Thatcher describes striking miners as Britain's "enemy within".	Kent County Council estimates cost of policing the strike to be £966,000. Chief Constable Frank Jordan assures councillors that phone tapping and troops have not been employed in Kent.
21 July 1984	Docks strike called off.	Dover and Deal M.P., Peter Rees, condemns strike as politically motivated. 50 Aylesham residents visit Lambeth for official twinning.

22 July 1984	First national conference of WAPC held at Northern College.	
28 July 1984	First discussions between NUM and TUC leaders.	
30 July 1984	S. Wales Area NUM fined £50,000 for contempt of court, assets seized.	
31 July 1984	N. Lawson claims £400m. spent on strike is "a worthwhile investment".	
3 August 1984		Bob and Irene McGibbon assist Conservative Party and Freedom Association in establishing a public information table in Deal High Street.
5 August 1984		Latin American group in Deal with gifts, donations and music. 50 Notts. children on holiday in Kent.
11 August 1984	NWAPC demonstration in London; a petition is handed to the Queen	300 Kent miners' wives take part in NWAPC demonstration in London.
13 August 1984	NCCCL begins inquiry into policing of the dispute.	
15 August 1984	12 collieries closed since start of strike. Welsh miners occupy Birmingham offices of sequestrators, Price Waterhouse. Spanton, NCB director, tells NACODS executive members will not be paid unless they cross picket lines. First strike breaker in Yorks. area, Gascoigne Wood.	
16 August 1984	Sequestrators seize £707,000 from S. Wales NUM.	
20 August 1984	1000 police escort solitary miner back to work at Gascoigne Wood.	Albert Theobald, Aylesham miner, reports for work at Timmansonstone - 1st Aylesham strike breaker.
21 August 1984	MacGregor suggests Scargill should be prosecuted for 'criminal conspiracy' for intimidating working miners.	
23 August 1984	Second docks dispute provoked by steel workers unloading 'Ostia' which dockers had blacked at Hunterston.	
24 August 1984	NCB reject Stan Orme's peace formula. TGWU dockers' representatives vote 78 to 11 to strike from weekend.	

27 August 1984		(to 1 September)'Mines not Missiles' Festival in Aylesham.
28 August 1984	Cabinet Meeting discusses docks strike and coal stocks.	
31 August 1984	Striking miners visit Greenham Common Peace Camp throughout the month.	
2 September 1984	Robert Maxwell arranges for NUM-NCB negotiations to be resumed.	
3 September 1984	TUC votes 10 to 1 to increase financial and industrial support to miners.	26 miners return to work at Tilmansstone and Betleshanger. Trouble on picket lines, 34 arrested including Malcolm Pitt. NACODS withdraws safety cover and refuses to cross picket lines.
4 September 1984	Kinnock condemns picket-line violence at TUC meeting. Negotiations called off.	
6 September 1984		John Moyle, district councillor and Betleshanger NUM chairman, accused of assault and actual bodily harm on pit deputy, Michael Jones
7 September 1984	NCB-NUM negotiations resumed. NUM agrees to consult TUC.	
8 September 1984	Paul Wormsley, 14 yrs. old, killed in coal digging accident.	
9 September 1984	NCB-NUM negotiations begin in Edinburgh, moving to Selby, Doncaster and London to avoid reporters.	
11 September 1984	National Working Miners' Committee formally constituted.	
12 September 1984	NACODS agrees to a national ballot with a recommendation of strike action.	Public meeting at Aylesham Welfare Club to discuss levels of violence.
14 September 1984	Negotiations end in stalemate.	
15 September 1984		2 Tory councillors from Folkestone and Shepway attend NUM meeting in Aylesham.
18 September 1984	Second docks strike abandoned.	
19 September 1984		500 miners march in Elvington and meet on village green to protest about police "siege tactics" in the pit villages.
22 September 1984		Rally in support of miners in Rochester.

24 September 1984		Terry Hall of Folkestone, 1st strikebreaker at Snowdown. Dispute in Dover council meeting over miners' application for a door to door collection licence.
25 September 1984	Scargill and Kinnock hold 'constructive' discussions.	
26 September 1984	NACODS offered compromise to avert strike.	
28 September 1984	NACODS vote 82.5% in favour of strike. High Court rules strike 'unlawful' in Derbyshire, 'unofficial' in Yorks.	96% of Kent NACODS vote for strike.
1 October 1984	NCB-NACODS negotiations resumed. Scargill et al. served with writ at Labour Party Conference for continuing to describe strike as 'official'.	
2 October 1984	Kinnock condemns police and picket violence. Labour Party Conference gives overwhelming support to miners.	
3 October 1984	Leslie Curtis, Police Federation Chairman, claims certain officers would be unable to work with a Labour administration.	
5 October 1984	Unemployment = 3.2 m. 13.6% of workforce.	
8 October 1984		Suspected arson as fires discovered at Betteshanger.
9 October 1984	Leon Brittan guarantees the Government will provide the money for policing the strike. Roy Oiley resigns from NEC.	Demonstration of solidarity with strike at Woolage Village. Standing ovation for Irene McGibbon at Tory Party Conference.
10 October 1984	NUM fined £200,000. Scargill fined £1000 for contempt of court.	
13 October 1984		Huge convoy of lorries arrives in Aylesham from French CGT. Dover NUS sanctions 50p. levy for miners. Townsend Thoresen finally agree to deduct it at source.
16 October 1984	NACODS call national strike from 25 October.	
17 October 1984	Scargill's fine paid anonymously.	Dover District Council delays licence for door to door collection.
18/19 October 1984	Notts., Leics. and S. Derby merge to form the UDM.	Spot checks by police on cars leaving Elvington for Tilmanstone.

20 October 1984	Michael Eaton replaces Ned Smith as NCB spokesman.	
22 October 1984		Eythorne Parish Council addressed by Police Inspector, Bob Austen, discussion of police tactics. Jack Dunn told by Price-Waterhouse to pay his rent to them. 24 hour occupation of Waterside House in Dover to prevent assets being seized.
24 October 1984	NACODS call off strike.	
25 October 1984	Deadline expires for NUM to pay £200,000 fine and High Court orders sequestration of union funds.	
28 October 1984	Publicity surrounding Roger Windsor's visit to Gaddafi in Libya ostensibly to ask him for money for NUM.	
29 October 1984	Eaton resigns as NCB spokesman.	
2 November 1984	NCB offers Christmas bonuses and holiday pay to miners who return by 19 November.	
3 November 1984	Kinnock "too busy" to attend miners' rallies. Price Waterhouse seize NUM assets.	
7 November 1984	Dublin courts freeze £2.75 m. of NUM funds. TUC reports little likelihood of power cuts.	
9 November 1984	Mass picket at Cortonwood in response to solitary strike-breaker.	
10/11 November 1984	National Conference of Women's Action Groups at Chesterfield.	(10 November) Auction at United Reform Church in Dover in support of miners. Kinnock donates his personal copy of Nye Bevan's book "In Place of Fear."
12 November 1984		Irene McGibbon guest speaker at Folkestone Conservative Club. 60 miners back at work in Kent.
17 November 1984		Kent Women's Support Group rally in Deal.
18 November 1984	Two brothers die coal-picking.	
20 November 1984		Scargill addresses Kent miners' rally at Ramsgate.

21 November 1984	Government deducts further £1 per week notional strike pay from benefits to strikers' dependants.	Cambridgeshire policemen Robert Reynolds dies after returning from picket duty at Tiltmanstone.
24 November 1984		Betshanger village sealed off by police.
27 November 1984	Paul Getty donates £100,000 to miners' hardship fund.	
28 November 1984	NUM funds traced to Zurich and Luxembourg.	
29 November 1984		DPP decides not to take action against Elvington working miner who fired a shot at people outside his home.
30 November 1984	David Wilkie, minicab driver, killed while driving a working miner to colliery, 3 strikers charged with murder.	
1 December 1984	Herbert Brewer appointed Receiver to administer NUM funds	
2 December 1984		Trouble in Eythorne between police and villagers.
4 December 1984	Brewer fails to obtain NUM funds in Luxembourg.	Working miner, Malcolm Trice of Deal, hospitalized after being attacked.
5 December 1984	MacGregor speaks in favour of privatising the pits. TUC Liaison Committee meets. Peter Walker and Tom King to discuss strike without knowledge of NUM, NEC or TUC General Council.	
7 December 1984	Brewer resigns, replaced by Arnold.	
10 December 1984	Government agrees to meet costs if Price Waterhouse fail to obtain NUM funds.	
12 December 1984		Dover Council votes 22 to 19 against issuing a licence for door to door collections in aid of miners.
13 December 1984	Labour Party and NUM leadership hold first formal meeting.	
14 December 1984	Scargill fined £250 for obstruction.	
	National Christmas appeal for miners and their families is published in the press. Toys from Europe start to arrive for miners' children.	
15 December 1984		Mass street collection and rally in Maidstone in support of strike.

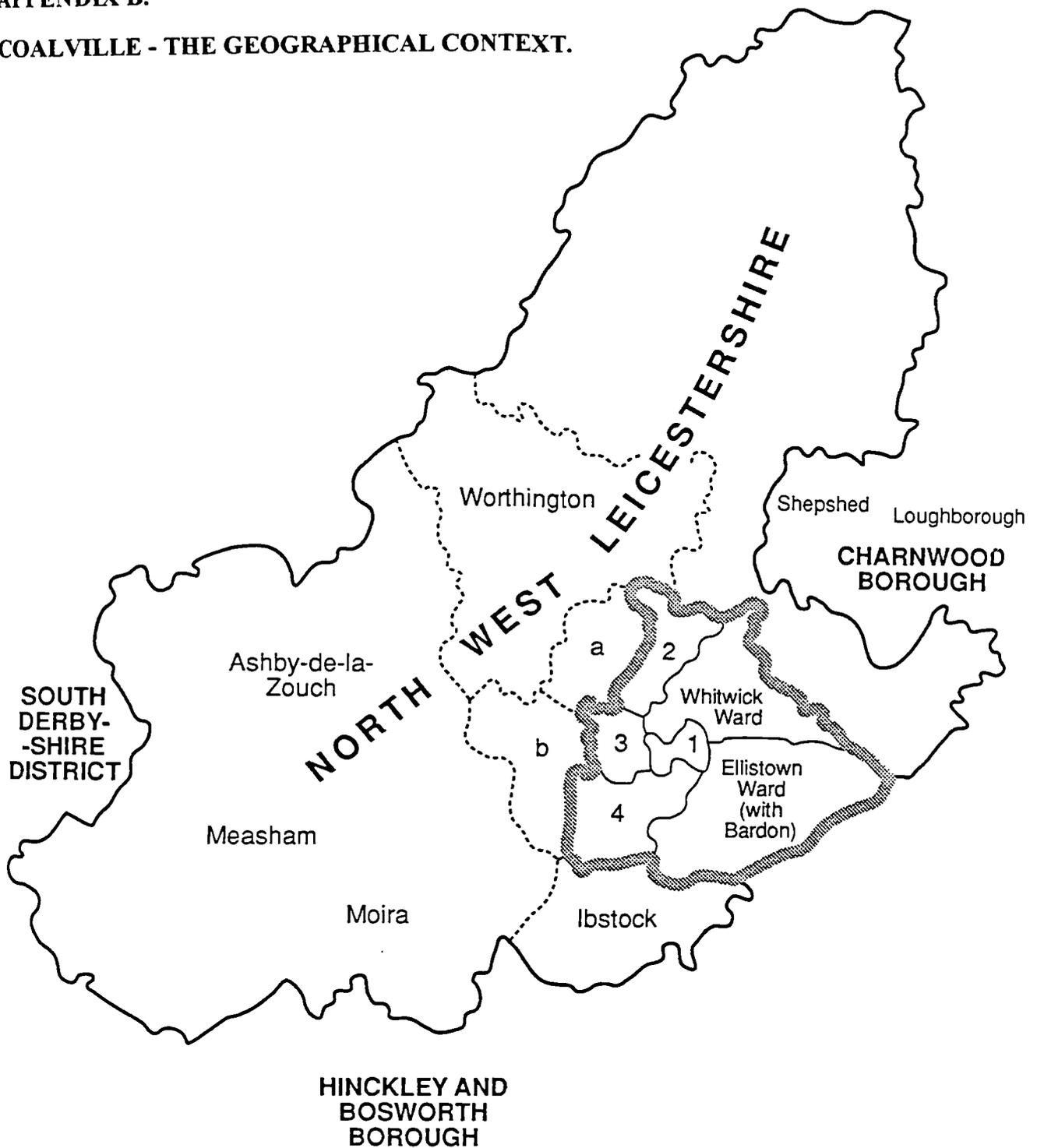
27 December 1984	N. Derbyshire miners campaign to remove strike supporters from NEC.	
1 January 1985	Strike costs estimated at £85m. per week.	Depressed striking miner John Green of Walmer commits suicide.
3 January 1985	Kinnock joins a picket line in S. Wales for first time.	
4 January 1985		Harriet Harman M.P. joins picket line at Dover.
11 January 1985	Local authorities agree to promote Coalfield Committees Campaign.	Belleshanger miner, Terry French, jailed for five years for assaulting a policeman.
16 January 1985		Mass picket at Richborough power station.
17 January 1985	NUR-ASLIEF regional strike in support of rail-workers sacked at Coalville for refusing to transport coal.	
19 January 1985		Snowball attack on Aylesham police station. Sgt. Roy Cox receives a broken arm
21 January 1985	Heathfield and Smith have informal talks.	Philip Sutcliffe, Vice-Chairman of Snowdown branch, fined £60 with £20 costs for obstruction.
		Miners demonstrate at Tilbury power station.
		Msgr. Bruce Kent salutes courage of miners at a Dover CND meeting.
22 January 1985	Failure of challenge in the High Court to Government's right to deduct £16 from supplementary benefits paid to miners' families.	
23 January 1985		20 Kent miners protest in public gallery of the House of Lords.
26 January 1985	Amnesty for 500 sacked miners becomes an issue.	
29 January 1985	Preliminary negotiations collapse	
30 January 1985	Sequestrators recover £5m. of NUM funds.	
31 January 1985		Sussex councillors and mayor, Peter Milton, join Tilmanstone picket line.
		NCB reiterates that Snowdown will not close but will be developed after strike.
2 February 1985	Second Yorks. Area WAPC conference at Northern College.	

4 February 1985	Adverse effects of oil burn on balance of payments estimated at £2,800m.	
7 February 1985	NCB refuses to negotiate.	
8 February 1985	Joint appeal by NUM and NACODS to NCB to re-open negotiations.	Aylesham youths and police 'battle' in Market Square. Posters appear in Deal showing photographs of working miners with their names, addresses and telephone numbers.
11 February 1985	TUC regional day of action.	Kent Miners' Wives' rally at Richborough power station.
15 February 1985	NEC rejects NCB proposals presented by Norman Willis.	
19 February 1985	TUC Liaison Committee meets Thatcher, then drafts further proposals for a settlement.	
20 February 1985	NEC rejects TUC document.	
21 February 1985	SDC rejects TUC document	
24 February 1985	Miners' rally in London. Speakers include Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner and Ken Livingstone. 101 arrested after disturbances near Whitehall.	
25 February 1985		Kent University Federation of Conservative Students invites Irene McGibbon to speak. Heckling forces her to leave with police protection.
26 February 1985	S. Wales moves to end the strike by an organised return without agreement - supported by Durham.	
27 February 1985	NCB claims 50% now working, including 20% in Yorks.	
1 March 1985	Durham, Lancs., S. Wales and COSA areas vote for organised return. Yorks. Area Council delegates vote 42 - 22 to continue strike.	
2 March 1985	Following branch meetings Yorks. Area Council votes 38 - 31 to return - but decision reversed on a card vote 557 - 561.	
3 March 1985	SDC votes 98 - 91 to return on 5 March	Special Conference at Aylesham Welfare Club.

4 March 1985	Yorks. Area Council votes to return unconditionally. Scotland and Kent vote to stay out as amnesty for 718 sacked miners remained unresolved.	Jack Collins moves Kent motion at the NEC with an impassioned plea not to desert the sacked miners. Defeated by 170 - 19. 2000 Kent miners meet in Glenville Theatre, Ramsgate. Vote unanimously to stay out until amnesty granted to 41 sacked Kent miners.
5 March 1985	Miners return in Yorks. and S. Wales. Kent, Scotland and half of Yorks. stay out.	Kent miners picket Yorks. coalfields and disrupt the organised return to work.
9 March 1985	International Women's Day rally at Chesterfield.	
10 March 1985	Scotland votes to return to work.	Kent votes to return to work.
11 March 1985		1800 Kent miners march back to work under banners. Betteshanger miners walk out again after management refuses to allow sacked miners to be elected workers' safety inspectors.

APPENDIX B.

COALVILLE - THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT.

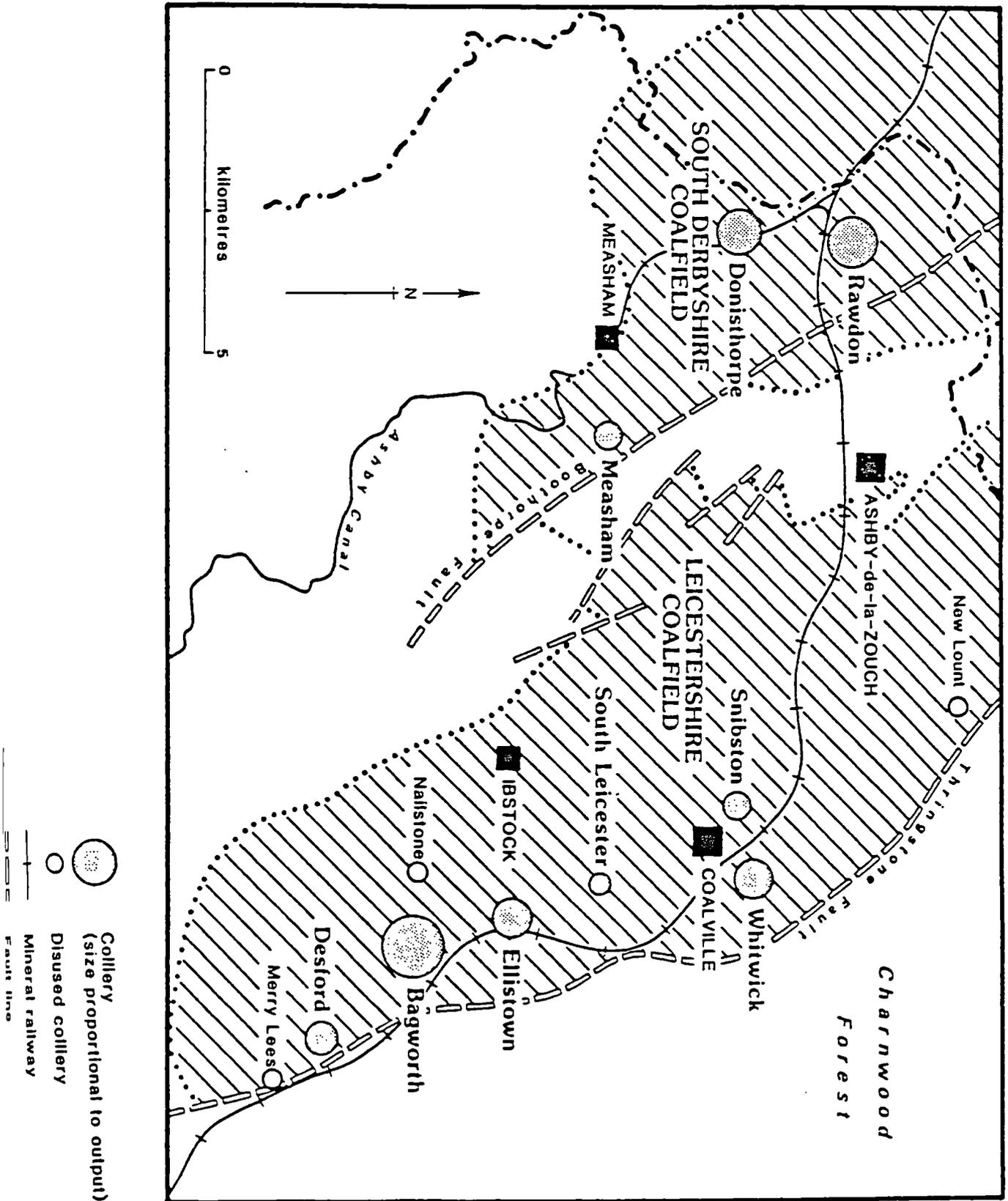


- 1 Central Ward
- 2 Thringstone Ward
- 3 Snibstone Ward
- 4 Hugglescote Ward
- a Swannington Parish
- b Ravenstone Parish
- Coalville Statistical Area

Source: Census 1981

APPENDIX C.

THE LEICESTERSHIRE AND SOUTH DERBYSHIRE COALFIELDS - 1981.



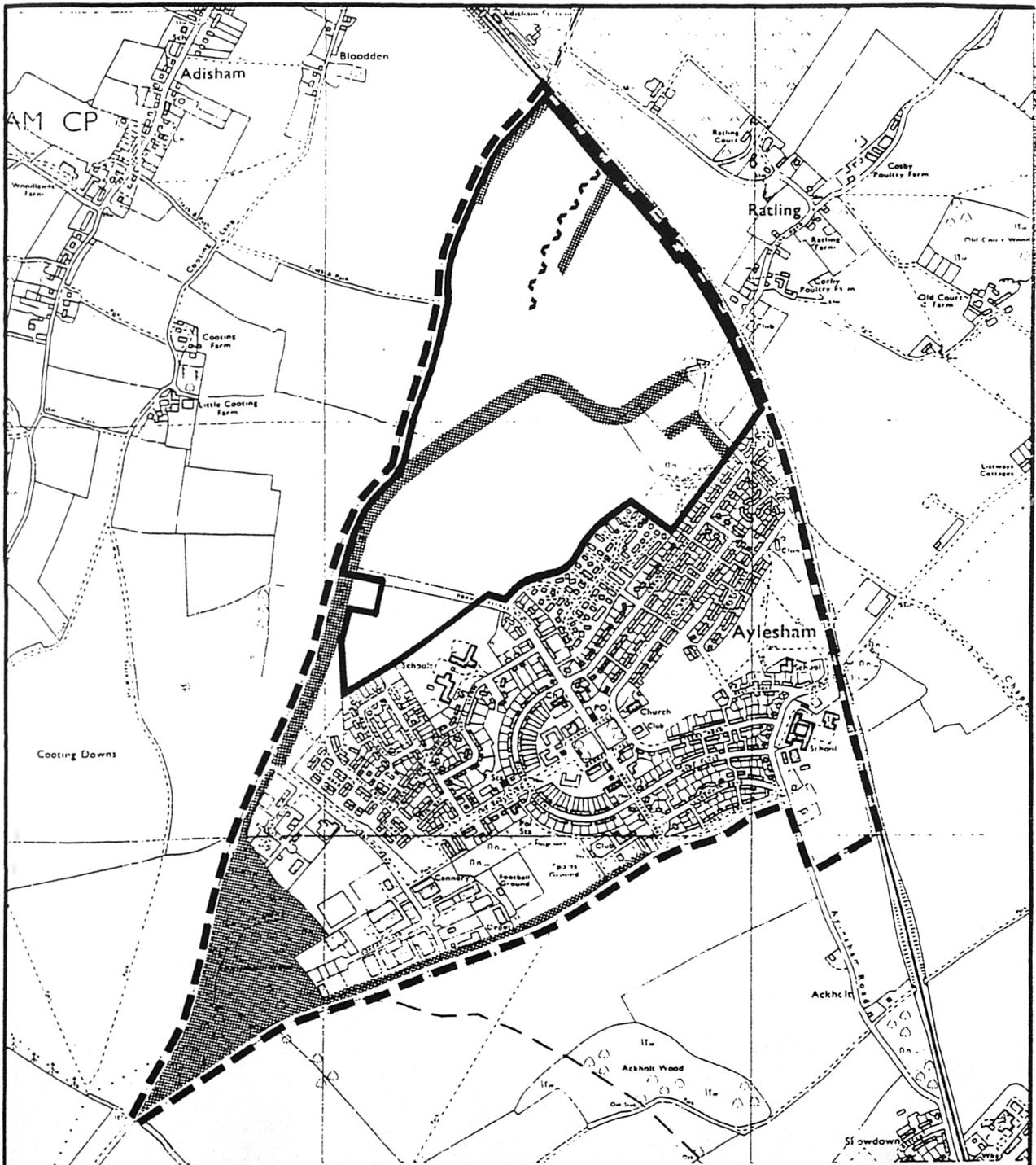
APPENDIX E.

AERIAL VIEW OF AYLESHAM.

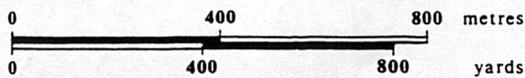


APPENDIX F.

AYLESHAM VILLAGE.



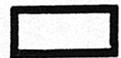
MAP 1
AYLESHAM VILLAGE



Village/ Master Plan Area



Development Area



Ridgeline



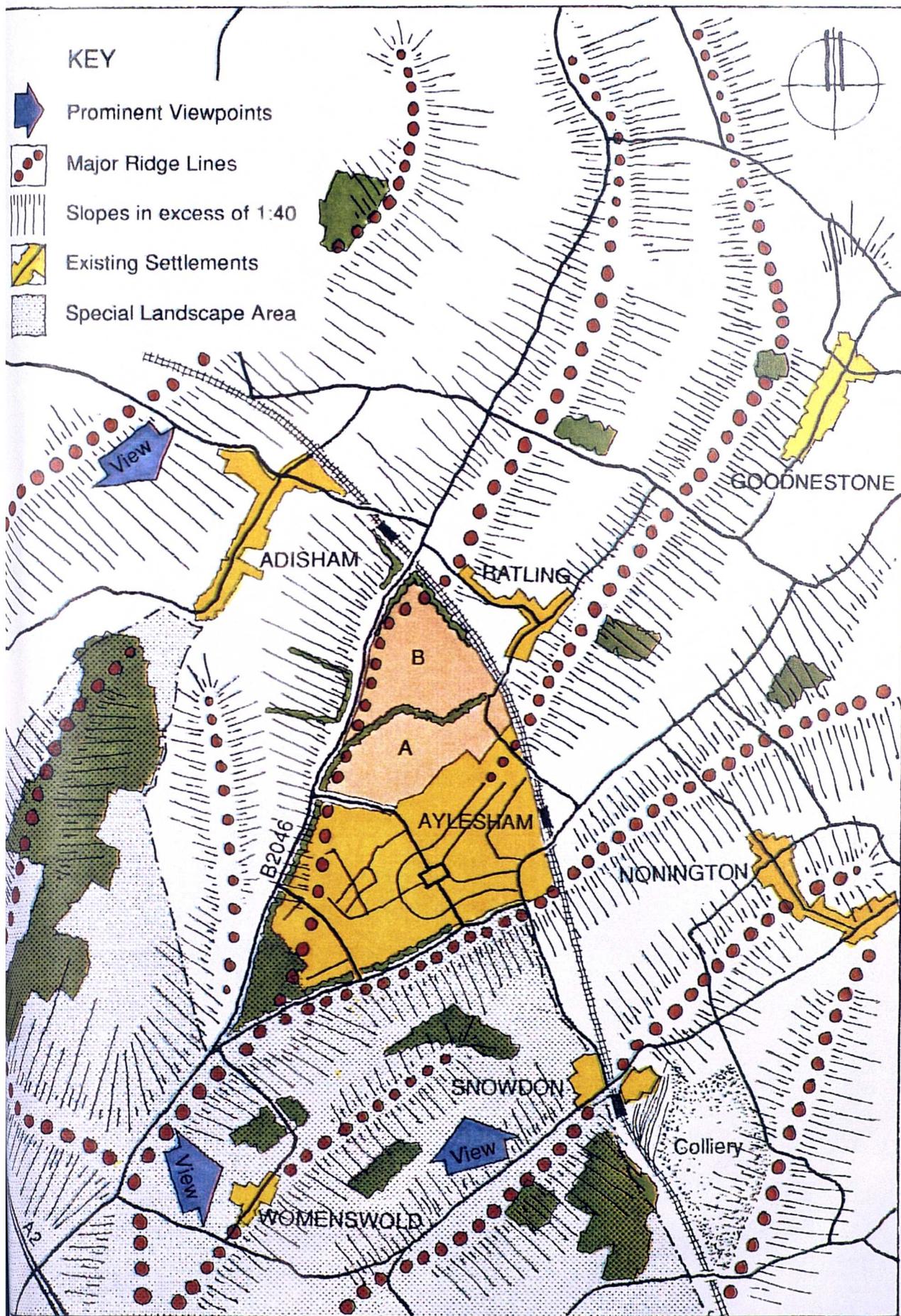
Existing Landscape Features
(e.g. Hedgerows and Tree Belts)



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APPENDIX G.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF AYLESHAM AND SURROUNDS.

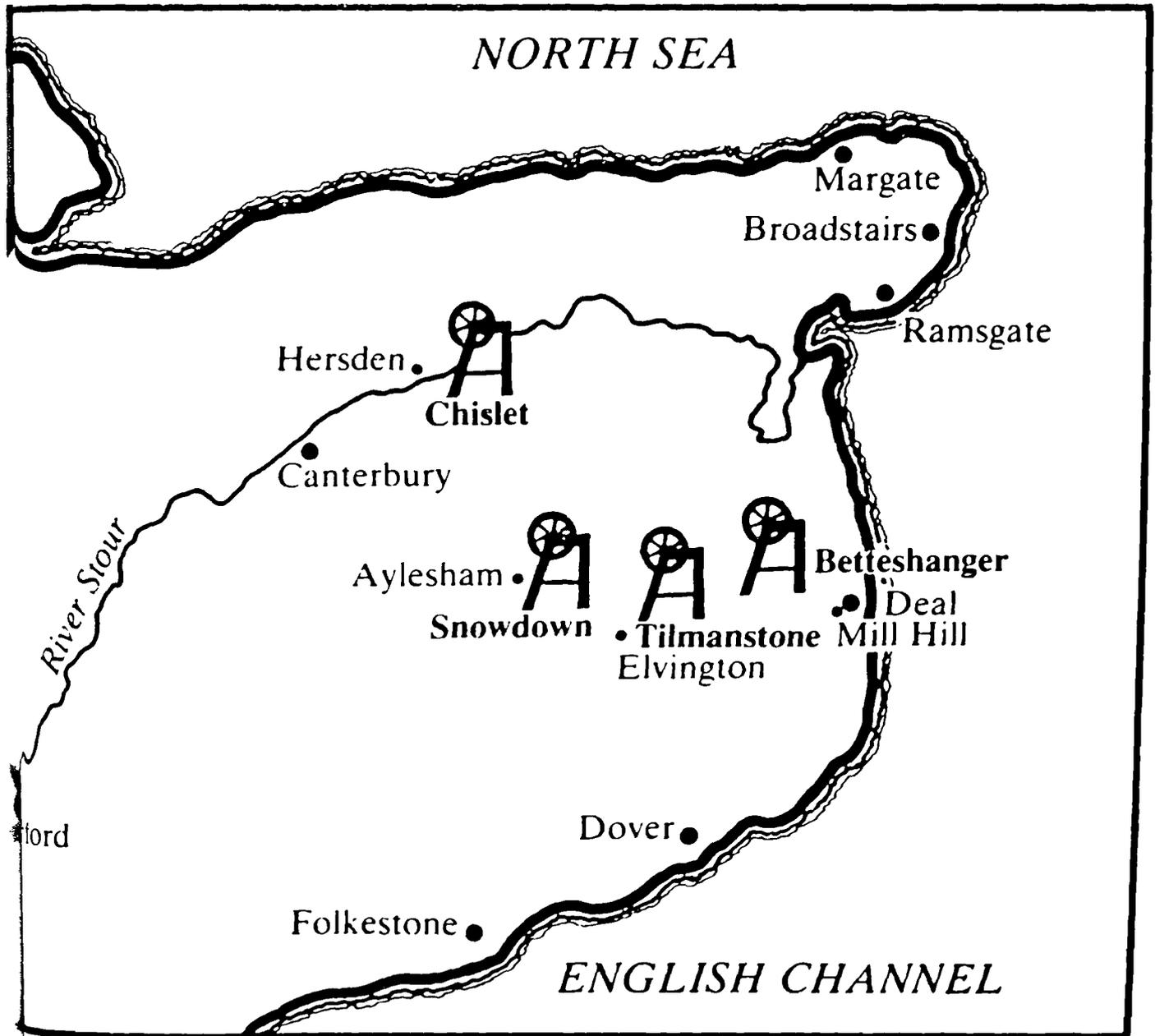


LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS showing ridge lines, woodland areas and important viewpoints

APPENDIX H.

THE KENT COALFIELD.

THE KENT COALFIELD



The pits and pit villages of the Kent Coalfield

APPENDIX I.

A LETTER TO STRIKING MINERS.

The Times, Friday, 29th June, 1984 19.

A LETTER TO STRIKING MINeworkERS

Dear Colleague,

June 1984.

YOUR FUTURE IN DANGER

I am taking the unusual step of writing to you at home because I want every man and woman who has a stake in the coal industry to realise clearly the damage which will be done if this disastrous strike goes on a long time.

The leaders of the NUM have talked of it continuing into the winter. Now that our talks with them have broken down this is a real possibility. It could go on until December or even longer. In which case the consequences for everybody will be very grave.

Your President talks continually of keeping the strike going indefinitely until he achieves "victory".

I would like to tell you, not provocatively or as a threat, why that will not happen however long the strike lasts.

What this strike is really about is that the NUM leadership is preventing the development of an efficient industry. We have repeatedly explained that we are seeking to create a higher volume, lower cost industry which will be profitable, well able to provide superior levels of earnings while still being able to compete with foreign coal. To achieve this, huge sums of money are being invested in new equipment; last year it was close to £800 million and we expect to continue a similarly high rate of investment in the years ahead. Our proposals mean, short term, cutting out some of the uneconomic pits and looking for about 20,000 voluntary redundancies — the same as last year. The redundancy payments are now more generous than ever before for those who decide not to take alternative jobs offered in the industry.

However long the strike goes on I can assure you that we will end up, through our normal consultative procedures, with about the same production plans as those we discussed with your representatives on 6th March last.

But the second reason why continuing the strike will not bring the NUM "victory" is this: in the end nobody will win. Everybody will lose — and lose disastrously.

Many of you have already lost more than £2,000 in earnings and have seen your savings disappear. If the strike goes on until December it will take many of you years to recover financially

and also more jobs may be lost — and all for nothing.

I have been accused of planning to butcher the industry. I have no such intention or desire. I want to build up the industry into one we can all be proud to be part of.

But if we cannot return to reality and get back to work then the industry may well be butchered. But the butchers will not be the Coal Board.

You are all aware that mines which are not constantly maintained and worked deteriorate in terms of safety and workability.

AT THE PRESENT TIME THERE ARE BETWEEN 20 and 30 pits which are viable WHICH WILL BE IN DANGER OF NEVER RE-OPENING IF WE HAVE A LENGTHY STRIKE.

This is a strike which should never have happened. It is based on very serious misrepresentation and distortion of the facts. At great financial cost miners have supported the strike for fourteen weeks because your leaders have told you this . . .

That the Coal Board is out to butcher the coal industry.

That we plan to do away with 70,000 jobs.

That we plan to close down around 86 pits, leaving only 100 working collieries.

IF THESE THINGS WERE TRUE I WOULD NOT BLAME MINERS FOR GETTING ANGRY OR FOR BEING DEEPLY WORRIED. BUT THESE THINGS ARE ABSOLUTELY UNTRUE. I STATE THAT CATEGORICALLY AND SOLEMNLY YOU HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY MISLED.

The NUM, which called the strike, will end it only when you decide it should be ended.

I would like you to consider carefully, so we can get away from the tragic violence and pressures of the mass pickets, whether this strike is really in your interest.

I ask you to join your associates who have already returned to work so that we can start repairing the damage and building up a good future.

Sincerely,



CHAIRMAN
Ian MacGregor.

NCB
NATIONAL COAL BOARD

APPENDIX J.**Questionnaire****Introduction**

This questionnaire is purely for my personal research. Nothing you say will be published without your consent. All forms will be treated as confidential. Should you wish it, your name will be changed and your identity hidden - this is normal procedure for student researchers like myself. Of course the whole thing is entirely voluntary and you may, if you wish, put it straight in the bin, now! But, I would be very pleased if you didn't, and if you answered as many questions as possible. Thank you for at least taking the time to read this far.

Personal Background

Name:

Address:

Date and place of birth:

Marital status:

Occupation:

Previous occupations:

Accommodation. Are you a

council tenant private tenant owner-occupier other (please specify)

Present occupation

How far do you travel to work?

less than 2 miles 2 to 5 miles 5 to 10 miles more than ten miles

What is your transport?

on foot bicycle private car public transport other (please specify)

Mining background

At what age did you start work as a miner?

What mining job(s) did you do?

When did you leave mining?

Why did you leave?

Was your father a miner?

Where?

Did your mother work?

Where were your parents born?

The 1984- 85 Strike

What was your position *during* the strike?

NCB/McGregor			NUM/Scargill	
agree	strongly agree	no opinion/don't know	agree	strongly agree

--

What is your opinion *now*?

NCB/McGregor			NUM/Scargill	
strongly agree	agree	no opinion/don't know	agree	strongly agree

--

Voting Behaviour

At the last general election in 1992 did you vote:

Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Other Abstain

Leisure Activities

How often do you go out for entertainment a week?

never 1 - 2 a week 3 - 4 a week 5 - 7 a week

When you go out, where do you go?

the pub the club the cinema restaurant other (give details if possible)

Are you a member of:

a working-men's club a sports club a church a political party
other (give details if possible)

Would you say social and leisure activities, since the pit closed, have got

worse better no change

How often do you go away on holiday?

never once a year twice a year more than twice a year

How often do you watch videos at home?

never 1 - 2 a week 3 - 4 a week 5 - 7 a week

How often do you go to your neighbours' houses?

never 1 - 2 a week 3 - 4 a week 5 - 7 a week

How often do your neighbours visit you?

never 1 -2 a week 3 - 4 a week 5 - 7 a week

Would you say the community is becoming

more friendly less friendly no change

In terms of crime, would you say the community is becoming

safer less safe no change

If you had a chance to move to another town in Britain with similar job prospects, would you go?

yes no

Conclusion

I would like to discuss, briefly, the following subjects in person with you, if you agree.

Your community-

How do you feel your community has changed over the years?

Has the closing of the pit, in your view, had any effect on the community?

The 1984- 85 miners' strike

What are your personal memories of the strike?

Did you take part in any way?

What were your attitudes toward the government, the UDM, the NUM, other miners, the police?

Are you surprised by the present state of coalmining in Britain?

Interview Assent

If you do agree to discuss any of the above topics with me, could you please leave your phone number in the space below.

Thank you.

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Birkin, Gordon. 14.8.93. Gordon was born in 1943 in Coalville, the son of a Snibston miner. He worked at several pits in the Leicestershire area and at Cadley Hill in South Derbyshire. He retired in 1985 and now works for the Mantle Press at Coalville.

Fraser Kevin. 18.8.93. Kevin Fraser followed his father down Snowdown Colliery aged nineteen, after trying a variety of other jobs. His father had not wanted him to be a miner. Kevin worked at Snowdown and then Tilmanstone until it closed in 1987. He still lives in Aylesham and is proud of maintaining the 'tradition' of leaving the back door open.

Gregory, Frank. 23.7.93. Frank Gregory went into mining relatively late - he was twenty-seven. His father had been a miner in Leicestershire. Frank had been a car mechanic and used this skill to become a fitter down the pit. He was a member of the Power Group. He took early retirement in 1983. Frank is well known in the region for his interest in local history and his regular columns on the subject which appear in the *Coalville Times*.

Holmes, Blanche. 22.7.93. Blanche was born in Whitwick in 1931, the daughter of a miner. Throughout her married life to Derek she continued working despite having five children. She is a keen Labour supporter.

Holmes, Derek. 22.7.93. Derek was born in 1931 in Bagworth and still lives there. Against his father's will he went down the pit, aged fourteen, and remained a miner until he retired in 1985. He was an overman at the end but insists upon his being a "left-winger of the Tony Benn variety". He is also a champion gardener.

Howe, Derek. 22.7.93. Derek Howe was born in 1928 and brought up in the Leicestershire region the son of a miner. Derek worked at Snibston Colliery all his mining career until 1983, when he took early retirement. Although not a miner in 1984-85, he has strong views on the conduct of the strike, having been closely involved in the strikes of the 1970s. He was NUM Delegate at Snibston. Derek is proud to remark that it was he who first noticed and then followed the trucks taking coke from Saltley Gate in 1972. After retirement he became actively involved in the District Council.

Jones, Paul. 13.8.93. Paul Jones was born in Aylesham the son and grandson of miners from South Wales and Scotland. He became a miner aged eighteen and worked as one until Snowdown Colliery closed. He was actively involved in the 1984-85 strike, an event which certainly left him "never the same again." Paul readily admits he misses mining and would "go back down tomorrow" if he could.

Jones, Terry. 29.12.93. Terry Jones was born in Stoke-on-Trent, the hometown of his father, a miner. He arrived in Kent aged six when his father transferred to Snowdown Colliery. He did not live in Aylesham but in the actual village of Snowdown, a small settlement of just two streets, built in a crescent shape. He became a miner aged seventeen and continued until Snowdown Colliery closed. Terry still lives in Snowdown.

Knight, Lawrence. 29.9.89. Lawrence was originally a miner at Chislet Colliery but transferred, when it closed, to Snowdown Colliery, in 1969. He was a member of the Communist Party in the 1960s and still retains a radical view of society. He became Branch Secretary of Snowdown Colliery in the 1980s and Area President of the NUM Kent Area.

Loomer, Arthur. 17.8.93. Arthur Loomer was a miner at Snowdown Colliery from 1959 to 1982 when he was transferred to Tilmanstone Colliery. He worked there until it closed in 1987. His parents met in Aylesham but originally came from Northumberland (father) and South Wales (mother). He died in March 1998.

Loomer, Colin. July 1989 (untaped interview). Colin is the brother of Craig and was also a miner at Snowdown Colliery. He was actively involved in the 1984-85 strike, spending most of his time in London.

Loomer, Craig. 16.8.93. Craig, son of Arthur, was born in Aylesham and became a miner at Snowdown Colliery in 1979, aged seventeen. He transferred to Tilmanstone at the same time as his father. His mother worked at the Miners' Rescue Station in the village and she was actively involved in the women's support group. Craig now works for British Telecom.

Marley, Gerald. July 1989. (untaped interview.) Gerald spent all his working life as a miner at Snowdown Colliery, and living in Aylesham. During the 1984-85 strike he became very active in union politics and was an enthusiastic street collector. A character in the play *In The National Interest* was based on him. Gerald is also well known for his ability to live off the land.

McMahon, Joyce. January 1998. (untaped interview.) Joyce came from Derbyshire originally and married into mining after meeting John McMahon. She has worked all her married life and even in retirement continues to do charity work. She also provides lodgings for members of the Colway Theatre Trust when they perform in Aylesham.

Mellin, Debra. 25.7.93. Debra was born in Leicester but had no contact with miners until she met Keith on holiday. After they married they lived in Coalville, but she never really liked it there. She openly admits that Aylesham is a much "friendlier" place.

Mellin, Keith. 25.7.93. Keith started work as an apprentice electrician at Snowdown Colliery straight after leaving school aged sixteen. His father was also a miner as were his grandparents in Wales and Yorkshire. He transferred to Ellistown Colliery in 1981 where he found the political and work atmosphere very different from Snowdown. He visits Aylesham regularly, keeping close contact with friends and family. But he would not like to live in Aylesham again.

Mellin, Kevin. 24.8.93. Kevin Mellin was one of the young miners involved in the 1984-85 strike. He was born in Aylesham, like his father, and, like him, worked at Snowdown Colliery. His mother came from Scotland. Kevin left mining at Christmas 1987 when Snowdown Colliery closed.

Owen, Keith. 29.8.95. Keith Owen was born in North Wales as a result of his mother having been evacuated from Aylesham in 1940. Both his parents were from Wales but his

mother soon returned to Aylesham to re-join her husband. Keith began work as a miner aged fifteen and at various times worked at all the Kent pits except Chislet. When Betteshanger Colliery closed he refused redundancy and was transferred to Kersley Colliery in Coventry. He remained there for less than a year before taking redundancy. He takes a serious interest in the history of Aylesham and has produced a video of interviews with residents speaking about the past.

Park, Mary. 28.1.98 and 2.4.98. (untaped interviews) Mary Park, (né McMahon) came from Scotland as a young girl in the 1920s. Her father and brothers were all miners at Snowdown Colliery. One of her brothers, John, was the Branch Secretary in the 1960s and '70s. Mary has spent most of her life in Aylesham but actively discouraged her sons from going down the pit. One of them has chosen to write about it instead.

Peace, Steve. 23.7.93. Steve has never been a miner, he works as a Community Development Worker and is a District Councillor. However, his father and both his grandfathers were miners at Snibston Colliery. His parents were from the Coalville area and he has lived all his life in Coalville, although he would love to move to Cornwall.

Quelch, Joan. 21.7.93. Joan was born in 1938 and brought up in the Coalville region, her father being a miner at Ellistown Colliery. She kept her family ties with mining by marrying a miner, Wally.

Quelch, Walter. Walter Quelch was born in Lewisham, Kent in 1937 but moved to Coalville with his parents when he was a young boy. He became a miner aged seventeen and worked as a faceworker and then a deputy. He took early retirement in 1987 due to ill health. However, he remains active in the locality being a member of the District Council.

Richardson, Richard. July 1989.(untaped interview.) Dick Richardson was probably the oldest working miner at the time of the 1984-85 miners' strike, having begun his mining career at Snowdown Colliery in the late 1930s. He still remembers the 'butty system'. He was an active supporter of industrial action in the 1970s and '80s, although never a Branch member. His house is a veritable museum of mining history and he has

committed some of his memories and research to paper. He is also an enthusiastic tenor in the Snowdown Male Voice Choir.

Smith, Peter. 10.8.95. Peter Smith was not from a mining family and went into mining aged twenty-five. He became a faceworker at Bagworth Colliery. He soon became involved in the union and was the last Area Secretary for the NUM Leicestershire Area. He is a Labour supporter and a moderate trade unionist.

Sutcliffe, Alan. December 1989. (untaped interview.) Alan, brother of Philip, was one of the most active rank-and-file miners at Snowdown Colliery. He has strong ideas about community, believing that people have to work at it to make it work. Since the 1984-85 strike and the closure of the Kent coalfield he has worked for various community projects and is closely involved with the Colway Theatre Trust which has produced two plays about the history of Aylesham.

Sutcliffe, Kay. 29.12.89 and 2.9.93. Kay Sutcliffe (né Roberts) was born and brought up in Aylesham. She married Philip, a miner at Snowdown Colliery. Her father was also a miner, from South Wales. Kay had no active interest in mining politics until the 1984-85 strike, but during that year she became one of the leading women speakers at national and international events. Philip occasionally introduced himself at large gatherings as "Kay Sutcliffe's husband."

Sutcliffe, Philip. 29.12.89 and 2.9.93. Philip was not brought up in Aylesham but in the small village of White City, a few miles away. His parents were from Barnsley in Yorkshire and his father is intensely proud of his militant ideas. The Sutcliffe family has politics in the blood and it was easy for Branch leaders in the 1960s, looking for young miners to be involved in the union, to persuade Philip of their arguments. Solidarity and working class identity are the guiding principles in his political philosophy.

Sutcliffe, Trisha. 28.12.89. Trisha Sutcliffe (né Nash) was born and brought up in Aylesham. She married a miner, Alan, and has, from a young age, been interested in the politics of mining. Trisha was actively involved in the strikes of the 1970s and 1984-85. She has regularly campaigned for the local Labour Party.

Tomlinson, John Andrew. 10.8.95. John Tomlinson originally wanted to be a footballer and was an apprentice at Leicester City Football Club. However, when that dream failed he followed his father down the pit at Whitwick Colliery. His family is from the Coalville area, going back a long way on both sides. John now works as a trophy maker and has no desire to leave Coalville.

Webb, Andy. 25.7.93. Andy Webb was born in Ellistown and went into mining straight from school aged sixteen. He worked at Bagworth Colliery until it closed in February 1991. Both his brother and his father were miners in Leicestershire. Andy was a member of the British National Party as a young man, but says he has grown up a bit since.

Whyman, Ivor. 14.8.95. Ivor Whyman went into mining late, he was twenty-seven. He worked at Snibston, South Leicester, Whitwick and Bagworth collieries. His father had also been a miner in Leicestershire. Ivor took voluntary redundancy in 1987 and used the money to set himself up in business as a seed merchant.

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